

# Chinese Theological Review 1988

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## Preface

Bishop Shen Yifan quotes John 6:68, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life," in his essay which appears in this issue of the Chinese Theological Review. He then comments, "So that the light of this eternal life might shine in the society of New China, we have begun to reflect anew theologically." There is ample evidence of this throughout the articles and sermons which make up the volume. Zhao Dianpeng, He Huibing, and Sun Hanshu all explore ways in which Chinese tradition and custom can inform a Chinese Christian spirituality. In the articles by Chen Zemin and Zhang Guangzheng there are numerous examples of developing forms of Christian witness particular to China. Bishop Shen's article provides some of the background and theological underpinnings for these developments.

A special feature of this 1988 issue is the section on religion and society. It provides a selection of articles reflecting the important changes taking place in attitudes toward religion, both on the part of scholars researching the subject and among people in general. Recent years have seen new initiatives in China's social, political and economic realms. Similarly, new approaches to understanding and fresh insights in the study of religion are leading gradually to an acceptance of the positive role of religion in culture and society, as well as to a recognition of the contributions religious adherents can make to the nation.

Non-religious academics like Xiao Zhitian of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences have been calling for a departure from previous rigid attitudes toward religion and religious believers for years. His paper on the possible relationship between religion, especially Christianity, and Marxism, reflects the more enlightened view which has gained ascendancy in Chinese scholarly circles in the last decade. Religious leaders and researchers have also taken an active part in the discussion. Zhao Fusan, Deputy Director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, and Vice-chairperson of the National Three-Self Movement, makes an impressive apologetic for religious belief in demonstrating the crucial role Christianity has played in shaping Western culture. The article which appears here, a condensation of a much longer study printed in *The Journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* (April, 1987), was reprinted in the widely-read Shanghai periodical, *Xinhua Wenzhai*, a monthly compendium of articles and reports selected from the Chinese press. The address by Zhao Puchu, President of the Chinese Buddhist Association, to the Chinese People's Political Consultative conference, which raises problems being traced to Buddhist circles, is included here because of the many similarities between the Buddhist situation and that of Christianity.

The highly significant study by K.H. Ting and Wang Weifan presents a strong critique of outmoded views of religion and inadequate implementation of religious policy, and a vigorous call for greater independence in the control of their own affairs by the religious bodies and by believers themselves. The final section of the paper calls for the reform of leadership and administration in religious affairs work. This has direct implications for

policy and marks a new departure in the level of the critique by religious circles. The extensive quotations from other journals included in the paper indicate the wide-spread nature of the discussion and the interest the subject arouses. This important paper should be carefully read and studied by all who are concerned about religion and religious life in China.

Also of importance to Chinese Protestants are the Minutes of the Third Joint Meeting of the Standing Committees of the Three-Self Movement and the China Christian Council. Discussion at the meeting centered on the changing function of the Three-Self Movement. These changes have great significance for the Chinese church and developments will be watched with great interest around the world in the months to come.

Articles and sermons for this volume have been selected from the *Nanjing Theological Review* and the *Syllabus*, a correspondence course for lay leaders, both published by Nanjing Seminary; *Religion*, the journal of the Institute of Religious Studies of Nanjing University; *Collected Sermons*, published by the Hangzhou Christian Council; and the Shanghai periodical *Xinhua Wenzhai*. All materials have been selected by the editor. Though an effort is made to include important statements issued by the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Association, there is no attempt to be comprehensive.

Pinyin romanization of Chinese names and terms is used throughout, except where another form is widely used or, in the case of names, is known to be a personal preference. Biblical quotations follow the Revised Standard Version. A brief identification of authors will be found at the back of the book. Where no translator is listed, articles were written or obtained in English.

I would like to thank the authors of the articles and sermons presented here for generously consenting to share their work and for their continued support for this Review.

Thanks are also due to Marvin Hoff and Joanne Hoff of the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia for their encouragement and assistance; to the translators: Peter Barry, Ewing W. Carroll, Jr., William Dockery, Lucy T.H. Loh, Craig Moran, Brynmor Price, Francesca Rhys, Britt E. Towery and Philip L. Wickeri; to Deborah Degolyer for proof-reading and to Eva Lai Woon Ching for typing the manuscripts.

*Janice Wickeri*

## 1. Minutes

Of the Third Joint Meeting of the Standing Committees of the Fourth Chinese Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee and the Second National China Christian Council

(17 December 1988)

The Third Joint Meeting of the Standing Committees of the Fourth Chinese Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee (TSM) and the Second China Christian Council (CCC) was held in Shanghai, 13 - 17 December 1988. Of 69 delegates, 53 were present, while 16 were excused due to illness or other business. Six colleagues from the provincial and municipal bodies of the TSM and CCC were also present as non-voting delegates.

The Deputy Head of the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council, Ms. Cao Jinru, and other leaders from the second office of the second section of the Bureau and of the Shanghai Municipal Religious Affairs Bureau also accepted invitations to be present.

Opening devotions were led by Bishop Shen Yifan.

Shen Derong, Vice-chairman and General Secretary, reported on the work of the two national bodies since the Second Joint Meeting of the Standing Committees in August, 1987. Individual supplementary reports were received concerning the work of the Committee on Theological Education, the Committee on Rules and Order and on Bible publication.

The Meeting heard an important address by Bishop K.H. Ting, Chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Committee and President of the China Christian Council. Bishop Ting reviewed the major achievements over forty years of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement since its founding by Y.T. Wu and others:

(1) Holding high the banner of patriotism in new China, TSM united the broad masses of Christians in love of country and in participation in the building up of socialist material and spiritual civilization.

(2) Through the TSM, Christianity changed its image as a "foreign religion" in the minds of the Chinese people and reduced the difficulties of implementing the policy of religious freedom, thereby gaining a better environment for Christian endeavors.

(3) By extricating the Chinese church from the control of foreign mission boards, TSM realized throughout China the independence, self-government, self-support, and self-propagation that was its legacy from the elder generation of church leaders, making it possible for the church today to embark on the tasks of governing well, supporting well, and propagating well.

(4) TSM urged the denominations to live in harmony with one another, preparing the ground for later post-denominationalism.

(5) TSM was one of the first to develop independence and self-government among third world churches.

(6) TSM led the way in exposing the damage caused to the modern missionary movement by its close relationship with colonialism and imperialism. As a result, world religious leaders, ordinary believers and historians were led to further reflection on mission work.

(7) TSM has won many friends for China among church leaders and colleagues in the world church, has enabled them to see the hope of the Chinese church and has strengthened their faith.

Bishop Ting stated that in order to run the church well according to three-self principles, we must study how intrachurch relationships, primarily those between Three-Self organizations and the China Christian Council may be rationalized. All delegates at the meeting, voting and non-voting, entered into enthusiastic and open discussion of Bishop Ting's address in plenary session as well as in small groups. Much of the discussion concerned rationalization of relationships between the two bodies.

The delegates reflected on the change in function undergone by the TSM organization after 1958. Various factors, including the unification of denominations in China, contributed to a situation in which the TSM organization was in control of church affairs for a specific period. This state of affairs was created by a particular set of historical circumstances. In 1980, the Third National Chinese Christian Conference established another administrative organ, the China Christian Council, outside the national TSM structure, and proposed the slogan "govern well, support well, propagate well." This was the beginning of the rationalization of relations between TSM and the church. In the eight years which have followed, national and local levels of the two bodies, while assisting the Party and government in implementing religious policy, have revived and developed the mission of the church throughout the country with self-evident results. However, the influence of ingrained habit has meant that the TSM still controls the church in various places, and the CCC has not been able to fully realize its role as the administrative organ.

The meeting was unanimous in the opinion that: three-self principles are and will be the long term guiding policy of the Chinese church and that these principles must continue to be upheld in all the work of establishing the Chinese church. This is a principle of long standing which cannot be altered. With this prerequisite, the delegates made various proposals on adjusting the balance of function between the TSM and CCC. It was the opinion of the meeting that any such adjustment in the function or structure of the two bodies was a major issue for the work of the Chinese church and could not be undertaken lightly, but must be repeatedly studied and considered. Any policy decision could only be made and carried forward after adequate discussion among the broad masses of Christians. Any adjustment relating to the function or structure of the two bodies would involve constitutional revisions and these must be discussed and passed in a National Conference in accordance with the bylaws.

It was the mind of the meeting that: there exist at present clear stipulations concerning the aims and duties of the two organs in the Constitutions of the national and local bodies of TSM and CCC:

The Constitution of the TSM, Article II states:

This committee serves as the patriotic and church-loving organization of Chinese Christians. It has the following aims and functions: Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government, to unite Christians throughout the country in their love for China, in observing the country's constitution and its laws, in upholding self-government, self-support and self-propagation as the guiding principles for the independent, autonomous church, and in safeguarding and augmenting the achievements of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement; to cooperate with the Government in implementing the policy of freedom of religious belief; to develop friendly international contacts; and to achieve national unity with a view to ensuring that China is established as a highly democratic, highly civilized, and modernized, strong nation, contributing its resources to the maintenance of world peace.

The Constitution of the CCC, Articles II and IV state:

This council serves as the organization which deals with the affairs of the Chinese church on a national basis. It has the following aims: To unite all Christians throughout the country who believe in the heavenly Father and who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord in effectively administering the Chinese independent, autonomous, self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Scriptures, working in full cooperation and with unity of purpose.

This council promotes the tasks of theological education and the publication of literature undertaken by the Chinese church, arranges the exchange of information between local churches on organizational and administrative matters, promotes the interchange of views on the work of the churches, and develops friendly relations with overseas churches.

The meeting was of the opinion that at the present stage all levels of the two bodies should carry on their work according to their respective constitutions. The ingrained habit of TSM administration of the church should be changed and all the work of the church should be independently handled by the various levels of the CCC and by the churches. All levels of the CCC should take appropriate measures to strengthen their leadership powers.

In the discussion, all the delegates were greatly concerned about the issue of rationalizing relations between the government and religious groups. It was felt that, through the implementation of religious policy since 1979, the government had done much to support the TSM and the CCC in developing their work, and that much had been achieved. Objections and criticisms were raised concerning the varying degrees of restriction, domination, and interference in church affairs and transgression of the legal rights of churches on the part of some local officials. There were calls for a thorough redress of these problems. Rationalization of relations

between government departments and religious organizations would definitely bring further progress in the implementation of the policy of religious freedom.

Deputy Head of the Religious Affairs Bureau, Ms Cao Jinru spoke on rationalization of relations between the government and religious groups and other issues during the meeting as well as conversing individually with members of the Standing Committees.

In order that adequate preparatory work could be undertaken, it was decided that the Second Plenary Session of the current Session of the two bodies, originally scheduled for the first quarter of 1989, would be changed to be held within the 1989 calendar year. To enable the TSM and the CCC to fulfill their respective functions, the meeting decided that all levels of both bodies would in the future carry out their work according to the aims and functions stipulated in their respective constitutions. Toward this end, two resolutions were passed.

Following closing devotions by Rev. Li Yongwu, the meeting was adjourned.

### **Resolution on the Rationalization of Relations between the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council**

Following the unification of worship throughout the country in 1958, and in the specific historical circumstances then prevailing, there was a definite period during which the TSM organization took up the administration of church affairs. The establishment of the China Christian Council (church affairs committee) in 1980 brought about a change in this situation; however, because of ingrained procedural habits, the transformation remained incomplete. Currently, in order to advance the building up of the church according to three-self principles, it is more necessary than ever that the role of the CCC as an administrative structure at all levels be fully realized. To this end, this meeting reaffirms that the TSM and CCC should, at all levels, share out the work and cooperate on the basis of their respective constitutions.

The CCC at every level should do even better in carrying out its responsibilities in the work of church administration, while, as a Christian patriotic organization, the TSM should do better in developing the tasks stipulated in its constitution.

### **Resolution on the Postponement of the Second Plenary Session**

The Second Plenary Session of the Fourth Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee and the Second China Christian Council, originally scheduled for the first quarter of 1989, will be rescheduled to take place within the 1989 calendar year in order that adequate preparatory work may be carried out. The meeting will discuss how the Chinese church may be well run according to three-self principles.

## ARTICLES

### 2. "Truly, You Are the Son of God" – Xu Rulei

The theme I would like to share with you today is, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Mt. 14: 22-33). This passage occurs after the feeding of the Five Thousand, and treats the miracle of Jesus walking on the sea as a new step forward for the disciples' recognition of his divinity. Three of the four Gospels record this miracle, and of the three, I prefer Matthew's account, because he pays special attention to Peter's personality, which is overlooked by both Mark and John. Everyone knows about Peter's impetuous temperament, and his frank, straightforward nature. When Cornelius fell at his feet and worshipped him, for example, Peter quickly lifted him up and said, "Stand up; I too am a man." Precisely because his personality resembles ours, we can learn from his experiences. His experience in this story is instructive for the growth of our own spiritual lives. I am a teacher at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. One week ago, we celebrated the seminary's thirty-fifth anniversary. The experience of these thirty-five years has given us a new perspective, and like Peter and the other disciples, we can say, "Lord, truly you are the Son of God."

Formerly, almost all Chinese churches and seminaries were founded with financial help from abroad. In December, 1950, that support was suddenly terminated, a development which engendered grave difficulties. At some seminaries, the number of students was sharply reduced; at others, the teachers were forced to abandon their vocations; still others had neither students nor teachers. The difficulties confronting Chinese theological education were truly formidable. Our situation was just like that of Peter and the disciples in their small boat when they were buffeted by strong winds and rocked by rough seas until they were driven far from the shore. Our storm was equally frightening, and, just as he had done before, the Lord who protects us walked toward us across the sea in the form of those who spoke of "union."

The seminaries united. How easy that is to say! The Chinese church was previously composed of many denominations, most of which had their own seminaries. Occasionally, some of these denominations would unite to form a seminary which would then divide over some theological dispute. Was it possible to create a united seminary from so many denominational and theological backgrounds? There were those who doubted, and others who were afraid.

When our Lord reveals himself in different historical conditions, people's sight blurs and often they cannot see him clearly. Jesus Christ was originally with God, but he "humbled himself" and "became like man." Thus, when he brought the Gospel to his hometown of Nazareth, no one recognized his divinity. Instead, they asked, "Is this not Joseph's son?" Jesus spoke the truth about himself, but all who heard him were filled with anger. They led him to the brow of a hill on which the city was built, and wanted to "throw him down headlong" (Luke 4:29). Similarly, when Jesus confessed that he was the Son of God, the high priest believed that he had spoken blasphemy (Mt. 16:65), and had him crucified on the cross. When the small boat which held Peter and the others was about to capsize in the midst



of the storm, Jesus showed his power by walking across the water to save them. Even though they had followed Jesus, heard his teaching, and witnessed his miracles, they still found this surprising; at first, they thought that he was a ghost and cried out in fear. As Jesus gradually approached the boat, his familiar voice comforted the disciples, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." At that moment, the disciples recognized Jesus, and the impetuous Peter said, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." Jesus replied, "Come." And Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus.

That Peter could walk on the water is truly a miracle. No one else dared make this request, and no one else dared to emulate this courageous act. Only Peter attempted it. Because he had faith, he boldly stepped into the sea, and when Jesus commanded him to come, suddenly a miracle occurred.

The seminary can be compared to Peter. When it was lashed by the storm, someone said "Unite!" in a voice both familiar and unfamiliar, just as the familiar yet unfamiliar figure of Jesus had approached across the water. The Chinese church had had twenty to thirty years of experience with union projects, but still my colleagues were uncertain about the prospect of combining so many seminaries from different denominations. At a meeting in late August, 1952, Wu Yaozong (Y.T. Wu) of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement convinced us to make the attempt. This was not to be a national seminary, but one limited to bringing together the eleven seminaries in the Huadong region (which included Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, and Anhui). At this meeting, we sat down to discuss the problem of theological education in the Chinese church. Representatives from the Huazhong, Huaxi, Huabei, and Beijing seminaries also attended. During those few days, we read the Bible, prayed, and discussed the church's work. Guiding our discussion were the biblical verses, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God" (Eph. 4:5), "Love one another" (Jn. 13:34), and "that they may all be one" (Jn. 17:21). These familiar words inspired us and led us gradually to discover the Lord's will. We saw that in the midst of unprecedented historical circumstances, God had given us a light to guide us on the path to union: "This is the way, walk in it" (Is. 30:21). Our Lord said, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

Like Peter, we replied, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water," and the Lord answered, "Come." Those of us at the meeting decided that the eleven seminaries in the Huadong region should move to Nanjing and unite in a single seminary. After the meeting, each of us returned to our home seminaries to pack the luggage, books, and furniture that we could take with us. We gave what was left behind to the local churches. The staff, faculty, and students all came to Nanjing. Only two months after the meeting, we were prepared to lay the foundation for our work. On 1 November 1952, a ceremony attended by church leaders from around the country was held to celebrate the opening of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

The new seminary formed a Board of Trustees. This Board established four articles of faith which were to guide the seminary: (1) the whole Bible is the revelation of God, contains everything needed for salvation, and provides believers with a basis for faith and behavior; (2) God alone is the source of all things, the father of humankind, and the perfection of justice and love; (3) Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became flesh in order to save the

world, was crucified and raised from the dead, and is the foundation of the church; and (4) the Trinity includes the Holy Spirit which renews life, sanctifies, and provides believers with diverse gifts of grace. Concerning the differences in theology and the special characteristics of each denomination's faith, order, organization, and liturgy, the Board decided to promulgate a principle of mutual respect. Later, one member of this Board expressed his feelings about these resolutions in this way: "When the Board of Trustees discussed matters of faith, purpose, and general principles, the harmonious spirit among the members was unparalleled in all my years in theological education."

At that time, there were thirty-three teachers and ninety-five students who participated in the union. Ten students were added in the first year, bringing the total enrollment to 105. In order to realize the principle of mutual respect, denominational courses such as "The Basic Teachings of the Baptist Church" and "Studies in Anglican Worship" were offered. A directive from the Dean's office stipulated that the students in the Bible and theology classes should be divided for study on the basis of their backgrounds. As for worship life, in addition to morning and evening prayers, and personal devotions, there were fellowship meetings, retreats, and Anglican-style communions (which were held in the auditorium). Participation in the fellowship meetings and communions was voluntary. The Seventh-Day Adventists did not attend class on Saturday, and made arrangements with their teachers to make up the classes another time. Everyone agreed these examples of mutual respect were evidence of a successful union. One Vice-principal said, "That fourteen denominations could unite and offer seventy-five classes to the 105 students is a historical breakthrough for the Chinese church that is unparalleled in the world." Another Vice-principal, who was the former Principal of the Huabei seminary, added, "This is a miracle never before seen in the Chinese church."

In January, 1956, the seminary decided to start a special training course for evangelists and pastors. Between 70 and 100 candidates were accepted for a four-month session covering subjects such as "The Essential Teachings of the Scriptures," "Special Topics in Theology," "Research in the Meaning of Original Texts," and "The Work of Evangelists and Pastors." The purpose of this course was to help these church workers solve the theological questions arising from their work in the Three-Self Movement. The course participants attested that their studies sustained them, strengthened their faith, enriched their spiritual lives, nurtured their wisdom, and girded their desire to spread the gospel. The course was held three times over the following year. We also published "Theological Notes," a source of mutual instruction and theological inquiry.

At the end of 1958, the establishment of socialism took another turn, and the seminary was forced to suspend classes. The seminary was closed for three years after 1958, and for fourteen years after 1966. We were like Peter, who, walking on the water in the storm, grew afraid and anxious, and therefore sank. We had no choice but to let most of our colleagues change careers. They became teachers and school administrators, bookkeepers and cashiers. Many went into management or service professions, while a fair number traveled to Xinjiang to assist in the settlement of the border areas. We doubted if a formal church would ever exist after that time. At this moment, however, our Lord held out his hand to us and said, "O men of little faith, why did you doubt?" Can reality emulate the Scriptures in this way? After 1958, the worship of the Chinese church continued down the path to unity, and then, after

1966, the church entered a post-denominational period. When the seminary re-opened in the spring of 1981, most of the students didn't know what a denomination was. Once I asked a student, "What is your denominational background?" She answered that she didn't know. I persisted, "How did you come to believe in the Lord?" "My mother taught me when I was a child," she replied. I observed that this student was not yet 20 years old, and that her mother was probably still young. "How did your mother come to believe in the Lord?" I asked. "My mother learned from her mother," was the response.

When we recruited students for the first year, nearly a thousand applied, but we could only admit between 40 and 50. We had no choice but to ask the local churches to help us administer the preliminary examinations. Later, we instituted a standard examination. Although in the following years the local churches helped by selecting candidates, the number of applicants could be as many as 500. On the basis of this test, we continued to admit 40 to 50 of those.

This year, we have a two-year course, a four-year basic course, and a three-year graduate course. Altogether we have 158 students, one-third of whom are women. From 1983 to 1984, we conducted three special training classes for Jiangsu province, teaching more than 120 church workers every four months. This term we have added a one-year refresher course for evangelists and pastors; every year, the evangelists and pastors from a different province will have the chance for continuing education. Most recently, 47 evangelists and pastors from Henan province took advantage of this opportunity. In the last seven years, 212 students have graduated from the seminary. Of this total, 64 have stayed on to enter the four-year basic curriculum or to undertake graduate studies, and 148 have left to begin church work. This year we have also sent six students to the United States and Canada to continue their studies.

The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary is a national seminary; in recent years, ten local seminaries have been established in various locations throughout the country. In addition, to meet the demands of rapid growth among Christians, a number of short-term training classes have been started.

Our seminary is like Peter. We have returned to the boat with Jesus and are now peacefully sailing toward the shore. This year's anniversary on 1 November falls on the last day of the Double Ninth (that is, the ninth day of the ninth lunar month) Festival. Recently, a friend of the school sent us a poem to congratulate us on this event:

Double Ninth: Anniversary of the Seminary in  
A time redolent of yellow  
chrysanthemums, Jinling\* autumn scenes surpass those of spring. May  
this 35th anniversary mark a new day Dedicated to endless truth-seeking.

The establishment of a united seminary opened new possibilities for the unification of the Chinese church. This light in our midst is a source of great happiness for us today. Every time we behold those thirty-five years, we know the Lord who "upholds the universe" (Heb. 1:3) never stops leading and caring for us. He grants practicality to our reverence, solidity to our faith, progress to our spiritual life, and depth to our knowledge of

Christ. We can only prostrate ourselves before our Lord and say, "Lord, truly you are the Son of God."

\*An old name for Nanjing

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translated by Craig Moran*

### **3. Church Reconstruction and Theological Training in China – Cao Shengjie**

I am delighted to have this opportunity to meet with the students of the South Central Theological College so that together we can talk over questions that are of concern to each one of us.

My first point is the situation of the Chinese church in the last few years. Everybody knows that during the Cultural Revolution all the churches were closed. At that time it was impossible to visualize any future for the Chinese church. During those days, religious freedom was limited to your being able to maintain your faith within your own head, but you were not permitted to take part in any religious activity. One of the lackeys of the Gang of Four said in Shanghai, "Here we have a city in which there is no religion." But when we look at the situation as it is today, we can see how completely mistaken such opinions were. It is not a question of there being no religion, or of there being no believers in the Lord. Instead there is a constant increase in those who believe in the Lord. After the smashing of the Gang of Four, and especially since 1979, the government has renewed its policy of freedom of religious belief. When the leaders of the church throughout the country met in Shanghai for the national Three-Self Committee, I was there along with your Principal, Liu Nianfen. At that time the number of churches that were functioning in the whole of the country was very small. Everybody was concerned with the problem of ways in which the Chinese church could once again be built up, of the ways in which it could be more effectively established as it faced the future.

The Third National Christian Conference took place in 1981. During the opening service those pastors and elders who had come from all over the country joined in singing "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord," but I had the feeling that they were singing not so much with their mouths as with their very lives. Their example should serve as a constant source of enlightenment to us all.

Six years have now gone by, and the church has quickly recovered. Throughout the whole country, more than 4000 churches have been opened, and the greater proportion of these are new buildings. Because in so many places the buildings had either been sold off or destroyed, rebuilding was the only practical course of action. In addition there are more than 10,000 meeting-points, the majority of which are in the homes of Christians. There are a number of places in which simple meeting places have been erected. When these places were first opened for worship, they had no Bibles and no hymnbooks. But now more than two and a half million copies of the scriptures have been printed here in this country. In proportion to the population of the whole country, this may seem a small number. When worship recommenced in Shanghai, they had no hymnbooks, so they set to work themselves mimeographing thirty hymns. Later on, the Christians in Shanghai edited a collection of more than a hundred hymns. The same practice was followed in Fujian, Guangzhou and Wenzhou.

In 1981 I was appointed to organize the editing of a new hymnbook for general use throughout the country, and an editorial committee was set up in Shanghai, with a group of four people, each of whom had his or her own particular task to perform. This was not a full-time occupation, but we recognized how important our task was going to be, and each week one or two days were devoted to the work. Later on, we left Shanghai for a while and secluded ourselves in Nanjing and Hangzhou to get on with the work. Compiling the new hymnbook did not simply consist in making a selection from hymns previously used and making a few emendations. If that had been all, it would have been rather easier. Our guiding principle was to reflect the special characteristics of the music of the Chinese church. Upon this basis we solicited original material from people all over the country, and in response to this appeal we received more than 2000 contributions. From this material we had to make a selection, exerting all our efforts to attain a high standard of musical expression and of mastery of literary style. The New Hymnbook contains 56 new hymns, among which one of the favorites is "I Love the Chinese Church." There is another point which deserves to be mentioned. The book as originally published gave only the numerical musical notation, but in order that the hymns might be suitably accompanied, ten young Christian men and women in Shanghai devoted some of their leisure time to the cutting of stencils so that hymns could be mimeographed with staff notation. It was not until two years later that we were able to publish the official staff notation hymnbook.

During the past six or seven years the Chinese church has been pursuing an exceptional course. This has been due to the Lord's leading and to God's mighty power, and we offer thanks to God for his grace. But we have also to thank the government for all the work it has done in implementing the policy of religious freedom. We should also remember the vast number of devout men and women who have expressed their love for the Lord by devoting the whole of their minds and strength to helping the church. For example, when a church is being rebuilt, there are many Christians who have put their efforts into buying the timber and doing the bricklaying. Old ladies well on in years bring their own brooms and sweep out the church. I am in the habit of worshipping at Huai'en Church in Shanghai, and all the cleaning is carried out by the members themselves. On one occasion when I was in Hangzhou, I discovered that there were some Christians already in the church at four or five in the morning. They began with prayer, and then they set to work mopping the floor, polishing the windows, and cleaning the place up, so that worship could take place there the following day. Men and women with such a love for the Lord, a church which displays such love for him, these are the special characteristics of the Chinese church. Another important characteristic is the way Christians can unite in the worship of God without drawing a distinction between the former denominations to which each one belonged. There are a great many churches in other parts of the world that have striven for many years and yet have not achieved the degree of unity which we have reached. Or again, Christian men and women bear their testimony for the Lord wherever they are, so that the witness of the church shines out like a bright light through their good works. Christians who live out in the country buy materials and contribute their labor to repair bridges and mend roads. Should a disaster occur in any area, they gladly and spontaneously make a generous contribution for its relief, and in all these ways they bear a good witness.

During the past few years, the work of restoration has continued, and a great deal of work has been done. But the situation with which we are confronted, and which we must seriously examine, is that the church requires not merely restoration, but also a recognition of the way in which it can most effectively be built up. Is the fact that from a complete standstill the church has rapidly been restored, so that the Lord is adding to us those that are being saved, the equivalent of saying that the church is being effectively run? That our duty has been accomplished? That our goal has been attained? In Ephesians 4:15 we read, "We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and builds itself up in love."

How is the church to be effectively built up? What principles are we to follow? We must increase the number of church members, we must strengthen the financial resources of the church, but we must not equate a numerous following and great wealth with real success. In line with one aspect of biblical teaching, the Church must truly become the Lord's Body, joined to Christ as its head, carrying out the will of God. But, on the other hand, the Church here on earth must fulfill the requirements of God, as it manifests God's glory through its witness. If our church cannot act in accordance with the will of God and cannot manifest his glory, then, however much enthusiasm it arouses, on however spectacular a scale, it is not a true Church.

Speaking from a spiritual point of view, the effective reconstruction of the church means fulfilling the will of God, in accordance with his demands. This is something that is permanent and unchangeable. But looking at it from another point of view, in whatever period of history or whatever circumstances the Church finds itself, there is a close connection between its reconstruction and its own situation and the requirements of the people. The Church here on earth does not live in a vacuum. It is clear from looking at the history of the Church that it was in Judea that the Lord Jesus proclaimed his message, and that at the time he had only twelve disciples. The Book of Acts records that after the bestowing of the Holy Spirit, there were a great many believers in the Lord. They very quickly discovered that some kind of organization was indispensable, since they had no means of solving the problem of food distribution in those early days.

And so they ordained deacons, and later they had elders and overseers. As time went on, the Church had to have some organization, with certain people doing specialized work. Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan, so in those days the disciples were also baptized in a river. As the Church spread over a wide area, it would sometimes reach places in which there was not certain to be so much naturally running water as to provide for traditional baptism, so what was to be done? There then arose the custom of baptism by sprinkling. Since it is the spiritual significance of baptism that is most important, in that we believe that it is the precious blood of the Lord that washes away our sins, and do not rely on water for that purpose, the amount of water is not of fundamental significance. The message of the Bible does not change, but its interpretation, its development, its exposition, including theological ideas, are constantly developing with the passage of time. This is because, if you live at a certain period, you must employ the language that is understood by the people of that period, in accordance with their way of thinking, if you are going to proclaim the Lord's Good News. And so, since the church lives in this period, it is this period with which the Lord has entrusted us, and the

reconstruction of the church must keep in step with the times and the circumstances in which it finds itself.

In many of the Christian nations of Europe, 80% or more of the population are reckoned to be Christians, and yet a great many people only go to church three times in their lives, to be christened, to be married, and to be buried. And there are some countries where, whether you are a Christian or not, you have to pay a tax which the government hands over to the church, so the church is maintained by the State. This has come about as a result of historical circumstances. When Martin Luther brought about the Reformation and translated the Bible into German, this was not only an important event for the Church, but it was also an important event in German history, enabling the German people to read the Bible in their own language. The Presbyterian Church which Calvin inaugurated in Switzerland was very different from the Lutheran Church in its church government and in its forms of worship. Geneva was a commercial center, and it had its own situation to face. The reason I mention all this is because I want to remind all of you that the Chinese church's observance of "self-government, self-support and self-propagation" is connected with China's national situation. The task of building up the Chinese church is one that rests upon the shoulders of each one of us.

The hymn we have just been singing, "Church of China, Arise and Stand," was written in 1933 by an old minister in Shanghai, Zhu Baoyuan, and he firmly believed in the necessity for the Chinese church to be independent. The question that was constantly being discussed in those days was how to achieve self-support. Apart from the churches in the larger cities, those elsewhere in this country relied for their support on contributions from abroad. What kind of foundations could there be for such churches? There were some people who became Christians, not for any genuine spiritual quest, but for some material advantages. And so people spoke of them as "living on religion." When I was a child, I heard my grandmother say that when she became a Christian, many people opposed her, saying she should not follow a foreign religion, for "living on religion" was a betrayal of her ancestors. But nowadays, the general public cannot make that kind of criticism. Due to our practice of three-self the church's image has been transformed. Ever since Liberation, and especially since 1979, the Chinese church has presented a flourishing appearance. We can see its brightest features, but at the same time, we must take account of some problems that still remain.

Here is the first of these. The period of foreign control of the Chinese church is past, and at the present time a number of different points of view with regard to the Chinese church are held by Christians in other parts of the world. There are those who deeply and genuinely respect the Chinese church. They honestly believe that the work of God here in his Church is being undertaken more effectively now than when they were here. The Chinese church is truly devout, has a firm foundation, and is maintaining its witness in the world. The Archbishop of Canterbury has said that when the Anglican Church separated from Rome, it was an example of three-self. Those who hold to this point of view consider it an honor to share our outlook. But on the other hand, there are other Christians in various countries who oppose China and the Chinese church. They assert that China is a communist country, and that communists oppress the church. The Chinese people, they claim, have no religious



freedom, so they are preparing to enter our country, and so on. Some of them make use of the religious press to speak at length about Chinese politics. They claim that they want to preach the Gospel in order to transform China, and they go on to say that China's destiny cannot be left in the hands of atheists. They also say that China's problem is not poverty or backwardness, but people's sinfulness and systematized sin. My friends, we have all devoted ourselves to the preaching of the Gospel, so as to bring people to God, but what do they want to do? To whom do they refer when they talk of those who govern as the "atheists of China?" To what system do they refer then they speak of "systematized sin?" They are clearly referring to the leaders of the Party and the socialist system, and such lies as these you will certainly not condone. I am mentioning all this in the hope that you will understand the situation more clearly and will not be misled by their so-called "evangelism." Each one of us should be a patriotic, church-loving Chinese citizen, and following such a path will admit of no ambiguity.

And now for the second. The church has been growing rapidly during the past few years. Meanwhile, our pastors and co-workers are well on in years. This applies especially in our scattered country churches, where in many places there are no clergy and no leadership. Consequently, there is a good deal of confusion in some country villages, and some illegal activities have been taking place.

There are some people connected with the churches who defraud others of money and food by pretending to be preachers, while indulging in feudal superstitions and other evil practices. Some specialize in praying over the sick and forbid the taking of medicine, saying that those who take medicine have no faith. So some sick people postpone treatment, with very unfortunate results.

As we may see from the Gospels, the Lord Jesus did not overrate miracles. When the Lord performed a miracle, he would retreat in order to witness the miracles. He did not want people to follow him simply on that basis. If we simply rely upon miracles to attract people to follow the Lord, their faith will not stand firm, and that kind of a church will not have a firm foundation.

There are some rural areas in which the rumor was spread that the Lord Jesus would return in the year 2000, while others said he would be coming immediately. Others again, said he would come in such-and-such a year and such-and-such a month. And so some people, on this account, would not cultivate the fields and refused to engage in production. They would neither marry nor build houses, and ordinary life was brought to a standstill. Actually, there was no scriptural basis for all this. Jesus himself said, "of that day or that hour no one knows."

In a certain village in Hebei, there was a family that used to be engaged in quite normal pursuits. Their donkey-cart was regularly used for transport, and every day it would bring in a dozen or so dollars for the family income. They also had some fish ponds, and their son had earned a place at the middle school in the city, so life went by quite smoothly. But one day the man of the house, a Christian, heard someone say that Jesus would be coming immediately. Thereupon he did very little work, the donkey stood idle, and the regular family

income failed to come in. He would spend the whole day indoors engaged in prayer, and when he had finished praying he would cry. To make matters worse, he refused to allow his son to continue attending school. The son could find no remedy for the situation but to write to the authorities, saying, "Come to the rescue of this family, or we shall all be ruined." The authorities set to work and eventually talked the father round, and so averted a tragedy.

Does it reflect well on the church when this kind of thing happens, or is it just the opposite? It certainly has an adverse effect. Far from saving people, it harms them! Events like this go to show how important it is to ensure that rural churches are properly run, and that an improvement in the situation brooks no delay. The seriousness of the situation faces every theological student.

And here is the third problem. During the past few years a tendency towards the emergence of denominations has been apparent within the church. In the past there was a multitude of denominations here in China. Some members of these denominations said, "There is no salvation in any other denomination. It is only by belonging to our denomination that you can be saved." There was an expression that was used in the church, "sheep-stealing," referring to dragging people from another church into your own. There is a historical background to the rise of denominations. There was a positive significance to the Reformation which took place in the circumstances of Martin Luther's time. Had his Reformation not taken place, the darker features in the Church of his day, such as the sale of indulgences, would not have been eradicated. So Martin Luther's Reformation was a great achievement. But from that time on, denominations have proliferated, with large ones, such as the Lutherans, the Anglicans, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and so on, and an even greater multitude of smaller ones. Each of these denominations has its own theological and credal characteristics, but the denominations themselves are an obstacle to unity. After Liberation, under the direction of the spirit of three-self, we recognized that the best way to deal with problem was the exercise of mutual respect. Some people meet for worship on Saturdays, observing the Old Testament Sabbath, while others worship on Sundays, to commemorate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and both practices have their scriptural basis. The church includes some people who do not observe Christmas Day, saying that it is not mentioned in the Bible. But most Christians see no disadvantage in commemorating a day to mark the birth of Jesus. So we may say that although there are all these differences, such variety can be accommodated within God's abundance, by practicing respect and avoiding the imposition of uniformity. If we begin once again attacking one another over these questions, that would be contrary to the scriptural teaching on unity.

So now we come to my second point, which is the demands made on our theological students by today's church. In 2 Timothy 2:21, Paul says to Timothy, "If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work." I am offering each one of you this verse of scripture for mutual encouragement. Please note especially those words, "useful to the master."

At the present time the church is greatly in need of workers. There are now eleven theological colleges in this country, with about six hundred students, who are preparing to

offer themselves for the service of the church, and every Christian in the country is delighted. When an offering was made in Shanghai on College Sunday, many Christians gave very generously to the theological colleges. In order that the church may be built up, it needs workers. Thanks be to God, he has chosen us.

In the sight of God, the question of becoming a vessel useful to the Master is not immediately solved by entering theological college. To be such a vessel, one must first have a dedicated heart and zeal for the Lord. Unless one has a love for the Lord and for his Church, one cannot of course do Christian work. But merely having enthusiasm does not necessarily qualify one for use by the Master. Paul said, "They have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened" (Rom. 10:2), and "It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9). Some people have plenty of zeal, but no discernment, no true knowledge, so they are not fit for the Master's use. The building up of the church must be done in accordance with the circumstances prevailing in China, so that we may follow our own path in accordance with three-self principles. If someone wishes to work in a church following his own rules, the rules belonging to the past, imposed by foreigners, can you imagine him leading the church along the right path? Can he be useful to the Master?

On entering theological college, reading the Bible is basic, but merely reading the Bible is not sufficient. Will a preacher who doesn't understand the times in which we live, who doesn't recognize the current situation for our country, be in a position to build up the church? How can such a person help Christians to solve their various spiritual problems and the problems of daily life?

All of us must see clearly the direction in which we are going, we must study diligently, we must broaden our horizons, we must abandon our prejudices, we must amplify our discernment, and only then shall we be useful to the Master.

It is a matter for deep regret that there are in the church some who have studied theology, who have preached the Gospel, and who later on, due to financial problems or other problems related to making a living, have fallen away, and have no longer been useful to the Master. Let us learn from their mistakes. Remember that anyone who devotes himself to a lifetime of service, working hard to become of use to the master, is sure to face many trials. Entering theological college is simply the first step in a life of devoted service, so let no one imagine that having taken that step, all our ambitions have been achieved.

You are all young people, and once you have started to serve in a church, you will be severely tested to see whether you can be truly humble as you seek to identify yourself with your senior colleagues and ordinary Christians, as you serve them without feeling that because you have studied theology you can look down on them because you are brighter than they are and superior to them. If you are to be useful to the Master, you need to be like seasoned timber, firm in your resolution to devote your life to his service, eager in your spiritual quest, intellectually discerning, and morally growing more mature. This must be the objective we must constantly strive to attain.

The prospects facing the Chinese church are bright and favorable. Nevertheless, we are faced with very many difficulties. I do not wish to paint a rosy picture for you, but I want to present you all with a factual report of the situation as I have heard and seen it, in the hope that all of you may see more clearly the present situation of the Chinese church. When you have graduated from this place, some of you may be returning to work in a country village, where the working conditions may be very difficult. When you face such circumstances, will you be able to remain loyal to the Lord? Will you be useful to the Master? I am told that some students are constantly worrying about their future employment. It is quite usual for young people to be concerned about their future, but the best thing you can do is to remember the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not be anxious about what you shall eat, what you shall drink, or what you shall put on. Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." We must first ask God to enable us to know how the Chinese church is to be built up, and to lead us along that way. If we follow his path, no matter what task we are given, or wherever it may be, I am convinced that all of us as we preach the Gospel will be able to become vessels useful to the Master.

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*translated by Brynmor Price*

#### **4. Theological Reflection in the Chinese Church – Shen Yifan**

Theological reflection cannot escape from the actual situation in which it finds itself, which is to say that any theological reflection is also contextualized reflection.

Contextualization and indigenization share common elements, but there are also differences between them. If it can be said that indigenization emphasizes the integration of theological reflection with traditional culture, then contextualization, while including indigenization, places greater emphasis on the relationship of theological reflection with its actual social situation and social transformation.

It is important for Chinese theological thought to absorb the best of Chinese traditional culture. But more important is the way in which Chinese theological thought should respond to the tremendous political, social, economic and cultural changes that have taken place in contemporary China.

Chinese Christians are confronted with the following facts about the new social and historical situation:

(1) The destiny of the Chinese masses, who for thousands of years have been at the very bottom of society, has been changed for the better.

(2) Many of the social evils which Christians have always opposed have been controlled or eliminated in Chinese society over the last forty years.

(3) We have seen a high moral character and a selfless spirit of sacrifice in the lives of many true revolutionaries.

(4) Our whole society is more united now than ever before, and we are working together for a common goal.

(5) As we strive to overcome the difficulties experienced in the twists and turns of the last thirty years, a new situation is rapidly being opened up in our country.

On the theological level, the Chinese church is called to address this new situation. Chinese Christians are now asking themselves:

Is God's love limited to the Christians who believe in God, or does it extend to all of humankind?

Does God express his acts of love only through those who profess to believe in him, or does God also work through the actions of all people of goodwill?

Has original human nature been so completely corrupted through sin that there can be no cultural creation or social progress? Or does human nature in varying degrees still reflect the image of God?

Are material progress and human accomplishments works of Satan which lead people away from God, or do they reveal the wisdom and compassion of God as they come to be enjoyed by all people?

Should people reject material life and give up all efforts for human improvement in this world in order to draw closer to God? Or should they enter into the real world, and work towards the improvement of material and cultural life so that they may come closer to the will of God?

When people seek God out of experiences of disaster and suffering, should we feel at home with these experiences and regard them as natural ways to "bring" people to God? Or, should we respond to such experiences through prayer and efforts which seek to overcome suffering and disaster, and thereby learn to give our praise and thanksgiving to God?

In the conflict between God and all evil forces, is today's world so totally under the spell of sin and evil that it must be destroyed in its entirety before the coming of the Kingdom of God? Or is God in the highest still directing the course of history from beginning to end?

Is salvation in Christ limited to reconciliation of each individual to God, or does it also include reconciliation between human society and God? Does the incarnation only have meaning for the redemption of individual souls, or is it also meaningful for all of human life and the life of the Church?

Should faith and love, faith and works, grace and morals, our relationship with God and human relationships be understood as opposed or complementary to one another?

These are the questions which we have been asking. Since the founding of New China, quite a number of thoughtful Christians who wished to be engaged in the changing currents of the time, have left the church. They felt the contradictions between certain traditional theological views and our new situation were too difficult to reconcile.

There have also been a small number of Christians who have insisted that certain expressions of traditional theology were eternal and unchanging truth in and of themselves. Opposing the course of social development, they have gone down blind alleys, increasingly removed from the broad masses of ordinary Christians.

But, embraced by God's love, the vast majority of Chinese pastors and lay people have not been willing to leave behind the eternal life found in Jesus Christ. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). So that the light of this eternal life might shine in the society of New China, we have begun to reflect anew theologically.

In the course of this reflection, we have not compromised our faith by combining it with any ideology. No one has tried to develop any kind of "Christian Communism," "Christian Marxism," or "Socialist Theology." In China, we don't even have a Christian-Marxist dialogue. In cases where pastors have tried to cast their sermons in a political mold, they have been rejected by their congregations, who have mocked them as having "the mouth of a horse on the head of an ox."

The theological reorientation of Chinese Christians is based on the spiritual experiences of Christians in New China, and the deepening of our spiritual experience has promoted livelier theological reflection. Chinese Christians maintain an abiding respect for the Bible, and whatever "new light" we have found in our theology has been derived from our study of the Bible in this new age.

The theological question which Christians in New China first encountered was that of the relationship between creation and redemption. God created all things and saw that they were good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 31). God's work of creation and providence has never ceased (Jn. 5:17). God used creation to reveal Himself and His glory, not only in the cosmos (Psalm 19:1), but also in people's hearts (Rom. 1:19-20).

But the world stands in need of God's salvation because of human sin and the Fall. There are those who, in order to emphasize our need for redemption, say that the world is entirely dark, corrupt, empty and hopeless. This understanding makes the contradiction between creation and redemption very great indeed. However, in our encounter with the realities of the new society, Chinese Christians could not but raise questions about this kind of theological dualism.

The world was created by God, but if there is no hope for the world, then why did God create it in the first place? In the early church of the second and third centuries, the Gnostics were already advancing a kind of dualism. Athanasius refuted this viewpoint in the fourth century: "Why is it that God chose to create the world? It would have been better if all which was created never was, so that it would not have to perish."

There are no longer Gnostics in the church of today, but we believe that we must still be on guard against any tendency in theology which comes close to a Gnostic-like dualism. What we are asking is this: Is the world a realm for the revelation of the power and glory of God, or does it represent a power which is basically opposed to God? Does the fact that there is still sin in the world mean that it is ultimately governed by God or by Satan? Is it the world which is opposed to God, or the sin and sinful powers of the world? (Christ did not ask that his disciples be taken out of the world, but that they be kept from the evil one. Jn. 17:15) When the Bible speaks of not loving the world, is it referring to the material world and its culture as a whole, or to "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 Jn. 2:15-16)? Insofar as God loved the world, why can we not also love the world? In sum, are creation and redemption contradictory, even to the extent that redemption negates creation; or is redemption a continuation and fulfillment of creation? This question pervades the theological reflection now going on in the Chinese church.

Another question we have been asking is concerned with a fuller understanding of human nature. The Bible tells us that human beings were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). God breathed the breath of life and man became a "living being" (Gen. 2:7). Human beings were made little less than angels, and crowned by God with glory and honor (Psalm 8:5). But the Bible also teaches that sin came into the world through Adam, and death spread to all of humankind because all sinned (Rom. 5:12). Since all have sinned, all people fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). If we say that we have not sinned, then we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 Jn. 1:8).

The question is whether human nature is so totally corrupted by sin that its likeness to God's image is completely destroyed. Is human life then devoid of any spiritual character? There have been those who have argued that God wants us only to be concerned about "life," not about questions of "right and wrong." For those who have no "life" (i.e., non-believers), their wrong is wrong, but their "right" is also wrong. In this way of thinking, there is not a single redeeming feature in people who do not believe in God. They are unsaved and totally corrupt, in their understanding, their emotions and their will. However, such a view corresponds neither to the Bible nor to what we experience in our everyday lives.

The Bible does not say that human sin and the Fall mean the eradication of God's image in us. God told Noah and his descendants to refrain from shedding blood because human beings were made in God's image (Gen. 9:6). James also taught that we should not use our tongues which praise God to curse human beings who were created in God's image (James 3:9).

This question is indeed concerned with the relationship between creation and redemption. Today there are many people who have a noble moral character but who do not believe in God. We cannot write them off, for to do so would also mean a denial of the very humanity which was created in God's image. At the same time, we must see that despite their noble moral characters, these people are still sinful and have their limitations.

Human nature consists of both God's image and human sinfulness. Paul explains this in terms of the conflict between sin and the law in the seventh chapter of Romans. This is not only the experience of Christians, but the experience of all human beings in real life. "There is no pure gold, and there are no perfect people." People should look at themselves by "dividing the one into two," that is, to look at their shortcomings alongside their virtues. These expressions have become common in Chinese society. One can see in them both the possibilities and the limitations of human beings, the bright side as well as the dark side of human nature.

Chinese theological reflection should absorb the best of the Chinese cultural tradition, but we have no way of accepting the overly optimistic estimation of human nature in Confucianism. Confucian ethics and morality have made definite contributions, but the emphasis on the original goodness of human nature has been conducive to a sense of hypocrisy and self-righteousness. The perspective of Christian faith on original human nature is in this respect more profound. However, traditional Chinese cultural understanding could never accept the view that human nature is despicable, useless and entirely worthless.



Respect for the dignity of human nature in Confucian thought should therefore be helpful in correcting the distortions of theological points of view which tend in this direction.

We should give thanks to God for the goodness of the people of this world, and we must preach the gospel to save them from their sinfulness.

In the past, Chinese Christians were troubled over the question of the relationship between the spiritual and the secular, thinking that the search for the "spiritual" would have to mean an escape from real life and the rejection of all earthly hopes. The "ideal" life would be found in a "locked garden" or a "closed well."

However, the Biblical understanding of the spiritual life is not opposed to physical and material life, but rather to lustful desires and selfish greed. Galatians 5:16-21, which speaks of the struggle between the spiritual and the lustful, and even lists all the lustful desires of the flesh, has made this point very clear.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ allows us to see that the body and matter can become a means for revealing the will of God and God's great love. The word become flesh means that the flesh can make manifest the grace, truth and glory of God (Jn. 1:14).

When Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God, he frequently cited all kinds of things from our earthly lives to illustrate what he was speaking about. He used illustrations about farming (the parable of the sower), fishing (the parable of the fishermen), shepherding (the parable of the lost sheep), construction (the parable of the two foundations), commerce (the parable of the talents), marriage (the parable of the ten virgins), homemaking (the parable of the lost coin), the relationship between parents and children (the story of the prodigal son), and so forth. Christ drew out spiritual teaching and meaning from things which we could understand in our ordinary lives in this world.

During his earthly life, Christ participated in all sorts of secular activities with his disciples. These included the marriage feast at Cana, where he turned water into wine for the guests (Jn. 2:1-11); his asking for water from the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:9-26); his eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, for which he was criticized by the Pharisees (Mt.9:10-13); his staying at the home of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector (Luke 19: 1-10).

The incarnation and Jesus' participation in earthly life did not degrade his message, but sanctified earthly existence in order to reveal God's glory. From Christ's perspective, all profane things that are done to glorify God can become "sacred." In contrast, if "sacred" things serve selfish interests then they become "profane." This shatters the traditional understanding of the sacred and profane, and is well illustrated by the contrast between the Samaritan and the priests and Levites in the story of the Good Samaritan.

In the life of faith of Chinese Christians, the gradual breaking down of the traditional division between the sacred and the profane, and the greater participation in real life experiences, are also due to a broader understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in our theological reflection. Previously we could only see the work of the Holy Spirit in terms of

its redemptive function, such as the confession of sin (Jn. 16:8), repentance and rebirth in Christ (Jn. 3:1 -8; Titus 3:5), proclamation of the gospel (Acts 1:8), the process of sanctification (Rom. 8:5 -11, 15:16), and the bearing of spiritual fruits (Gal. 5: 22-23).

But we have discovered that throughout the Bible the activity of the Holy Spirit as one person in the Trinity is much more magnificent than we had understood. The Holy Spirit takes part in cosmic creation and its renewal (Gen. 1:2; Psalm 104:30), breathes life into human beings (Gen. 2:7; Eze. 37), empowers and gives courage (Judges 3:9-10, ff.), grants wisdom and understanding (Is. 11:2; Job 32:8), bestows righteousness and peace (Is. 42:1; 32:15-17), liberates humankind (Luke 4:18-19), and leads people to truth (Jn. 14:26; 16:13).

These passages show that the Holy Spirit is not only involved in the work of redemption, but is also involved in the progress of all aspects of human culture, science and art, as well as in the struggles for justice, peace and liberation. We Christians should therefore devote ourselves to all of these spiritual efforts for they deserve to be regarded as work which belongs to God. Were it not so, would we then attribute them to sinfulness and Satan?

The work of the Holy Spirit is so grand that it acts not only through those who recognize and believe in God, but also through those who do not yet recognize and believe. Were it not so, then how could we understand that "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17)? Or how would we understand the meaning of, "everyone who does right is born of God" (1 Jn. 2:29)?

The generalized inspiration of the Holy Spirit cannot, of course, replace the Spirit's special activity in proclaiming the gospel and bearing witness to Jesus Christ. This work of the Holy Spirit is as always a challenge to this generation. To lead men and women to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ requires the confession of sins, repentance, and faith, and this is something which is never easy.

Chinese Christians accept the emphasis on "salvation by faith" in Paul and Martin Luther. It is our common experience as well as a truth which we abide by that we are saved by faith, and are not judged according to the Law or our actions. However, we cannot but be on guard against any "antinomian" fallacies and the divorce of faith from ethical life. An increasing number of Chinese Christians have come to understand that Christian belief, insofar as it is a total surrender to God and Jesus Christ, has to do with change in the whole of human life. Belief would be a new form of legalism if it only meant acceptance of some doctrines of a creed or a set of regulations. We are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, not through the acceptance of credal propositions about Jesus Christ. The former implies that we are fully committed and obedient to the life of Jesus Christ.

Christ came into the world in order to reveal God's great saving love for the world. John the Apostle tells us, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him"(1 Jn. 4:16). He also says, "For whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn. 4:20). For this reason, faith separated from love becomes empty, formal and even hypocritical.

The same Paul who spoke so firmly about salvation by faith just as firmly emphasized the unity of faith and love. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). The message of "faith working through love" has a most important meaning for Chinese Christians of today. It helps us to integrate belief and actions, faith and life, and thus overcome a simplistic emphasis on belief alone which can so easily result in narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, pride and self-righteousness. Beginning with the unity between faith and love, Chinese Christians have proceeded to further theological reflection on the nature and mission of the church. The church is a community of people whom God has brought together through the message of Jesus Christ. Its existence and development must be founded on its witness to God's great love, and on Jesus Christ who has become a human being through the incarnation. This has at least a threefold meaning for us:

(1) For the church to be able to bear effective witness to the gospel, it must identify itself with the common people out of love for them, becoming all things to all men and women. (1 Cor. 9:20-22). For the church to grow, it must "have favor with all the people" (Acts 1:47), taking "thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Rom. 12:17). As the church is both the body and the bride of Christ, it also bears the character of the incarnation. In one sense, the church is an extension of the incarnation, for it must root itself in society and stand together with the people. This was an important theological basis for implementing three-self in the Chinese church.

(2) For the church to be able to bear effective witness to the gospel, its members must be forbearing of "one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2-3). "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35). This is to say that Christians must be loving, tolerant and forbearing of one another in order to bear effective witness for Christ. Chinese Christians have thus entered a post-denominational period by gradually laying aside denominational prejudices and transcending theological differences.

(3) For the church to be able to bear effective witness to the gospel, it cannot harbor an attitude of confrontation with non-Christians. The church must not denounce and curse non-Christians, and even less can we threaten and condemn them. In order to attract people to Jesus Christ, the church should lift up the great love of the Cross.

When Jesus entered a Samaritan village with his disciples and the people there would not receive him, James and John wanted Christ to consume the people with fire from heaven. But Jesus said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:51-56).

Jesus Christ was himself lifted up from the earth, drawing people to him through the revelation of his great love on the cross (Jn. 3:14-15). Christ had the power and authority to punish the people of the world, but he preferred to sacrifice himself in order to save them. Many Chinese Christians know full well that we cannot usurp the place of God by judging others and convicting them of sin. We can only use loving words and actions to bear witness

to Christ and to reveal God's great love, for the witness of love is often the truest and most effective of all.

The life and witness of Christians is inspired both by God's love and our eschatological hope. Forty years in New China have not in any sense diminished our sense of hope in the last things, and our expectations for the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem, for this new age has enabled us to see more of the connections between the present world and eternity.

The Bible speaks of the eschaton in terms of the burning and destruction of the present world, but also of the connection between this world and the future. As it is written in Revelation, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 21:6), and "I am the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:13). Or again, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). How are we to understand the Bible as a whole?

The cosmos and human history are moving between the beginning of time and its end. Is it possible to imagine that the Lord who created all things and brings them to completion would negate the beginning and the entire course of history simply to bring about their end? In the final analysis, this too is a question about the relationship between creation and redemption. If everything must be destroyed, then why was it created at all? Or, from another angle, if everything must be destroyed, then how shall the nations bring their glory into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24, 26)? Paul said, "As a plan for the fullness of time, (Christ) unites all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." If all things must be destroyed, then how can all things be united in Christ?

Chinese Christians are seeking a deeper understanding of the relationship between the beginning and the end, the first and the last, destruction and fulfillment, decay and revitalization, process and outcome. The Christ who rose from the dead and is eternal will fill us with even greater hope from this world to the next, from the present to eternity, from the first day until the last. And all the efforts which we make in this world which are in accordance with the will of God will have an everlasting value.

*This speech was delivered by Bishop Shen Yifan in Hong Kong in June, 1988 at a forum organized by the Committee on Evangelism and Theology of the Hong Kong Christian Council. The translation is from the text which was published in the Hong Kong Christian Council's Message, No. 107 (July-August, 1988), pp 1-4.  
translated by Philip L. Wickeri*

## 5. Chinese Culture and Christian Faith – Zhao Dianpeng

The Chinese people enjoy a long history, a great culture and great achievements in the arts. Their superior ethical heritage is not only one of the best in Asia, but is outstanding among the nations of the world. China is regarded as an ancient civilization, a country which highly values propriety and decorum. It should be noted that China's ideals for human life and concepts of the highest deity are not devoid of elements of Christian doctrines and ethics and elements that may be elevated and sanctified into articles of belief. We know that there cannot be contradiction between one truth and another, nor can this "beauty and goodness" and that "beauty and goodness" be mutually exclusive. For all truth and beauty come from the great Creator God. Without a doubt, it would be beneficial for the spread of the gospel in China if the Church were to have a sufficient understanding of Chinese culture and appropriate it to its own use. This paper is an initial exploration into the possibility of harmonizing Chinese culture and Christian faith, and I hope it will stimulate further discussion on the subject.

### I. Lofty Ideals for Human Life

The main substance of Chinese philosophy is ethics; that is, ideals for human life. The major schools include Confucianism, Taoism and the thought of Mozi. Of these, Confucianism has had the widest and most profound influence on the life of the Chinese people. The Confucian ideal of a harmonious society where "all are brothers" shows the influence of the Taoist and Moist schools.

Confucius was a sage in the eyes of the Chinese people. His ideal for human life is *ren* (lit., benevolence or humanity). What is *ren*? In positive terms, it may be expressed as "desiring to be established oneself, one seeks to establish others; desiring oneself to succeed, one helps others to succeed" (*Analects VI:28*; de Bary).<sup>1</sup> In other words, whatever one wants to achieve, one should also help others to achieve. Put in negative terms, this is "do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you" (*Analects XII:2*; de Bary). In other words, do not impose on others what you do not want yourself. Christ told his disciples: "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (Mt.7:12). Confucius also said: "*Ren* means to love people" (*Analects XII:22*), thus pointing out the basic idea behind *ren* as "to love people."

Yan Hui was the favorite disciple of Confucius. He advocated and practiced the following: "When people are good to me, I am good to them; when people are not good to me, I am still good to them" (*Hanshi waizhuan: VII*) - a kind of benevolent spirit that responds to hatred with goodness and treats enemies with kindness. Christ also asked his disciples to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Mt.5:44-45). This means that in order to achieve complete love, people should love not only those who are kind to them but also those who offend or hurt them.

Confucian filial piety is very similar to that of Christian faith. In discussing filial piety, Confucius said: "Behave in such a way that your father and mother have no anxiety about

you, except concerning your health" (*Analects 11:6*; Waley).<sup>2</sup> This means that good children should not be a source of worry for their parents except when ill; in all other matters they should please their parents. Zengzi spoke of filial piety as well: "This is the way for a filial son to care for his aged parents: give pleasure to their mind, do not oppose their wish, give pleasure to their ears and eyes, make their living quarters comfortable, and provide for them for the rest of their lives" (*Book of Rites X11:34*). In other words, good children should ensure that their parents are well provided for materially and kept happy in mind and spirit, and should not go against their parents rightful wishes, all that their parents may enjoy a peaceful life in their old age. The Fourth Commandment of Christian faith requires children to love, honor and obey their parents. When parents are old or have lost their ability to work, the children should work in order to provide for their parents for the remainder of their lives.

Mencius was heir and promoter of Confucian thought. While he saw *ren* as the most important principle for human life, he also placed great emphasis on *yi* (righteousness, propriety, or duty). One may say that he promoted both *ren* and *yi*: "Love for one's parents is *ren*, and respect for one's elders is *yi*" (*Mencius VIIA:15*). Ethical treatment of one's relatives requires love for one's parents and respect for one's elder brothers. But this is not enough. One should apply these principles to the whole of humanity. "First, treat with reverence the elder members in our own family, then treat the elders in other families likewise; treat with kindness the young members of our own family, then treat the young of other families likewise" (*Mencius IA:7*). One should treat other people's parents reverently and sincerely in the same way one respects and supports one's own, and treat other people's children with the love and protection one shows to one's own. Interpersonal relationships should be developed according to *ren* and *yi*, and the main idea behind *ren* and *yi* is none other than love.

In Christianity, love is not restricted to relationships between family members or friends but is for all people. "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?" (Mt. 5:46). Christ asks us to love people with the heart of our heavenly father, because the love of the heavenly father does not exclude anyone. "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt.5:45).

Mozi's concept of *jian'ai* (universal love) is more positive than the *ren* and *yi* of Confucius and Mencius. *Jian* means to make no distinction between oneself and others, between far and near, or between classes. It is a kind of love without distinction. This is equivalent to the love of Christ which makes no distinction between realms and races but is all-inclusive.

"Heaven loves the whole world universally. Everything is prepared for the good of people (Mozi: *Will of Heaven 11*).<sup>3</sup> All states in the world, large or small, are cities of Heaven, and all people, young or old, of high or low station, are its subjects; Heaven desires people to benefit and love one another and abominates them hating or harming one another (Mozi: *On the Necessity of Standards*). Heaven abominates the large state which attacks small states, the large family which molests small families, the strong who plunder the weak, the clever who deceive the stupid, and the highborn who disdain the humble. Heaven desires people who have energy to work for each other, those who know the way to teach each other, and those who possess wealth to share with each other (Mozi: *Will of Heaven II*). Heaven desires righteousness and abominates unrighteousness (Mozi: *Will of Heaven I*)."

These words of Mozi actually correspond to Christian teaching and practice. We believe that God created humankind and all things and that God cares for all of them. *All* people are sons and daughters of God and so should live in the spirit of equality and mutual love, seeking to help and benefit one another. Nations should treat one another with peace and friendship, and not with enmity and strife. Nations should not cause harm to each other. We have the same God as our father, just as Christ taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven..." (Mt.6:9). He did not teach them to say "My father who art in heaven." In the early church, believers exemplified this spirit of universal love in their lives as recorded in Acts 4:32: "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common."

Mozi also pointed out that a person who practices universal love "would take care of his friend as he does of himself, and take care of his friend's parents as he would his own. Therefore when he finds his friend hungry he will feed him and when he finds his friend cold he will clothe him. In sickness he will care for him; in death he will bury him" (Mozi: *Universal Love III*). We should treat others the way we want others to treat us. We should share other people's concerns, help solve their problems, and come to the rescue when they are in trouble. Christ commanded his disciples: "You love one another; even as I loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn. 13:34). How did Christ love us? He was originally the true son of God, yet for the sake of saving the world from sin, he humbled himself to be born in a manger and became a servant. In order to save people from eternal death, he accepted the suffering and shame of the cross and gave up his own life. He opened the eyes of the blind and recovered their sight, and moved the tongues of the dumb to recover their speech. He also bid the dead to rise and returned them to their grieving families. This was how Christ tirelessly and gratuitously engaged himself in relieving the pain of the people and bringing happiness to their lives. He also repeatedly told us to do the same, and reminded us that at the last judgment he will see whether we have carried out the work of love as a measure for reward or punishment (cf. Mt.25:35-46).

Christ commanded the disciples to love others as themselves, while Mozi advocated treating others as one would oneself, making no distinction between others and oneself. Christ sacrificed himself for the well-being of humankind, thus realizing the spirit of universal love (*bo'ai*). For Mozi: "If it would benefit the world, even though he may rub off and lose his hair from head to heel, he would do it" (*Mencius VIIA:26*). This kind of universal love (*lian'ai*) is Mozi's ideal for human life. Christ's great *bo'ai* and Mozi's noble *lian'ai* are the like the sun and the moon whose rays shine together upon humankind.

Laozi advocated quietism, non-action, non-competitiveness, humble withdrawal, weakness, and nothingness. For people in general, this is a negative, unworldly way of thinking. But if we take a closer look, we find some positive and worthy elements that we can use or promote. I would like to share with my readers a portion of Laozi's thought in which we may analyze the points it has in common with Christianity.

Laozi said: "I have three treasures which I hold and cherish. The first is known as compassion, the second is known as frugality, the third is known as not daring to take lead in the empire" (*Laozi LXVII*; Lau).<sup>4</sup> "Compassion" means to love people and things, to save people and things, and to benefit all things without fighting to get the benefit for oneself. "Frugality" means "to avoid excess, extravagance, and arrogance" (*Laozi XXIX*). That is to say that human life should not be excessive, extravagant, and undisciplined. One should not do whatever one pleases without regard for propriety. "Not daring to take lead in the empire" means humble withdrawal as opposed to fighting and competing to stand out. It requires people to be reserved rather than to show off. We can see from this that Christianity has similar ideas. The Church holds that since God created and blessed humankind and all things, our actions will be in accordance with God's purpose in creation only when we love, treasure and make reasonable use of the whole of creation. We should cultivate and discipline ourselves to have the virtues of humility, benevolence, and self-control as a way to modify our conduct. We should maintain a mean or middle position in order to lead a holy and good life.

To sum up, it is not hard to see that the ideals of ancient Chinese philosophers may be stated in different ways, yet have the same guiding principle: love. This is the principle for human conduct, and love of virtue is the direction for human life. All these are present in Christian teaching.

## **II. The Concept of God is Present in Traditional Thought**

The theistic concept is deeply rooted in human nature. We may find verification for this in the history of Chinese thought and people's practices in daily life. Thinkers of profound wisdom recognized the true god of supernatural power through the power of reason. This god is a personal god with its own will, who is the supreme wisdom in charge of the universe and of human life. This they named "Heaven." The common uneducated people also sensed the existence of god in a natural and simple way through their life experiences and through conscience. This they called "Lord Heaven." The Church called this god "Heavenly Lord." Although each tradition uses a different name for god, the idea is the same, the only difference being how clear their recognition of this god is. The following is a simple introduction to the nature of "Heaven," i.e., god, as reflected in the thought of a few representative philosophers of ancient China.

Confucius said: "Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses and all things are continually being produced, but does Heaven say anything?" (*Analects XVII:19*; Legge)<sup>5</sup>. Heaven is the master and ruler of the universe. It does not need to say a word, yet the alternating courses of the four seasons and the being and becoming of all things are under the control of its will. Confucius also said: "He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray" (*Analects III:13*; Legge). He pointed out that the will of Heaven is absolute and that no one has higher authority than Heaven.

Mozi spoke of Heaven as someone good, whose nature of justice loves goodness and rewards the good while it hates evil and punishes evil-doers. He also spoke of Heaven as having sovereignty over humankind. He said: "He who obeys the will of Heaven, loving



universally and benefiting others, will obtain rewards. He who opposes the will of Heaven, by being partial and unfriendly and harming others, will incur punishment" (Mozi: *Will of Heaven I*). He also said that Heaven is the most honorable and wisest and that no one can surpass its beauty, goodness and wisdom. "Heaven is honorable, Heaven is wise" (Mozi: *Will of Heaven 11*).

When Liezi discussed the origin of the universe, he said: "That which gives birth was not born ... That which was not born continually gives birth to life... Therefore, the source of life was not given life" (*Liezi I*). He pointed out that the creator of all things was not created. If this is so, then it must exist of itself. For there can be only two ways by which all things come into existence. Either one exists spontaneously, or is caused to exist by other agents. Liezi also said: "That which causes change does not change ... That which does not change continually brings change to the changing... Therefore, the source of change is changeless" (*Liezi I*). This makes clear that the creator is changeless, yet it changes all things. It is neither new nor old but is the generator of renewal for all things.

Some people in the field of philosophy in China today think that Laozi never considered Heaven as the true god who was in charge of all things and of human life, but rather as an unknowing and unresponsive heaven of nature. I think this is contrary to what Laozi meant. He believed in god. In Laozi, Chapter 73, we find: "The way of Heaven excels in overcoming though it does not contend, in responding though it does not speak, in attracting though it does not summon, in laying plans though it appears slack. The net of Heaven is cast wide. Though the mesh is not fine, yet nothing ever slips through." This makes it clear that heaven possesses great power and great wisdom, and is far superior to humans. Although Heaven is generous and lenient, it is also impartial and selfless in that it would not let evildoers get away, but would punish them. If the "Heaven" in the above quotation from Laozi does not mean a personal god with its own will, then we would not be able to properly explain the meaning of these words.

Mencius held that human beings possess a spiritual quality which is capable of nurturing the seeds of morality and reason, and this spiritual quality is given by the creator. He said: "The mind is the faculty for thinking. By thinking, it gets the right view of things, by neglecting to think, it fails to do this. These (ears, eyes and mind) are what Heaven has given to us" (*Mencius VIA: 15*). He also said, "There is a way to the attainment of sincerity in one's self; if a man does not understand what is good, he will not attain sincerity in himself. Therefore, sincerity is the way of Heaven. To think how to be sincere is the way of man" (*Mencius IVA:12; Legge*). This tells us that Heaven is true without falsehood, the supreme goodness which is the source of all virtues, and the basis of all things. Only when people adopt the way of Heaven as their principle can they live holy, good and virtuous lives.

All of these philosophers have expressed in their thought their concept and understanding of god, and reflected from different points of view on the nature of god. Surprisingly, although their insights do not come from the direct revelation of God or special illumination, they correspond to a large extent to the God our Church believes in through revelation - the God who is omnipotent, omniscient, perfect goodness, most impartial, righteous, and

merciful; who creates, rules, and fills the universe yet is not contained by it; and who has no beginning nor end but exists of God's own accord.

### **III. Christian Faith Does Not Neglect Human Civilization**

The Christian Church started to preach the gospel to the world after the reception of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. At that time, the nations already had various religions of their own. Each place also had its own culture, moral tradition, customs and mores which were uniquely its own and deeply implanted in the hearts of its people, thus exerting strong influence on their lives. When the Christian Church, whose aim is to save the whole world, spreads the gospel to a new place or a new people, is it necessary to eliminate the influence of the local culture and moral traditions? Must we brand all non-Christian things as immoral and heretical? Our faith and the teaching of the Church show us that we should not arbitrarily reject the local culture and tradition, but should preserve and reform, support and sanctify them. Although our faith is oriented toward the supernatural, it is based on humanity. By means of promoting self-development and mutual help, the Church may lead all peoples of the world to enter the sacred realm together.

St. Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, wrote in his letter to the believers: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8). This teaching clearly explains that Christian faith does not reject anything that is true and holy in the culture and tradition of each people. It respects wholeheartedly different ways of life and different cultures and systems. Although these may not be in agreement with the teaching and practice of the church in many respects, they will always reflect a ray of truth that shines upon humanity. Thus, Christian faith will accept human civilization within possible limits. As for those that have nothing to do with matters of faith, the church will not at all force people to abandon them.

### **IV. The Complementarity of Chinese Culture and Christian Faith**

A Vatican II document pointed out that "From ancient to present times, there has been discovered in various peoples certain latent power which functions in human life. Sometimes it comes into contact with the existence of the most high, or even the heavenly father. This kind of consciousness of recognition would infuse into the life of this people a strong religious consciousness." The essence of Chinese culture and philosophy may provide historical and factual proofs for this proclamation of the Catholic Council. It will also provide rational proofs for Christian doctrines and ethics. Basically it is close to and agreeable to Christian faith. Therefore in my opinion, of all peoples, except that chosen by God, the Chinese are the closest to and the most favored of God. From the point of faith, both revealed wisdom and natural wisdom originate in God. Chinese culture excels in the realm of natural wisdom, which may greatly enrich and serve the needs of our faith. The faith that comes from God's revelation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit may, on the other hand, fulfill and sanctify the Chinese culture. The two complement each other just like milk dissolves completely into water. Therefore, I am sure that the Chinese people will accept the

light of the gospel more easily, and the seeds of Christ's gospel will be more suited to take root and grow in the fertile soil of China, and much fruit will be borne.

**Notes:**

*The final name in brackets indicates the source of the English translation. If no name appears, the translation was done by the present translator.*

1. deBary, Chan, and Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. I (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1960).

2. Arthur Waley, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf and Random House, 1983).

3. English translation of all quotations from Mozi is taken from Yi-pao Mei. *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1929). Reprint. Taipei: Chengwen Publishing Company, 1974.

4. All quotations from Laozi taken from D.C. Lau. *Tao Te Ching* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1982).

5. James Legge, tr. *The Four Books*.

*translated by Lucy T.H. Loh*

## 6. Form in Christian Art – He Huibing

In contemporary Christian art we find Jesus depicted as an African, an Asian, a Latin American or a European. I have heard a lot of comments on this. Some say, why should Jesus be black when the Bible clearly states that he was a Galilean? Do these paintings have a historical basis? Is there any theological evidence for this? I would like to share my thoughts on the subject.

An artist reveals through her art her own knowledge of the world, of nature, and of humankind, through the creative expression of emotion. A work of art carries a unique message, that of the artist's attitude, knowledge and level of understanding, along with his or her emotional response to objects in the world, shaped through the use of the artistic medium. When we are drawn into the world of a painting, our imaginations and emotions take flight with its theme. We are led inward, to ponder the significance of our lives; we are led outward, to ponder the relationship between our lives and the larger world. We are drawn to meditate upon the source of life and beauty and their goal.

If a work of art causes the beholder's spirit to tremble, if it arouses a sympathetic response to the message it contains and if it goes further and causes the beholder's imagination to surpass itself and even to surpass the creative impulse of the artist, then it has realized an inspirational role. This can function in society to lead people into social relationships and help them to know and change social realities. A work of art not only functions to help us accept and endure social realities, but strengthens our resolve to enable humankind to explore its own value, and to move human society towards being more human and on towards perfection. The social roles of art and religion are similar in many respects.

Art is itself a social reality. Its social function lies in its ability to take the fragmented entities of space, time and human events and form of them a whole made up of human ideals. It manifests the possibility of change in the world and is the force behind that change. Art emphasizes or records human ideals and aspirations within a given time-frame, giving expression to human hopes and needs in the context of history.

Christian art is the expression of the knowledge of God, the faith and the religious feeling of the artist through his or her individual and contextualized aesthetic experience. Since the Renaissance, Christianity and Western culture have been profoundly influenced by humanism and the opposition of human nature to divine nature has received unprecedented attention. Throughout history Christian art has reflected contemporary theological thinking: in speaking of Christian art, we think of the Madonna and Child of Da Vinci or Raphael, of Michaelangelo's deathless masterpieces, the Sistine Chapel ceiling paintings "Creation" and "The Last Judgment," of Rembrandt's many famous works on Biblical themes, of William Blake's philosophical and yet boldly imaginative images of God, of El Greco's misshapen images of Christ, among countless other famous religious works.

From a historical point of view, Christian art once meant illustrations for the Bible. During the Middle Ages, art was used to decorate churches, while contemporary Christian art

has become an individual statement of faith. And though today these three elements, Bible illustrations, church decoration and individual statements of faith, co-exist, if we do not add another element this Christian art of which we are speaking would be incomplete. This fourth element is the evangelical mission and social responsibility of Christian art, to express the work of our saving Lord in the contemporary context.

At the same time as an artist expresses through art his own knowledge of faith, he must also shoulder the responsibility to spread God's word and the truth of God's kingdom. This is the responsibility to help people see God's revelation, that through the visible message they may know the world and themselves and may come to know the relationship between mortals, the world, and their Creator. Through the expression and depiction of religious subjects, religious artists grasp the issues of the relationship between God and ourselves, they live in our times, and respond to real issues.

The Christian art of today does not simply illustrate the events of the Bible with authentic pictures; this would not be enough. When we read the Bible, we do so as though through a fluoroscope or spectroscope which we employ to help us understand our lives in the present, to understand the realities of our society and the relationship of all that happens around us to ourselves, and in this way comprehend what God wants of us. God works in many ways, and enables us to accept his message in definite times and environments.

The Bible is art in itself; a magnificent work of art expressing the actions of God. The Bible seems like one painting after another. The descriptions in Genesis lead us to imagine the grand spectacle and motion of the universe, the clash of light and darkness during the creation of the world. The Garden of Eden calls up the beauty and harmony of primitive nature. The magnificent scenes of the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt are soul-stirring and turbulent. We track Jesus through the New Testament as he spreads the truth of the Kingdom of God, calling the disciples along the shores of the sea of Galilee, speaking of eternal life with the Samaritan woman beside the well. A myriad of events form pictures in our minds.

When an artist is composing, attempting to give visible existence to an imagined painting, she must seek assistance from real life, from all the things of her own life. When I see a mother holding her child, revealing warmth and love, when I see the small body of the child with its tenacious grip on life, it gives me such excitement, such hope. And I recall the words: "I am the light of the world" (Jn.8:12). I am inspired and moved by true-life scenes. In a peasant woman in a southern Chinese village, I saw the elements I wanted and employed them in my "Madonna and Child." In "Nativity," I used the subject to express the truth of the Incarnation. I included the sun and a dove because though our nation and our church have known winter and rain, and have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, now winter is past, and the rain has ceased. We turn to the sun and the light, and pluck up our faith and courage for the construction of our church. We strive for the prosperity of our nation and people, we beseech God to watch over us, to bless all of us, nation and people, and we open ourselves to Christ's coming. The entire compositional process of this painting made me feel the intimacy, the humanity of the Nativity, because I had painted many women with their children.

Neither Christians nor artists are isolated in their times or societies. Their aesthetic and their understanding of faith cannot be separated from their real lives, because God inspires and teaches us through real events. You may ask: "Why do you paint Christ as a Chinese when the Bible says he was a Nazarene and Jesus is portrayed as a European in many famous paintings?" But it is a fact that there is no one image of Christ. Those of El Greco, of Rembrandt, Holman Hunt or Dali, are all different. Artists search for a model for Christ among the people of their time and place. The Christ depicted in their works then gains acceptance among those people. It is evident that what the people accept and what the artists paint is the inherent spiritual significance of events themselves, which has nothing to do with externals.

The reality of the incarnation is for all humankind; it is a universal event. In accepting this event, each individual, each people, each nation is situated in their own special circumstances. Their acceptance differs according to variations in culture, ethnic background and traditional ideas. An African who has suffered racial discrimination will certainly not be willing to portray Christ as a Caucasian. These are the very people who have oppressed him. Thus we can understand why the Jesus of African art is black. The incarnate Jesus belongs to all humankind, his image is not subject to the limits of time and place. He is the embodiment of eternal truth; he is past, present and future. He lives among us and enters into our lives. We willingly accept him into our everyday lives, to enter and change those lives. In the visage of the old man in Van Gogh's "The Peasant" we see a face full of the things of eternity. In this face, Van Gogh saw Christ. We find Christ in other people just as in the solemn harmony of nature we apprehend the wondrous creation of God and discover the attributes of God.

"The Church has spread to all parts of the world. Knowledge is universal, culture particular (Richard Niebuhr).

There are many images which can be used to depict the theme of Christian faith. Images of Christ are one way, of course, but there are also numerous ways to portray Christ. Christ is one, but our acceptance, knowledge of and response to him are myriad, because these are tied to our subjective ideals which are influenced and conditioned by the objective realities of our lives. A Chinese says that when she reads Exodus, scenes from Chinese landscape paintings pass through her mind. A Sri Lankan artist painted God as one of the gods of his people. This was a way for him to know God, one aspect of that knowing. He also used the opening of a lotus to symbolize the nativity, because according to the traditions of his people, the flowering of the lotus suggests the process by which a material object is exalted. For them, this is very appropriate to the birth of the Savior. This helps us to understand why some say they feel that God resembles the images of the Jade Emperor. In this image of a god from Chinese mythology, a Chinese finds some attributes which help to imagine God. In actuality, this person is unconsciously accepting God through a traditional cultural consciousness. Of course, the actual image of God is far beyond the limited power of human imagination. Yet, when we share with others that part which we have experienced, we are making our contribution to the culture of universal Christianity. Because Christian culture is endlessly enriched through mutual sharing, the image of God is reflected from many and

diverse angles. Our angle is our contribution to this image. It is by allowing for the experience of others that we enrich our own knowledge of God.

Artists in every age have their own contribution to make to our understanding of Christ. The Jesus shown to us in the Bible is like an image seen through a glass darkly. We see the suggestion of an image, not the distinct features. The gospels do not tell us either. Even though we may be given hints as to what Jesus looked like, no eye-witness proof can be put forth. But artists in their paintings, seeing with the eyes of the spirit, have seen the Christ within the world. Every era can understand the human situation when seen through the eternal historical facts of Christ's life, death and resurrection, giving rise to a link between Christ and human life and responding to the revelation of God. An artist is a person living in society. In giving expression to the events of that society, she must work through her own life, reflecting her knowledge and understanding of God in a work of art. A religious painting which has both a message for the age and real significance is of timeless value.

Universal Christian culture is constantly being enriched as peoples and nations accept the gospel and blend their faith with their own cultures. Contemporary Christian art, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America, is invigorated through its close ties with theology, society and people's liberation movements. The Incarnation and indigenization have appeared in Christian fine arts. We can see Jesus in Asian, African and Latin American appearance, race and dress, living among those peoples, sharing their everyday lives. The marks of Jesus are the crown of thorns upon his head, the holes from the nails in his hands, his sufferings on the cross or his calm other-worldly appearance. Nations, peoples, cultural traditions and social backgrounds differ in their understanding and response to God and Christ, because their sentiments and aesthetic standards are based on the factors mentioned above. The times, artistic styles and methods and the artists' own experiences reflected in the rich images of Christ they have produced provide their audience with ample grounds for choice. Individuals differ in sensibility and experience and what they seek in art also differs.

Religious art is closely linked to its contemporary theology. The Chinese church has given renewed emphasis to its own theological enterprise following the resurgence of the church and Chinese Christian art will follow in its turn. We have a unique ethnic culture and tradition, a unique social background. When I ponder how to make our traditional ethnic culture, society and people compatible with the gospel, or how to make our faith understandable to our society and people, then art has a definite role to play. When our artists use the traditional Chinese ink and wash and coloring techniques in their religious paintings, or when they paint a Christ involved in our lives, a Christ who ponders with us and takes up the burden of his destiny as our contemporary, this is a kind of praxis, an attempt to give artistic expression to the vitality of our faith. The role of art in evangelism is often not inferior to that of the pulpit. If we have our own unique Christian art, then Chinese Christian art will fulfill its own evangelical mission. I believe we will find our own path as we blend with our traditional culture, experiment with our own methods, and discover our own identity, responsibly making our contribution to the church universal.

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*translated by Janice Wickeri*

## 7. Living as Christians Today: Biblical Insights – Chen Zemin

Behold, now is the acceptable time;  
Behold, now is the day of salvation.

(2 Corinthians 6:2-10)

The history of Protestant Christianity in China begins with the arrival of Robert Morrison at Guangzhou in 1807. The first part of the story covers about one hundred and fifty years. Many volumes have been written on this period with various descriptions, conclusions and assessments from different angles. Some are helpful, some are not quite so. Now we have turned to a new chapter. As regards the relationship with Christians of other countries in the future, we are looking forward to a new era of brother and sisterhood and being fellow-workers in Christ, of genuine mutual understanding, concern and respect. We have come to share with you some of our experiences and reflections of how Christians are living and witnessing for Christ in China today, in the post-Cultural Revolution period of rebuilding and rehabilitating the Christian Church. Let me first give you a brief sketch in figures as a background of my presentation.

As you all know, the Christian Church in China underwent a total "blackout" of about fifteen years. Then, beginning from 1979 there came a "recall-to-life" and recuperation. The changes have been stupendous. According to our latest survey and estimates (1987) there are now more than 4,700 churches and 16,600 "meeting points."

This means we have been re-opening or building anew at a rate of more than one church a day. The total number of Protestant Christians, including church members and inquirers, is over four million. (This may be a conservative estimate. But I would rather be a bit conservative on this than exaggerate, as some people like to take pleasure in making sensational news with scanty factual support.) As compared with 700,000, the pre-liberation total, the result of one hundred and fifty years of missionary efforts, this means an increase of about five times in a period of three decades. This is really miraculous, taking into consideration the rugged roads of hardship and trials we have trodden. We praise and thank God for His guidance, protection and blessings. (There are many factors contributing to this rapid growth, which I shall touch upon a little later, and there are also many problems and difficulties calling for immediate attention and further endeavoring.)

But the Lord has led us to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and makes us lie down in green pastures, leading us beside still waters and restoring our souls (Psalm 23, See also Ezek. 34:11-16). "Thus says the Lord: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." And to, "the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host" (Ezek. 37:9-10). Now we are facing the task of rebuilding the Lord's house. "Take courage, all you people of the Lord, says the Lord; work, for I am with you." "My spirit abides among you, fear not ... The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts" (Hag. 2:4,5).



It is through these experiences that the message and force of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Great Commission and promises given to the apostles in the first century, and the stories of the Pentecost and afterwards, recorded in the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, have become all the more real and vivid to us during these years. And we have been talking about, and meditating on a Theology of the Resurrection in our church a great deal. The little (?) book by the Rev. Professor Rowan Williams, whom I had the privilege to meet in person in Oxford, becomes more revealing and thought-provoking to us, in developing a theology of Resurrection in the context of present-day Chinese church and society.

But the growth of the church is faster than we can keep up with. There is a grave shortage of pastors, preachers and church workers. At present there are only about six thousand pastors and preachers in the whole country, most of them in old age, and others rather young and without adequate training and experience. There is a wide age gap among the practicing ministers. Most of the rural churches and assembly points have only lay workers who have little or no training at all. The quality of spiritual nurture and pastoral care is very low, and in some places this breeds disorders and deviations. "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Mt. 9:36-37). The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was reopened in 1981. Altogether 150 students have graduated over the past three years. And since 1984, eleven theological schools and colleges or training centers at regional or provincial levels have been set up. A Bible school of junior standard was opened in Shaanxi Province last year. Heilongjiang is preparing to set up another. Last year a one-year training course was started in the Nanjing Seminary for the province of Henan, where there are over 830,000 Christians with less than 100 pastors and preachers. It is hoped that from the 50 trainees many may be ordained to take up ministerial responsibilities in that province. Over 700 regular students are being trained in these colleges. Many church councils at provincial or municipal levels are also running short-term courses of one to four months to train lay workers. A correspondence course is published bi-monthly and has over 33,000 subscribers. These and other measures are what we have been taking to meet this number-one need in building the church in China.

Shortage of Bibles was also a problem, and caused concern to many Christians abroad. The shortage has been due to, not just the devastating "Cultural Revolution," but also the growing needs of new converts and inquirers and an increasing interest in (and demand for) the Bible among non-Christian students and intellectuals. In the past five years three million copies of the Bible have been printed and distributed. The Amity Printing Press in Nanjing, thanks to the assistance of the United Bible Societies, gives priority to printing the Bible and other religious literature. We have compiled and published a new hymnal for national distribution. Ms. Cao Shengjie, Associate General Secretary of the China Christian Council and Executive Secretary of the Committee on Church Music, who is here with us today, is the chief editor of this hymnal. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit many other things are being done in meeting the many needs of the growing and thriving church.

Another feature of the Protestant Church in China I want to stress is that in response to the intercessory prayer of our Lord (Jn. 17), we are striving to realize the unity of the church, following St. Paul's admonition: "with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Eph. 4:2-6).

We have outgrown former denominational structural patterns which often brought about splitting, competition, waste of personnel and financial resources and disharmony. Adhering to the principle of mutual respect regarding matters of faith (theology), spirituality (ways of devotion and forms of service and liturgy) and church polity, we are reorganizing our congregations into local churches under "Christian Councils" at municipal, provincial and national levels. Most of the meeting points are associated with churches, and the ministers and preachers stationed at the churches go around to serve and help the assembly points. We seek to preserve the valuable historical heritage and contributions of the various denominations but try to guard against the evils of denominationalism and sectarianism. The China Christian Council is not like National Councils of Churches in other countries, nor yet is it a united Church of Christ in China, but is something somewhere between the two. Your experiences and efforts in seeking a new pattern of "ecumenical instrument" that will embrace not just Protestant denominations, Anglicans, but also Catholics are something beyond our grasp and hopes yet. But we can learn from you in this aspect. We are waiting for the Holy Spirit to lead us a step forward toward our aim, which is to achieve real unity but with variety, not uniformity.

You have heard of the consecration of two bishops in Shanghai on June 26. They will be bishops without dioceses. The title of bishop will mean a recognition of their spiritual excellence and being model pastors and teachers of the Word of God, and will not add any additional administrative responsibilities to what they have now. Both of them are already serving the Church in Shanghai in distinguished positions. Bishop Shen Yifan (of Episcopalian background) is the resident Vice-president of the China Christian Council, Chairperson of the Commission on Theological Education, as well as senior minister of the Community Church in Shanghai. Bishop Sun Yanli (of Methodist background) is the President of the Shanghai Christian Council and also Principal of the East China Theological Seminary in Shanghai. He is also senior minister of the Mu'en Church. Some have commented that the consecration of bishops may signify that the Protestant Church in China is intending to carry on the Apostolic Succession in the history of the Christian Church, and may prove to be a positive step in the Ecumenical movement. It is also significant to point out that in addition to the three bishops of Episcopalian background, there were three elderly pastors of high esteem participating in the laying-on-of-hands in the Consecration. These three are of Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist background respectively.

You all know that all these experiments and achievements have been made under the guiding principle of three-self: self-government, self-support and self-propagation. The main purpose of this movement is to change the old image of a foreign religion into one that is authentically Chinese, to sow the seed of the Christian Gospel in the soil of Chinese culture and let it grow and bear fruits in a Chinese climate for the Chinese people. As primitive

Christianity with its Jewish origin and background grew and developed into Hellenistic, Latin, Byzantine, Coptic, and later into the multifarious ethnic and national forms and patterns of churches, there is a real necessity and rationale for the existence of a Chinese Church. It is not at all anti-foreign, nor will it alter or dilute the essence or weaken the power and uniqueness of the Christian Gospel. Indeed, a message, in order to be meaningful and to be responded to, must be interpreted into national tongues. The Word must be made flesh and dwell among the people, so that the people can see that it is full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14). This is what we understand by incarnation, to bring Christ into humanity and to live in blood-and-flesh reality among the Chinese people in order to win the people. The three-self principle is indeed not something of our own invention, not something new under the sun. I think Christians in Britain are among those who understand most readily and easily the Biblical basis and theological rationale and historical necessity of this principle. Six years ago when we had the honor and privilege of welcoming the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, at the Nanjing Seminary we heard the Right Reverend comment that the reformation in Britain in the sixteenth century and the establishment and development of the Church of England (and may I add, the Church of Scotland) could be taken as an example of "three-self." This is a most encouraging and complimentary statement concerning the Three-Self Movement, and we shall never forget it.

I think this is one very important factor that accounts for the rapid growth of the Chinese church in the last decades.

For the Chinese Christians this also means identification and reconciliation. In the first place, this is a process of seeking realization of the authentic self-hood of a Chinese church, not a shadow or copy of outstations of any foreign church body or missionary organization. It means independence. Only when we have become independent are we able to enter into interdependent relations in the Church Universal. It also means identification with the Chinese people, sharing with them the struggles, sufferings and aspirations, in weal and woe, indeed sharing with them the same fate, and struggling with them in building a new, socialist China. This is all the more necessary and significant because in the pre-revolution days we were alienated from the people by identifying with a "foreign faith," in various ways and degrees. To counteract and recompense for this wrong identification we have read in the gospel of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians Chapter 5 a wealth of meaning: to be reconciled to God in Christ, to be reconciled to the world (in this case to our fellow-countrypeople) in Christ, and to be reconciled to our alienated self-hood in Christ. These three dimensions of being a Christian today in China all hinge upon "in Christ" and are geared to a right relationship with our fellow-citizens. We have found Paul's experience most illuminating as he writes in 1 Corinthians 9:22 on "becoming all things to all people so that by all means I might save some." Translated into Chinese within the Chinese context it reads, "to the Chinese we became as Chinese." In what way? Again, Apostle Paul is the teacher. "Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all ... rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:9-21). "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things ... and do" (Phil. 4:8-9).

Through identification, reconciliation, and taking thought of and doing "whatever is noble in the sight of all," we are changing the concept and image of being a Christian in China. I could cite a long list of examples of Christians awarded with titles as model teachers, doctors, engineers, workers, peace-makers in neighborhoods ... etc., and numerous anonymous "good people doing good things." As I understand it, Mr. Zhang is going to elaborate this in his presentation. The first of the three goals of the Amity Foundation in Nanjing is to make the Christian presence more widely known and felt in our country through education, social welfare, services and philanthropic work. It is well-known to public security authorities that Christians are a rarity among delinquents and law-breakers. That Christians are living up to a higher moral standard than most others has become common talk. There is an awakening of interest in religions in general and Christianity in particular among young people and university students today. The contributions of Christian intellectuals among academic circles are being more and more recognized. There is a noticeable increase of the proportion of young and middle-aged people among those who come to church. The general attitude of Chinese people towards Christianity is gradually changing in a positive direction with more understanding, sympathy and appreciation. This in turn also accounts for the rapid growth in the last decade. We have not only been preaching and hearing the Gospel in words, but also trying to live out the gospel of reconciliation and service in love. The new commandment given by Jesus Christ in John 13:34-35 and 15:12-17, and the teaching in James 1:22-25 on being doers, not only hearers, are leading us to develop a diachronic theology and a synthesis of faith and works (James 2:14-26), and to see the importance of orthopraxis as a necessary accompaniment of orthodoxy.

But still we are a young, very small and weak church. There are many problems and difficulties and weaknesses and we need God's guidance and power to help prepare us for the task of building the house of the Lord. We have come to share with you our experiences and to learn from you, with the hope that the ties that bind us together as children of God in the love of Christ be strengthened.

In conclusion I would like to read a passage from the Second Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth, which sums up and depicts in a very vivid and realistic way what we Christians in China have been going through in the last thirty to forty years.

"For he says,  
At the acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and helped you on the day of salvation.  
Behold, now is the acceptable time;  
Behold, now is the day of salvation.

We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way:

Through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger;

By purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God;

With the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left;

In honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute.

We are treated as impostors, and yet are true;

As unknown, and yet well known;

As dying, and behold we live;

As punished, and yet not killed;

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; As poor, yet making many rich;

As having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

(2 Corinthians 6:2-10)

May the grace of God be with us all, children of our one Heavenly Father, both in China and in Britain. Amen.

*This article has been slightly shortened.*

*Address given at a joint conference of the China Study Project of the British Council of Churches and the Friends of the Church in China (UK) 8-10 July, 1988.*

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## **8. Living as Christians Today: Sociological Insights – Zhang Guangzheng**

I bring with me the greetings of the four million-plus Christians in China.

To say that it is just a great pleasure and honor for me to be able to be in your midst is but a gross understatement. I fully realize that this is far more than a personal matter. It is a privilege, an opportunity, and a responsibility. It concerns both the Christian Churches in the UK and the Church in China, their relationship, fellowship, intercommunication, and perhaps even certain cooperation in the days to come. And we are all here to form a part of the bridge connecting the Christians in the two great nations.

In the church, I am a layman - this is a fact that you all know, but perhaps you do not know for certain that as far as sociology is concerned, I am more of a layman. It is beyond me to talk about "Living as Christians today with sociological insights" technically and systematically, but I shall endeavor to present, in perhaps a disorderly order, my experience and knowledge of the Christian Church and Christians in China and other relevant matters in connection with Chinese Christians in general.

### **1. The Chinese Church and Myself**

I was born a third generation Christian in a family of ten children. My father was a church minister and an evangelist working in the rural district in Fujian Province in China and established about thirty village churches or chapels in that area. I was born the very year my eldest brother, later Bishop Michael Chang, was ordained. I was brought up in a strict "Christian" way. Up to when I was ten years old, every day we had evening family worship at home. On Sundays, we had morning services and afternoon services in the church and an evening gathering at home until I left home to go to town for further education. I could hardly believe it when I discovered that in town on Sundays, Christians were only required to go to church in the morning - a most pleasant surprise, for, despite all those services at home, I was nevertheless at heart only a lukewarm Christian. I went to missionary schools and university, and graduated as B. Sc. In Engineering in the winter of 1941 from St. John's University right after the attack on Pearl Harbor. At home and in school, I had constant association with missionary workers. Even one of my sisters-in-law is a New Zealand Presbyterian missionary doctor. In certain respects, you can say had been westernized in culture, in outlook and philosophy of life. All through those years in my life till the beginning of the tragic Cultural Revolution in 1966, I had not cared a whit about church matters. I would rest satisfied as long as there was a church in which to go worshipping on Sundays. Unlike most Chinese people, I was brought up in a fully Christian atmosphere and was never aware and did not care to find out what the sentiments of non-Christian Chinese towards Christianity were. To me then, if anyone bore hostile sentiment against the Christian Church, my verdict would be: the fault is certainly theirs. Although I was taught that the contents of unequal treaties imposed upon Chinese people included the so-called "right to do missionary work in China," yet I would just shrug my shoulders and sublimely opine that

"Isn't it all for the best?" It was because of such people like me that many would say "One more Christian, one less Chinese" - which charge I certainly denied with indignation.

Furthermore, owing to the intimate relationship of our family with many missionary workers, and because many of them individually were such fine selfless people, I looked upon them as heart as my own people. I may add I still bear this sentiment. It is also quite true that Christians in China as a whole regarded the individual missionary workers with high esteem and good will because these workers were such fine people and they brought us the Gospel - for which fact we shall remain grateful always. But the resentment was quite prevalent for the way the church, instead of being governed by ourselves, was managed primarily the similar way the branch offices of foreign business firms in China were controlled by their parent organization - Head Offices in Home countries. Many progressive Chinese church leaders were yearning for an independent Chinese Christian Church. I did not share their rancor for our dependency nor their longing for independence. I saw nothing wrong with our church being governed by foreign fellow Christians for the reason that they probably had more experience. Besides, did they not give us financial help we needed so sorely? For that reason alone was it not quite fair to let them place themselves in a position of a stepfather of some kind? All seemed logical. A matter of give and take.

After liberation, when the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was initiated by certain progressive church leaders, if I did not look upon it with disdain, I at least did nurture a grudge against it. I dislike the word "movement" which implied something political in nature. I used to pride myself for not meddling with politics and so I kept a respectful distance from the movement although at that time my own bishop brother was taking an active part in it. When the various denominations were merged and joint services began, I was all the more disgusted.

However, a breakthrough in my thinking took place after the Cultural Revolution was over.

Before the advent of Christmas 1978, my wife and I received an invitation from the reinstated Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee to partake in a Christmas celebration together with 200-odd other Christians in Shanghai. As no church had been reopened yet, the celebration was held in the International Club. We got there with an expectant heart for we had not worshipped together or celebrated Christmas openly for thirteen years. We could then only do so at heart. Now, we could sing in praise of our Lord and listen to reading of scriptures again. The joyous Christmas hymns and songs we knew so well brought us joy so intense that it was almost akin to pain. All present wept with tears of joy and thankfulness. One could never realize how much religious worship means to one until they have been denied it. I could feel my heart bursting. Even now, when I reminisce that moment, I cannot help feeling overcome and my eyes moist with tears of sweet memory.

I was compelled by reality to concede that if it were the intention of the People's Republic to stamp out Christian activities in China, the most opportune moment and the most effective course would have been to continue banning all Christian religious activities right away following the previous thirteen years of suspension. No more Three-Self Committee would

be necessary. After all, to non-Christian Chinese, Christians only represented a very minor percentage of the total population in China - less than one half of one per cent. And to be able to govern and support the church and to propagate by ourselves means religious freedom.

I fully appreciate and support the policy that China could no longer tolerate anything colonial in nature, the church being no exception. The Church in China can and must be indigenous, be able to support and govern herself, and organize her own activities, spreading the gospel by herself in particular. Three-self has a twofold meaning as far as religious affairs are concerned. When I looked back to many of the incidents I myself had witnessed, I had to admit: that the old Chinese church during the Nationalists' regime was in general not mistress of herself.

Basically, what does the Three-Self Patriotic Movement mean? It simply means that a Christian in China must be a Chinese Christian and a Christian Chinese at the same time. Isn't it a fact that for ages the Church in England has been governed and supported by herself, and that all church activities have been organized by herself, despite the fact she doesn't proclaim it? Aren't all Christians in England expected to be patriotic to their own country, to fight and even to die to keep her free? It would seem inconceivable that certain factions of the Christian Church in other countries should strive to refuse Chinese Christians the very right and privilege they are enjoying themselves and the very responsibility they are undertaking.

One breakthrough led to another. I began to see how for all denominations to come together was the will of God. In the Lord's Prayer, the Lord Jesus taught us: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." - I could not imagine that heaven be divided into many compartments, spacing this one for Catholics, that for Anglicans, the other one for Methodists, etc. Our belief is in one God and one Heaven, and therefore one Church on earth. We now have our combined church. I would think a united church should be the next goal but it may be too early to put it into practice yet. A famous saying in China is: "Seeking the major common ground while reserving the minor differences." To us, the topmost common ground is that we all believe in one God and one salvation, that we believe in the Fatherhood of God and brother-and sisterhood of human beings, that we believe in Jesus Christ our Savior, and that we are all Chinese and children of God. We are not blind to our many minor differences but they are intrinsically of no or little importance when compared with the major common ground. They concern traditions, practices, and other matters of that sort. Regarding these matters, we adopt the attitude "Unity without conformity." We respect one another in these matters. To think of it, how could I ever forgive myself that I formerly resented the combined church so much?

## **II. The Church, Christians and the People Today**

Chinese people of different ages and different walks of life have all gone through all sorts of experiences, Christians especially.

Without knowing China and the Chinese people, differing very much as they may, it



cannot be said that a person understands too well the growth and organization of the Chinese church. But please do not be surprised if any one of you finds our information differs, because China is quite a big melting pot and consists of all kind of people. There are over fifty nationalities in our country with Han the overwhelming majority - about 94% of the total population, while the Hans in different areas are also dissimilar in their customs, dialects, and even culture.

In China, after these decades of changes and upheavals, people no longer consider Christianity a foreign religion. That means the Christian Church has reconciled herself with the people at large and Christianity is no more associated with the unequal treaties and national humiliation. In society, the Christian Church occupies the same place as Buddhism, Islam, and Taoism. This is the same in cities and in rural districts. How could this be possible?

It was by proclaiming the Chinese Christian Church indigenous and independent. Chinese Christians are now entrusted with the task and responsibility of supporting the church and assisting in governing the church and spreading the gospel. The Chinese Christians are further instructed that they must be both Chinese and Christian at the same time. They assumed real responsibility for the church, for themselves and for the people.

To be a Christian nowadays does not ensure one of the rice bowl, but involves responsibility and duties. We feel proud to be Christians and make our contributions in our work not only because we love our motherland, but also because we are doing the will of God in serving the people. There are countless cases showing how Christians won their places in the society and in the hearts of the people. I shall just mention a few:

In the coastal area in Fujian Province where the Rev. Canon Paton and many other friends in the UK served the Lord years ago, there is a village with a small creek running through it which is used for drainage of rain and domestic waste water. No one paid much attention to it but with industrialization and the growth of the village, the creek got full of all sorts of rubbish and waste and became smelly, a threat to the environment. It would have been quite a job to clean up the creek and to keep it clean thereafter. It became the village's sorrow.

There were a number of Christians in that village. All these years they took it as their duty to help the aged, the sick and the needy, to bring comfort to the bereaved and those who met with misfortune, and to do other good work to the community and the villagers, Christians and non-Christians alike, in accordance with Christ's teaching. This brought many, including young folk, to Christ. They too were eager to participate in such good work. The Christian community grew year after year.

To rid the village of this health hazard, 100-odd Christian youngsters got together and spent three days and three nights to completely clean up the creek and line the bottom of it with bricks purchased with their own money. The effect was stupendous. The whole village was shocked. Many villagers told the Christian elders that Christians are indeed the cream of the land. Even the Party Secretary of the village confided to the leaders that formerly he was worried to see so many young people become Christians, but after having witnessed what

they had done in the past and how they voluntarily and quickly cleaned up the creek, he would feel at ease to hear of any other conversion in the future, for Christians had proved themselves worthy.

Ms. Tu Ying is the manager of a small state-owned haberdashers shop located in the residential district adjacent to our Community Church in Shanghai. A few years ago, with half-a-dozen shop assistants, she was only able to sell 200-odd kinds of small commodities such as needles, pins, buttons, thread, etc. The volume of business and hence the profit were comparatively small. Such shops in China were more for serving the people than for gaining profit.

In the early 80s, a system of paying to employees subsidies commensurate with their contribution was put into practice. For the shops, contribution was rated as profit gained. Most other haberdasher shops in Shanghai turned to more profit-yielding trade. Ms. Tu's shop assistants also began clamoring to do the same.

Ms. Tu Ying is a middle-aged Christian. She could see the residents in her area needed such a shop to supply them with these small commodities on the one hand, and haberdashery meant harder work and less profit and subsidies when compared with other trade. On the other hand, unless she could think of some way, they would have to change trade or get less income. However, she decided that people's needs came first. They had no alternative but to expand the scope of business and to work harder. As a Christian, she could not shrink from her duties. She prayed about this matter and then began to exchange views with her assistants, not only from the position of a manager, but also from the angle of a Christian. To gain more profit is the duty of the group, and to make a greater contribution and hence get more subsidies is doubtless beyond reproach, but to serve the people is more important. Now theirs was the only shop in that densely populated area. She cited cases she came across when she herself served at the counter. How many old people came a long way and were so

delighted to find what they needed. This showed that haberdashery was indispensable in a

residential district like theirs. Many of her assistants were moved. They unanimously decided to carry on, not at the original scale, but with an increase of 200 to 800 assorted goods. In doing so, they met with many unforeseen difficulties in getting supplies and had to do more back-aching work, but everyone felt at peace with themselves. What was more, the volume of business increased considerably and their income was not any less than other shops.

Some grateful customers wrote to the newspaper about their exemplary deeds and several prominent newspapers in Shanghai gave a full report of what they had done. They were awarded and highly honored as a "Progressive Unit" and she a progressive worker.

Ms. Wang Zhu\*<sup>(?)</sup> is now a teacher in Dalian Technical School. She is a fifth generation Christian in the North Eastern part of China. Her school teacher mother was assigned a post in a backward rural district in 1969. She was in high school at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and so had to give up her studies and work. When she was twenty-two years of age, she received word that her mother was seriously ill. She immediately moved from the city to attend to her. She agreed to marry a young man in the neighborhood when he and his family promised to help in taking care of her mother and to exercise their influence in obtaining a post as a school teacher in the village for her. But, soon after the marriage, they went back on their word. They refused to look after her mother and instead of making her a teacher, they compelled her to work in the fields, as she was a good farm hand. Under these deplorable circumstances, she still upheld her faith. She prayed continuously for her mother and herself. Her faith gave her hope. She was certain that God would come to her help one day, and that she could have another opportunity to continue her studies. With this conviction, she spent all her scanty spare time in reviewing the lessons she took at school. The laborious farm work and her crammed schedule for studies took their toll and her health quickly deteriorated.

When she was on the verge of physical collapse, the dear Lord came to her rescue. With the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, the universities were reinstated. All eligible young people were given a chance to take the matriculation exam in 1977. She decided to try but was strongly opposed by her husband and his family who wanted her to remain as a farm hand. But the law was on her side, and, as she had never left off her studies, she passed the matriculation exam successfully and became a university student. Even then, her husband and his family were still unwilling to give up but kept on coming to her university to harass her - which fact greatly provoked her schoolmates. Indignantly, they came to her defense. Some of them even suggested divorce, but she never gave it any consideration for she remembered Christ's teaching that we shall forgive seventy-times-seven.

After her graduation, she became a teacher and was given a flat in the city. Instead of divorcing her husband, she forgave him and welcomed him to the city. In October 1982, he was seriously injured in an accident. He could not even take care of himself. She tended him with all her heart and even ran into debt to provide for his medical care until he recovered.

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\* *Mr. Zhang originally gave the woman's name as Wang Ning; the latter character one which is easily confused with Zhu. For a detailed account of Wang Zhu's story see her article, "To Be a Person with a Beautiful Spirit, " in The Chinese Theological Review: 1987, p.152.*

How stunned were the neighbors in the village to hear of all this. They predicted a divorce was inevitable after her graduation because of his previous misconduct and because of his comparative illiteracy. He himself was also deeply moved and confessed to her "I can never repay you for what you have done for me." She also forgave her in-laws and took the initiative of making up with them. All who learned of this were amazed but their amazement turned to understanding when they were informed that she was a Christian. Her story was widely told in that area, bringing glory to our Lord's name.

Ms. Wang Juzhen, born in the 20s, is a third generation Christian graduated from university shortly after Liberation, majoring in industrial management. After graduation, she joined the Shanghai Electric Bulb Factory as a managerial member of staff, in a newly created department for development of our own process in manufacturing tungsten filaments, which up to that time China had to import. She threw herself into her work with vim and vivacity as a real Chinese Christian was supposed to do. Her effort and work were so much appreciated by her chief and colleagues that when the factory was expanded and renovated in 1956, she was chosen to take the post of a process engineer. She had to learn many new things. She attended night school and read up all the technical literature she could lay her hands on in her spare time. She attended seminars and took certain college courses by special arrangement in order to fully equip herself. She hardly had any time for herself. By the 60s, she was totally worthy of the title of a process engineer.

She noted with great concern that a great many manufacturing processes in her own factory and other plants in Shanghai involved thoriated tungsten electrodes. But thoriated tungsten electrodes are radioactive - a hazard detrimental to the workers' health - causing leukopenia and thrombocytopenia. However, such electrodes are indispensable in production. Could a substitute be made from cerium? From all information available, no such substitute had yet been found. She faced the challenge whether or not it was up to her to find the answer. It was then in the middle of the Cultural Revolution. If she impulsively asked to have a stab at it and failed, it was equivalent to putting her own head in a noose. But the responsibility of a person of science and the duty of a Christian left her no other choice. She remembered a former Christian teacher's parting word to her: "May it be a better world because of you." She had a strong conviction that the Lord would lead her, give her wisdom, courage and strength to overcome all obstacles. Boldly she submitted her proposal to the factory authorities who quickly approved it and made her in charge of this project. For months and years she trod on relentlessly. She met with many similar failures as reported by many predecessors in other lands who finally were compelled to give up. But her prayers and her concerns for victims of radioactivity held her up. Pangs of bitter failures and the stings of bystanders' derision daunted her not. After countless numbers of trials, she finally succeeded in persuading the two elements to unite and obtained the first strand of sample. From then on, she was met with one success after another. She was not only able to exceed thoriated tungsten in the "rate of finished product," but to reduce the manufacturing cost. The radioactivity of the new product is less than one-thousandth of that of thorium tungsten and after tests was ascertained to be equivalent to that of ordinary soil in Shanghai. It is not a substitute, it is not merely an improvement, but it is a new invention the world had yet to know. In 1980, it was passed by the ISO (International Standardization Organization) and included in the International Standards. In 1986, it was exhibited in the 21st Exhibition of the

Technical Market in the USA. Many foreign firms applied for an agency. To date, scores of commercial and/or industrial companies in ten-odd countries in Asia, Europe, and America have placed orders. A patent has been obtained in the USA. For this and her many other subsequent technical breakthroughs, she won the only 1987 National Class I Award for Science and Technology.

She is now one of the Standing Committee of the China Christian Council and Chairperson of the YWCA in Shanghai as well as a delegate of the National People's Political Consultative Conference and a national progressive or advanced worker. She still single. In private life she is a sympathetic, unassuming and quiet lady. But what spurred her to such outstanding achievements? To quote her own words:

My every accomplishment should be attributed to the Grace of our Heavenly Father and to those who helped and guided me in life and work, for I came to this world empty-handed. Since we were all created by the Lord to be the master of all things on earth, and through His wonderful love we were saved, we shall live our lives in accordance with the Lord's prayer Jesus Christ taught us Himself that "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Let the Lord God's most gracious and merciful will be done on earth to make the world ever more beautiful ... Even though we are each by ourselves tiny, pitiable and helpless beings, and we may also become weak and stumble, as long as we turn our face to our God, we shall receive all the power and strength we need from above to enable us to overcome all difficulties so that His glory may be manifested by His people.

### **III. The society we live in today, and living as a Christian in China**

The topic "The society we live in today" reminds me of the beginning paragraph of Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities. Anywhere in the world, in any historical period, individuals in different positions and different strata of society hold their own conception, view, or even judgment of themselves, of other people, of any event, and of the state of affairs in general. China has gone through many drastic changes in the last half century; therefore, society in China and the thinking of the Chinese people have every reason to be more complicated than others. After all, a person is a bit what he/she knows and a society is a bit what its citizens think and practice. I shall not bore you with all aspects of things that influence people's thinking and practice besides the following:

From a decade ago, the People's Republic and the people have begun to judge things more objectively than they had ever done before. From the former axiom "Correct ideas come from practice" evolved the new axiom: "Practice is the only criterion of truth." This is a challenge a Chinese Christian must face.

In the scope of philosophy, morality, ethics, and standards of conduct, we inherited Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism from our ancestors 2,000 years ago; we accepted Buddhism from India, Islam from the Near East, and Christianity from the West. Marxism-Leninism was introduced to China in the early 20th century. While Marxism-Leninism is ideologically atheistic, one has also to take into consideration the number of people taking part in different religious activities in the whole country approaches 100 million. Most of them

are also taking active parts in serving the people. This is another challenge for all, but which has been shelved. Co-existence is the solution, but the issue has not been settled.

With the adoption of the open policy, certain undesirable thinking and practice infiltrated into China despite customs regulations, and gave cause for discomfort if not alarm. The imported type of greed, depravity, corruption, pleasure-seeking, neglect of one's responsibility as a worker, a citizen, and a family member, etc., are collectively called spiritual pollution. I wonder if those present have ever noticed the news report covering the debate held in Singapore in April between college students from Taiwan University in Taipei and Fudan University in Shanghai on how to inhibit this spiritual pollution? A most interesting report. Students of Taiwan University advocated Confucianism which they claimed would hold this hazard in check, but those from Fudan University ruled that spiritual pollution is a combined syndrome and requires a combination of treatment. We could not help asking: "What about Christianity?" Certain people have doubts based on the fact that Christianity has proved rather ineffective against it in the West. But I personally and many others believe that Christianity is the final answer. And this is another challenge for us.

At the risk of being taken as "a novice displaying his skill before the masters," I venture to quote the following passage from Francis Bacon:

It is not what men eat but what they digest that makes them strong; not what we gain but what we save that makes us rich; not what we read but what we remembered that makes us learned; not what we preach but what we practice that makes us Christians.

From the several narratives of certain Chinese Christians mentioned above, it could be seen that it is of paramount importance to us to practice Christianity, for practicing is part of preaching itself and more effective than preaching alone. Nowadays in China, the chief means of bringing more sheep to the fold is by practicing. The ordinary Chinese people do not have any Christian background and most of them know little or nothing about Christianity. It is usually not easy to interest them without first laying down the necessary ground work. Many have first been struck by certain unusually good and persistent conduct of some Christian friends, relatives, total strangers, or even those considered to be enemies, before beginning to turn their face to God.

To be kind to a fellow Christian is worthy of approbation, but to be kind to all humankind is the will of God. We are instructed to practice brother-and sisterhood of human beings to all concerned, Christians or non-Christians. The above-said Christian community in the village in Fujian multiplied and won the hearts of all because they obeyed Christ's teaching. I will just mention in passing without any thought of malice that when I was a boy, Christians were often taught to call Chinese non-Christians gentiles. Gentiles could not be one's brothers and sisters.

In the place where I work - a design institute of approximately 1,000 employees - I know

of at least three cases of late cancer finding peace in God in their twilight hours. Case No.



1 is a woman in her late fifties. When I went to see her, she showed me a Holy Bible and *Springs in the Desert* by her pillow. She told me a Christian nurse in the neighborhood came to visit her regularly and talked to her about Jesus Christ and salvation, and lent her these books. She found great comfort in them. She died soon after but I believe her soul was saved in the nick of time. Case No. 2 was a woman too. She had cancer for years. Towards the end she turned to God through a Christian friend when she felt so hopeless and helpless. Before she breathed her last, she asked for a pastor. Our woman pastor visited her and prayed for her. I am also convinced she was saved before it was too late. Case No. 3 was a man. I only knew him slightly and had no direct contact with him. After he was found to have cancer, his health deteriorated quickly. I inquired after him of his wife one month before his death. She told me that through his friends, he found peace in Christ and salvation.

Christians are encouraged to make their contributions to the best of their abilities. This is taught and this is practiced. That is why an unusually high percentage of Christians are nominated "Progressive or Advanced Workers." On the other hand, many Christians quietly take an active part in Neighborhood Committees, in common posts behind a counter or as a conductor in a bus, etc., in the way a Christian is expected to take part. Their invaluable contributions may go unnoticed by many but not unnoticed by the Lord.

In those localities where the YMCA and YWCA have been reinstated, they work hard together to avail children of opportunities in learning music, handwork, singing, calligraphy, drawing and dancing; to give lessons to young people in electronics, science, English language, music and to provide them with certain recreation facilities; to teach the aged light gymnastics such as disco (a dance now well developed and adopted as physical exercise for the aged), to organize them in various recreational activities such as chess, bridge, and to give them lectures on health care. In Shanghai they organize "Shanghai Forum" regularly with speakers from different walks of life to give lectures on science, the world situation, finance, development, etc., from Shanghai and overseas. Christians and non-Christians are invited.

In case of family discord, in the Christian community or otherwise, most Christians will take it as their duty to strive for reconciliation. Normally, we advise against divorce because in most cases, discords are reparable. Furthermore, divorce hurts the next generation more than the divorcees could possibly gain.

Becoming a Christian does change a person. A schoolmate of mine, an assistant chief engineer in another design institute, for a long time held grievances against his fate after the Cultural Revolution. His relatives abroad urged him to come to God but he was uncertain of himself. He came to me for help about two years ago. As we live quite a distance apart, I in turn asked a church minister living close to him to come to his aid. Soon I was told that both he and his wife were baptized. When I met him again a few months later, he was all smiles. His faith changed his outlook on life. His heart is no more full of grievances but full of happiness and thankfulness.

Wang Juzhen mentioned above is a most outstanding case - one in a billion. But there are many Christians in the field of science and technology, in fine arts and music, in the medical

profession, in literary and art circles, who also make outstanding contributions and are honored. In our design institute, a Christian senior engineer successfully designed and put into operation the first drying tower for detergent in the 60s and was highly honored. He suffered much during the Cultural Revolution, but he not only forgave those who brought false charges against him, but continued giving them whatever help they needed.

There may exist a limited number among us who harbored such presumptuous ambitions to alter the society in the depth of their souls, but no one has heard talk on such a subject. Most of us are striving, instead, to be able to do what the Lord wants us to do:

"What doth the Lord require of thee: but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." All of us are willing and desirous to do our little bit to make the society a little better. That is all we could say.

There are also certain problems that we have to solve by ourselves. Take the weekly day of rest for instance. Owing to the fact that increase of electric power supply lags behind the growth of other branches of industry, shortage of power supply deters industrial development. A system has been implemented ever since the late 50s that each day of the week is taken as the weekly day of rest for one-seventh of the factories in any location. In the same way, approximately one-seventh of those Christians working in industrial plants cannot come to church to worship on Sunday. For this and certain other reasons, certain churches in Shanghai hold evening services on Sundays and morning service on Saturdays.

As for certain special church activities on week days, for instance: when the Church Council is holding some important discussion, or it is necessary to join certain meetings locally or in other places, or even to come to this conference, the person concerned generally gets free leave of absence in the place where he works. The authorities are mostly interested and often give words of encouragement.

I have to admit that as I am still working, I do not have sufficient contact with churches in other cities or provinces as I would like to. Ever since the reinstatement of religious freedom after the Cultural Revolution, I personally have not run across any case where one has to choose between one's duty as a citizen and the commandment of God. That does not mean we have not met with difficulties at times. A compromise has to be resorted to. Reclamation of church property is one example. Whatever the case, we have now over 4,700 churches in operation and that ought to serve as an answer on this subject.

We are but a young and small church, and we have a long way to go. We seek your support in your prayers.

*Address given at a joint conference of the China Study Project of the British Council of Churches and the Friends of the Church in China (UK) 8-10 July, 1988.*

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## **SPECIAL SECTION ON RELIGION AND SOCIETY**

## **9. Recent Developments in the Study of Religion – K.H. Ting and Wang Weifan**

Since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Communist Party Central Committee (December, 1978), social scientific thinking in China, including research on the study of religion, has become extremely dynamic. New thinking and new viewpoints have emerged, and the discussion has been unusually animated. In the new climate of reform and openness, there have been increasing breakthroughs in the study of religion. Religion as an ideology is far removed from the economic base; but if we speak of the social impact of religion, we find that religion is very close to real life and to socialist reconstruction in China. Tens of millions of religious believers from all walks of life live among us and in all walks of life participate in the socialist construction of the spiritual and material aspects of our culture. Theoretical breakthroughs in the study of religion in recent years are helpful for a realistic approach to understanding and dealing with religious issues during China's socialist period and are thus useful in summoning the will and the strength of the believing masses to the magnificent enterprise of constructing a strong socialist nation in China.

### **(1) Replace Dogmatism with a "Seek Truth from Facts" Approach in Research.**

Dogmatism has had long-standing influence in social scientific circles in China, going back to "leftist" Soviet impact on scholarly circles. In the study of religion, "leftist" dogmatism has been worse than in other areas. Even after the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, a minority of authoritative voices concerned with the study of religion continued to uphold Marx's dictum, aimed at the Germany of his own day: "religion as opiate." These people made this into a universal truth, eternal and unchanging, and simplified the study of religion as no more than "the critique of theology." Their so-called research was in fact the type which is totally isolated from reality, moving from concept to concept but never beyond the covers of a book, and which knows nothing of the actual religious situation. They basically ignored national cultural differences, differences of historical setting and the different roles religion may play in different eras or even at different times within the same era. Such people are not acquainted with even one religious believer, let alone count one as a friend, nor have they ever tried to enter into and understand a believer's thoughts and emotions. They have done no investigation or research into the role and contribution of religious believers in the economic, cultural or political life of society. They have a kind of inborn prejudice and abhorrence towards religion, and have allowed emotion to supplant Marxist methods.

As early as 1984, the well-known Chinese scholar Luo Zhufeng, in a paper entitled "Towards a Specifically Chinese Theory of the Study of Religion," observed:

Marx's discussion of religion was entirely "Germany-centered", and did not represent generalizations or all-inclusive statements. . . . Marxist theory on religion teaches us that comprehensive and correct understanding cannot be a matter of wish-fulfillment in which everyone gets what he wants. Even Lenin, in his discussion of religious issues, began with the actual Russian situation of his day. His approach was "Russia-centered." . . . Our approach today should be "China-centered," because China has its own national

conditions and character which differ from those of Germany or the Soviet Union. ... The study of Marxist theory on religion must begin with the actual situation of China, and must establish a theory which is specifically Chinese. We cannot mechanically copy others. If we do not proceed in this fashion, we **will** never be more than scholarly dwarfs.

*The Religious Question During China's Socialist Period* (Luo Zhufeng, ed., Shanghai: Academy of Social Sciences, 1986), is a product of precisely this type of "China-centered" approach. It begins from the actual Chinese situation, relating theory to practice, seeking truth from facts, testing out truth in practice and developing truth as a line of thought. For this work, the Institute for Religious Studies of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences sent some ten teams of comrades away from their books and into cities and villages in thirteen provinces and municipalities to undertake broad-based social scientific investigation. Altogether over one hundred samples of material were collected and dozens of reports on their findings written. The investigations were carried out without preconceptions, proceeding from actual situations and were broadly-based, unfolding new lines of inquiry. The findings were analyzed, after which they were subjected to incisive comparative investigations. The people at the Institute for Religious Studies were able to produce this epoch-making and highly influential book on the study of religion in China because of the correctness of their ideological and research methods, and because dogmatism had been utterly cast off.

**(2) Religion is a multiplex, many-layered social entity. Scholarship should not limit itself to the philosophical and doctrinal aspects of religion.**

Religion incorporates philosophical viewpoints and doctrinal thinking, but it is not only these. Religious believers believe in theism, they believe in various doctrines, and they conduct themselves according to the doctrines they follow. But a religious believer is certainly not a narrow philosopher, even less a "fideist" as some would have it.

In the philosophical realm it is necessary to draw clear lines between idealism and materialism, theism and atheism. But genuine historical materialists have never extended this philosophical dividing line to distinguish the politically backward from the politically progressive, nor the revolutionary from the counter-revolutionary. Historically, we find many examples of people who have maintained a philosophical idealism or even theism, who have yet been quite progressive politically. The liberation theologians of Latin America today and the Black South African religious leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu, are contemporary examples. This is because religion is not simply an ideology, but is also an extremely complex social phenomenon. In *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1849*, Marx stated:

If for me religious philosophy were the only genuine religious existence, then I could only be truly religious by being a religious philosopher, and if that were the case I would deny real religious belief and believers.

But real religious belief and actual believers can accommodate and accept many new ideas and phenomena.

Religious believers have been caricatured in China as "fideists" and "simple-minded," "with

eyes unwilling to see earthly beauties and ears unwilling to hear its sounds;" as people who feel that "anything not found in Scripture is not fit for thought," as freaks who see "all reasonable requests to improve the material life as the root of all spiritual evil." Such portrayals, based entirely on subjective imagination, are profoundly insulting and deeply repellent to religious believers. Such portrayals fit Lenin's taunt: "(they) attribute the most blatantly ignorant views to the opponent and then attack them. This is the habitual practice of people who are not very intelligent." In fact, the negative effect of religious doctrine on a person is extremely limited. The majority of those who promoted the Enlightenment and rationalism were the monks and theologians of the day. During the more than three hundred years from the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia* in 1516 to the peak of utopian socialism in the nineteenth century, the great majority of utopian socialists all bore some Christian coloration. If we look at scientists throughout history, we will see that many have been religious believers. Religious faith has not been a hindrance to them, and we cannot discount their scientific discoveries and achievements because of it. In the article on Xu Guangqi in *Cihai*\*<sup>(?)</sup> introducing his role as a Ming-dynasty scientist and his contributions to social productivity, there is no mention of the fact that Xu was a pious Catholic. Keeping such "closely guarded secrets" shows either misgivings that religion will defile science, or anxiety that science will elevate religion. Actually, history is replete with examples of science and religion joined in one person. Tolstoy was a staunch believer in God and Christ, a writer who even bordered on the fanatic in religious matters; yet Lenin affirmed him as "an artistic genius," saying he "mercilessly critiques capitalist oppression ... a clearheaded realist who has discarded all masks," and "has created masterpieces of world literature." Lenin did not discount Tolstoy's literary merits nor his contributions to the social struggle wholesale simply because he was staunchly religious, nor did he let the latter's artistic genius obscure the fact that he believed in God.

In his essay "On religious systems," Chen Yaoting attempts to use systematic philosophy to understand religion. In his view:

The systematic approach understands religion, or any religious system, as a social entity composed of religious believers, organization and thought, as one branch of the spiritual systems of human society. It both reflects the hardship brought upon humankind by the natural world and sustains religious believers' protests and laments against real hardship along with their hopes and quest for the ideal life . . . .. Of the three components of the religious system, it is only the believers who play a key role in the system's development under normal social conditions. . . . The reason religious believers are dynamic "people" with an intimate relationship to the natural world and to the political, economic and other elements of society lies in the fact that the religious system is an open one. . . . And what makes the believers the most dynamic part of the system is the fact that they reflect the most up-to-the-minute demands of social, material and spiritual production. To see religious believers as not sharing in this world, as "alienated" individuals who take no part in human life, does not accord with the facts; to depict them as "superhumans" who have no care and concern for mortal nations, politics or social

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\* *A standard Chinese encyclopedic dictionary.*

economy but only for "paradise," is also out of line with the objective realities of religious systems. There is not one historical record relating to religious "alienated" individuals and "superhumans" which is not a distorted reflection of the social problems of the day. (*Religion, No. 1* (1986)).

To refrain from concentrating on philosophical and doctrinal issues, to study religion as a multiplex, many-layered social entity, to employ systematic philosophy and not simply mechanistic materialism in the study of religious systems: these are the basics of a correct understanding of religion.

### **(3) Have an appropriate understanding and evaluation of the idea of religion as the opiate of the people.**

Some authors, familiar with a few Marxist phrases, but with no grasp of the spirit of Marxism, slide easily into equating religion with opiate in any consideration of religious issues. They feel that as long as that formula or label is kept in view, any issue impinging on religion can be readily explained. They take the assessment of religion as the opiate of the people to be original to Marx, as the quintessence of the Marxist view on religion, as a penetrating insight which lays bare the true nature of religion.

In fact, more than ten German philosophers, social thinkers and men of letters before Marx made the same or similar pronouncements on religion. Marx was simply repeating what others had said before him: he was not making an original observation. Furthermore, in those days, opium was used medicinally as a painkiller, it had not yet been put to use as an addictive drug. In considering whether "religion as opiate" can serve as a definition for religion, Luo Zhufeng has observed:

How can we say that Marx simply took "religion as opiate" as a definitive statement? Hadn't he linked it to "protest" and "lament" right before that? How can we quote out of context, seeing only "opiate" and nothing else?

There has been a negative side to the role of religion in history. It has functioned socially as a self-induced anesthetic of the people as well as having been manipulated to anesthetize them. But this has not been the only historical role religion has played, and is certainly not its primary one, under whatever circumstances. Religion has functioned to mobilize and unify the people to throw themselves into the revolutionary struggle. Engels affirmed this in his German Peasant Wars. Some writers on religion have invented the so-called "cloak theory," whereby religion is seen as no more than "a cloak covering the people's eyes and ears" in peasant revolutionary wars, ever dooming them to defeat. This is a distortion and simplification of history; in fact, Engels referred to religion not only as "a cloak," but also used terms such as the peasant revolution's "standard" and "armor." Let us ask, if religion is solely an opiate, how could it also be the standard and armor of peasant uprisings? As for the defeat of peasant uprisings, that requires scientific analysis; to turn "throwing on the cloak of religion" into the major factor in this defeat is, to say the least, over hasty.

The Archbishop of Recife, Brazil, Dom Helder Camara, has said to Christians there:

"When I give bread to the poor, people call me a saint, but when I ask why the poor have no bread to eat, then I am called a communist." A sermon such as this plays a tremendous role in exposing the dark side of society and in arousing the conscience of the people. Isn't this role of conscientization the exact opposite of the befuddling opiate role mentioned above? In Camara's religion, to make "reasonable calls for the improvement of material life," is far from "occasions of sin for the spirit." Can a religion which raises such questions as: "Why don't the poor have bread to eat? What sort of party is the Communist Party? Why should the people oppose the Communist Party?" be equated with religion which calls upon the people to submit meekly to oppression and exploitation?

Document 19 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China<sup>??</sup>, makes no mention of the religion as opiate thesis. Only in its discussion of pre-Liberation exploitation and class control of the masses in China does it mention that religion was at that time used as a spiritual device to tranquilize the masses. Similarly, the volume *The Religious Question During China's Socialist Period* does not allow the "opiate theory" to dominate its inquiry and research. The editor does not deal with the opiate issue until the Afterword. There, he raises three points:

(1) "Opiate" is a picturesque term used to describe the negative role religion is made to play in class society.

(2) Historically, the role of religion differs in different eras and social conditions. These differences cannot all be subsumed under the term "opiate."

(3) It is even less possible to explain the role of religion in socialist society by the term "opiate."

These three points represent an important breakthrough with regard to the "opiate theory." The debate which has raged in religious studies over the "opiate theory" since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, has been dubbed the "Third Opium War." From the looks of it, this "Third Opium War" has basically ended, for there are now very few scholars studying religion who continue to expound its "opiate nature."

**(4) Religion has its ethical dimensions and these play a positive and supplementary role in socialist society.**

The view of religion most widespread among people is that "religion encourages goodness." Many officials at the grassroots report that in areas where there is a high number of religious believers, there are few criminal activities. Religion exerts a guiding and restricting influence upon the behavior of adherents. But there was a time when certain scholars of religion, under the influence of "leftism," inflexibly advocated a division between religious creeds and ethics

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\* An authoritative document on religion and religious policy circulated internally by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in March, 1982. The full title of the document is: *"The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Question of Religion During Our Country's Socialist Period."*



in order to discredit religion. They said that the ethical dimensions of religion were reflections of the relationships of production and not directly dependent upon religion; that religion governed only the relationship between the believers and God while social relationships lay outside its purview. It has even been said that since the last six of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament dealt with behavioral ethics, they were not an integral part of religion. It would therefore be interfering with ethics for religion to speak of the matters contained in the last six commandments.

In this regard, Yan Beiming's essay "On Religious Ethics During the Socialist Period," points out that:

Each religion not only promotes its own sense of morality, but also emphasizes moral cultivation, and an entire set of creeds and practices which uphold and protect moral integrity, far surpassing non-religious ethical schools. ... The strength of the strictures of religious ethics is, quite simply, second to none. One wouldn't know where to begin in trying to prove a statement to the effect that religion has no ethics.... And it is thanks to the great force of these strictures of religious morality that it produces such strikingly concrete results in the adherents of each religion. There is factual evidence of this. In China, and especially in the minority areas, a noteworthy phenomenon has been discovered through actual social investigation: the majority of believers, of whatever religion or sect, were found to be law-abiding, enthusiastic in helping others, and unlikely to do wrong. ... According to what a comrade who studies juvenile delinquents told me: "Among young hoodlum elements who are repeated offenders, it is very difficult to find any from the churches, temples or mosques, which shows that the bonds of religious morality are a powerful influence and play a not insignificant role, not only among the middle-aged and elderly believers, but among young people as well." (*Investigation of Religious Issues*, Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Religious Studies Center, 1984).

Another opinion has it that though religion includes ethics, in essence this is morality in service to the counter-revolutionary ruling class; therefore, religion and socialist society by contrast, are as incompatible as fire and water. As Luo Weighing points out in "The Social Function of and Changes in Religious Morality During the Socialist Period":

Religious morality is a moral concept based on the religious world view and closely linked to religious teachings. It is a system of standards and rules of behavior, a special realm within social ideology, which draws together the different ideologies of religion and morality. It is both a type of morality and a part of religion. . . . Historically, many ruling classes have used the will of God as a means of coercing the people into acquiescence to their counter-revolutionary rule. Religious ethical teachings thus became the spiritual implement for maintaining their counter-revolutionary rule and played a negative role. In socialist society, this mistaken theoretical system of religious morality cannot change, but it no longer attaches itself to a counter-revolutionary ruling class nor does it continue to pursue moral expositions on behalf of that ruling class; its negative political role has disappeared as well. . . . During the socialist era, religion still encourages people to do good and religious circles are

active in doing good for society. This present goodness, both in essence and in content, has undergone a change from that in class society. ... Socialist morality is a completely new stage in human moral development, different in essence from morality of past historical eras. However, it is not at all divorced from, or without links to the morality of past historical eras. Quite the opposite, it must critique those quintessential elements of the heritage of historical moralities. Socialist morality must naturally incorporate moral principles and standards universal to all human social life, which have been shaped over the long period of human development and are embraced by various classes. Although it belongs to a lower order, such social morality provides a minimal level of morality which can maintain the social order and is therefore indispensable. Religious morality which mirrors these principles and standards, can therefore be adapted to socialist morality and is one with socialist spiritual civilization. (Ibid.)

### **(5) Religion can be compatible with socialism**

Theoretical research into religion in every socialist country since the October revolution (1917) has held that religion and socialism are irreconcilable opposites. Marxists who speak of the compatibility of religion and socialism might be seen as "right deviationists" or be considered as having lost their way. A religious believer who does so, might be seen as an opportunist or as harboring ulterior motives.

But the facts of the matter are that in the thirty-odd years since Liberation in China, the majority of religious leaders have supported socialism. As for the laity, the vast majority are daily engaged in socialist production. To our knowledge, in many areas, the proportion of Christians who have been chosen by their colleagues as advanced or model workers is greater than that among non-Christians. The various religions in China have undertaken considerable reforms. In contrast with the past, these have resulted in great strides toward adjusting to the socialist trend. The facts are there for all to see. This is considering the matter from a religious viewpoint. On the national level, though the leading party of China stands for atheism and confesses no religion, it recognizes the reasonableness of religion and its legal status, and opposes any actions aimed at destroying or discriminating against religion. Only illegal and counter-revolutionary activities disguised as religious which, along with superstitions, are not part of religion, and which threaten national interests and the lives and property of the people, are opposed. However, normal and proper religion is firmly protected by law. The preceding two points are the foundation for the compatibility of religion and socialism in China.

The first to allude to the compatibility of religion and socialism was Hu Qiaomu. In October 1982, while drawing up the sixth Five-Year Plan, he mentioned in his report that study of religious topics should include research into the bases for the occurrence and continued existence of religious phenomena in China, and how it could become compatible with Chinese socialist society, and how it might play its proper role. ("Explorations into the Religious Issue", 1983).

Xiao Zhitian of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences says in his 1985 paper "A

## Tentative Enquiry into the Problem of the Compatibility between Religion and Socialist Society in China":

... compatibility is based on patriotism and socialism, under the guidelines of the Chinese Constitution, and not on the criterion of materialism, nor with the purpose of "wiping out" religion. In a country like ours, with a population of one billion, it is inevitable that there will be different levels of ideological thinking. In order to achieve our unprecedented and gigantic task of socialist construction, a latitudinarian policy must be adopted, for it is impossible to impose uniformity in ideas and beliefs. To launch debates on issues between theism and atheism is also harmful. Only by insisting on the four basic principles and by implementing the policy of religious freedom can a positive response be aroused in religious circles.

Some people lay stress on the assumed antagonism between religion and socialism, holding that believers in their role as laborers can take part in socialist construction, but that the religion they believe in can only play an obstructive and disruptive role in socialist endeavors. This is contrary to fact and to truth. One's actions are always governed by one's thinking. The participation of religious believers in the modernization program is due in a way to their acceptance of patriotic education and socialist policies, but they are also bound to interpret their deeds in terms of their religious teachings. Some believers who take a negative and pessimistic attitude and stand aloof from reality have been influenced by their religious beliefs; but other believers who are devoted to the motherland and are law-abiding, positive, and enterprising, have also been motivated by their religious convictions. (*Religion, No. 1, 1985*).

Xiao Zhitian believes that the positive role of religion which is beneficial to society is manifested in the following respects:

(1) workers, peasants and intellectuals who believe in religion are engaged in developing industrial and agricultural production, raising scientific and technological levels and doing their utmost to open up new prospects for China's socialist modernization program; (2) by calling on patriotism, certain ideas and beliefs promoted in religious circles can mobilize believers to take an active part in the current modernization program; (3) certain religious moral teachings can guide believers to reject evil and do good, and this is conducive to the stability and unity of society; (4) the religious tradition of service for public welfare can contribute to the building of socialist spiritual civilization. (*ibid.*)

Of course, there are both compatible and incompatible aspects of the relationship between socialism and religion. In order to promote the four modernizations, we must continually strive to overcome the incompatibilities. From the religious point of view, this means that each religion, within the bounds of acceptability dictated by its beliefs, is called to move ahead in eliminating whatever is not in accord with socialism, and to develop that which is. At the same time, non-religious circles are called to resolutely cast off leftist influences, to rid themselves of the type of thinking which encourages the destruction of

religion, to implement policy, and to create conditions for each religion to carry out its work successfully.

When mutual compatibility replaces mutual destruction, there is a new spirit abroad in the world which represents a vast breakthrough in research into religious issues in China during the socialist period.

**(6) Religion should be seen as an intrinsic part of the socialist cultural legacy.**

In speaking of the socialist critique of the historical cultural heritage, some people always treat religious culture as the dregs of historical culture, as a part which may not be accepted as part of the inheritance but must be cast off. This is superficial and reveals an ignorant attitude toward historical culture.

Zhao Fusan observes in his address "Religion, Spiritual Culture and National Unity," given to the Third Session of the Sixth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference:

... the literature, poetry, art, music, dance, sculpture and architecture of every nation, and consequently its philosophy, its morals, its social customs and the history of how its way of life has developed, have all in varying degree been influenced by religion. . . . If we were to suppose that a culture with a religious pattern brought about through the impetus of religious thought and feeling simply belongs to the mere refuse of that people's civilization and is to be rejected, does it imply that so far as China is concerned, the greater part of the artistic treasures of Dunhuang, the carvings and sculptures of Datong, Longmen, Maijishan and Dazu, are they all to be rejected? When we deal with European culture, are we to reject Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, Raphael's *Madonna*, the complete range of Michaelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* ... the many musical works of Bach, Handel, Mozart and Beethoven, and the whole range of European medieval philosophical thought? It is quite evident that were we to do so, we would be very foolish.

Zhao Puchu, President of the Chinese Buddhist Association, in an article entitled "The Influence of Buddhism on Chinese Culture Should be Studied," points out:

It is inevitable that every people, in the process of the development of its culture, will meet with the question of how to treat the relationship between religion and culture. Buddhism has had a tremendous influence upon and role in Chinese culture, and it has left a resplendent heritage of Buddhist culture in Chinese history. ... This being the case, does Buddhism still have a role to play in the developmental process of the new people's culture under socialism? Human cultural development is a continuous, unbroken process, traditional and modern culture cannot be completely severed. We must absorb all that is of value in the essence of traditional culture and bring it to enrich the development of the new socialist people's culture. Traditional Chinese culture incorporates Buddhist culture ... thus, in formulating a strategy of cultural development today, we should earnestly raise the issue of the study of the

quintessence of Buddhist culture. (*Fayin, No. 2, 1986*).

In "Our National Culture: Modern and Traditional," Wang Meng, China's Minister of Culture, has stated:

The phenomenon of religion is in no way a simple cosmological view which exists in human life. It is in fact a cultural phenomenon, embracing morality, art, psychology, philosophy and even science and social custom, along with a coalescence of national sentiment. ... Marxist teaching has no way to sympathize with or assent to religion as a cosmological view, but Marxism must treat religion scientifically as a cultural phenomenon.

To link religion with historical culture, to see the religious phenomenon as a cultural one, to affirm that there are in religious culture those things which can be accepted, is beneficial to the building up of a new socialist people's culture in China. This may be an even greater breakthrough in the study of religion. This is why one prominent conclusion in the essay "Are socialism and religion mutually compatible?" is:

We must not make religion into an antagonistic element which socialism cannot accept. We must not only see the negative aspects of religion, but make it an intrinsic part of the historical cultural heritage of socialism, and do all in our power to enhance the positive role of religion in socialist construction. (*Theory & Information, No. 148 (25 April, 1988)*).

#### **(7) The leadership and administration of religious affairs work must be reformed.**

There has long been an over-concentration of power in China's system of religious affairs leadership and administration, resulting in serious abuses in the system's taking on for itself things which should be left to religious groups. Following the publication of Document 19, Ru Wen stated in his address "What I Have Gained from Studying this Document":

The separation of government from enterprises is now being implemented throughout China. Yet, as we look at the relation between government and religion, the fact of their non-separation is, in some places, causing serious problems. This is not conducive to strengthening the bridge-building role of religious groups between the Party and the masses, and is thus extremely deleterious to rallying the masses of religious adherents around the Party. Document No. 19 stresses that cadres must take seriously the role of patriotic religious organizations at all levels and must do a good job of leadership in order to avoid monopolizing the tasks involved. Religious organizations must be permitted their work and rights, and must be enabled to form close links with religious believers. . . . Presently there are some areas in which conditions are entirely at variance with this, where everything, including the internal affairs of the religions themselves, hinges on government cadres. These cadres have no understanding of religion, do not appreciate the thoughts and sentiments of religious believers, do not respect religious traditions; yet those in religious circles do not dare speak up. The harm caused to religious believers by this state of affairs has resulted in their being driven into the arms of bad elements and enemies, and patriotic

religious groups have lost many people in the process. (*Religion*, No. 2, 1984).

In his address to the National People's Political Consultative Conference following the Thirteenth Party Congress, Zhao Puchu went further and raised the issue of reform of the leadership and administrative systems in religious affairs or, in other words, the issue of separation of religion and the state. He said:

For a long time the administrative and leadership systems relating to religious affairs have suffered from the abuses of over-centralization of power and a monopoly of religious work by these organizations; this is entirely unsuitable in the current situation of openness and reform, and obstructs the development of religious work. We must undertake reforms in a sound and positive way. The key issue in these reforms is based on the spirit of the principles raised in Zhao Ziyang's report at the Thirteenth Party Congress on the separation of Party and government, of state and management, reform of the cadre system, rationalization of Party and administrative organs relating to people's organizations, and the implementation of the separation of religion and the state.

"Separation of religion and the state" refers to the fact that the functions of responsible government departments and religious organizations, temples, mosques, and churches are separate ... the key to resolving this issue lies in the rationalization of the leadership of administrative departments and the right of religious organizations, to govern themselves according to their own characteristics. Religious believers themselves should have control of religious venues and this control should be institutionalized. Responsible government departments carry out the leadership of the state administrative organs toward religion, implement the policy of religious freedom, safeguard and monitor the constitution and related laws, regulations and policy, and coordinate the interaction of religion and other sectors of society. We must reform the mechanistic practices of the administrative and leadership system and its methods in working with religious organizations. Religious organizations must become true people's organizations which carry on their work independently and according to their special characteristics, enjoying the right to administer their own personnel, property and affairs under the leadership of Party and government and within the scope of the Constitution, laws and policies of the nation.

At present, some comrades engaged in the study of religion are giving thought and attention to the issue of reform of the system of religious affairs leadership and administration. They are pondering the following question: In a socialist country, what should be the relationship between the political authorities and religious organizations? Some feel that such formulations as "administrative leadership," or "strengthening administration" are not as desirable as a simplified formula such as "leadership in politics; self-government in religion." This would mean that the function of Party and government departments is to carry out the policy of religious freedom, to resolve problems and contradictions in the implementation of policy, and to assist religious organizations in terms of guiding policy. However, their function is not to interfere in normal religious affairs and activities, while curbing *illegal* religious activities. Other comrades object to what has been promoted as the

"three designates"\*(?)system in recent years. They feel that religious organizations have not been consulted with regard to these methods and that they represent a departure from the policy of religious freedom. It is as if a teacher receiving an invitation to lecture in another part of the country or a student wishing to attend a lecture somewhere had first to get approval from the Ministry of Education!

There are also those who feel that what has been termed "strengthening administration" in religious affairs does not sufficiently distinguish between the legitimate and the illegal, and at times verges on a guiding ideology which would set limits to and suppress religion. Indeed, the realities as we understand them, are as follows: in a small number of areas, the spirit with which this "strengthening of administration" has been applied has meant that religious activities should be acceptably short, not long; acceptably small, not large in scale; rituals should be acceptably simple, not complicated; and held with appropriate frequency, not too often. Even worse, in some areas, a kind of "permitted to leave, but not to join" pact has been forced upon religious organizations, with all sorts of regulations limiting outsiders entering churches, some even advocating that "members of the church may drop their membership." All these are done in the name of "strengthening administration," but are in fact putting into practice a line of church destruction, one which fundamentally contravenes the spirit of the freedom of religion stipulated in the Constitution.

The result is that religious activities are driven underground where they become fair game for bad elements. Is it any wonder then that some believers are saying: the policy in every area is now reform and openness, but tight control is unique to religion?

The issue of reform in the system of administration and leadership in religious affairs represents a new breakthrough in theory and research on religion following the enlivened spirit of reform since the Thirteenth CPC. It is our hope that the responsible departments will give serious consideration to the views of the theoreticians and give ear to the voices of religious circles. This will help to arouse a positive response among religious believers, to bring religious activities out from underground and into the open, to bring believers who have drifted away back into religious organizations, and to establish the international reputation of the Chinese government for its conscientious implementation of the policy of religious freedom.

*October 1988*

*translated by Janice and Philip Wickeri*

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\* *i.e., designated place of worship, designated leadership, designated jurisdiction.*

## **10. A Tentative Enquiry into the Problem of the Compatibility between Religion and Socialist Society in China – Xiao Zhitian**

Religion is a form of social ideology. Belief in supernatural and supramundane spiritual beings and their worship is the distorted and illusory reflection of natural and social forces in the human mind. In the history of mankind, religion has had since its beginnings a definite influence on social life. In societies of class antagonism, religion mirrors the sighs and protests of oppressed people over their current misery. The ruling classes usually control and employ religion as a spiritual tool to benumb the will of the people to struggle. But sometimes religion also provides an ideological covering for expressing the will of the progressive classes, or a link uniting the oppressed people in revolt. Today we have entered socialist society. What has been the impact of society on religion? And what kind of role does religion play in social life? Is religion in socialist society simply a drug which acts as a stumbling-block impeding our modernization program? This poses an entirely new theoretical issue, to which no ready answer can be found in the writings of our predecessors. "Only if we emancipate our minds, seek truth from facts, proceed from reality in everything and integrate theory with practice, can we carry out our socialist modernization program smoothly, and only then can our Party further develop Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought."<sup>1</sup> This comment by Comrade Deng Xiaoping also applies to the study of religious problems in the socialist era. Life in the past thirty years or more has shown that religion can be compatible with socialist society and play a role among religious believers which is beneficial to society. This essay attempts a preliminary enquiry into the issue.

### **I. The True Meaning of Compatibility and its Nature**

Religion came into being when primitive society reached a certain stage. Initially spontaneous religious beliefs began to emerge among primitive human groups at a time when more complex forms did not yet exist. With the development of human society, religious organizations, priests, hierarchical systems, doctrines and creeds, theological theories, monastic rules and prohibitions, sacrificial rites etc., began to appear one after another. Two points are noteworthy. (1) Religion is not just a theistic ideology, but through long years of historical development, has become a social force that rallies a part of the people within a certain religious body, binds them with its doctrines and regulations, and influences the course of social progress. In the class societies of the past, religion, as part of the superstructure, was often closely linked to political struggle. All this distinguishes religion from any idealist philosophy which is merely an ideology. (2) Tremendous social transformations will bring about changes in religion itself, and under different conditions, religion has a different impact on different people, producing different social consequences.

As atheists, Communists do not endorse any kind of theism. Today the theoretical guidelines for the proletarian revolution and for socialist modernization and construction in China are Marxism, dialectical materialism and historical materialism. When we discuss the problem of whether and how religion can be compatible with socialist society, it does not in any way mean that the two different ideologies or world-views of idealism and materialism, of atheism and theism can be harmonized, and still less that religion can complement or even



replace Marxism.

The compatibility of religion with socialist society in China and the nature of the role it plays in making believers behave in a way beneficial to society, can be summarized in the following three aspects:

(1) Under the leadership of the Communist Party, believers and non-believers form a broad patriotic united front, working hard together to realize step by step the modernization of industry, agriculture, national defense, and science and technology, and to build China into a highly prosperous, highly cultured and highly democratic socialist country.

(2) On the common basis of upholding patriotism and socialism, certain ideas, beliefs, moral teachings and behavior promoted by religion can be adapted to the demands of socialism, producing among believers certain results beneficial to society.

(3) In its long course of development, religion has assimilated and been integrated with a great deal of traditional culture in the fields of literature, aesthetics, ethics, medical science and architecture. To carry out academic research of religious cultures and draw on their fine elements will enrich the treasure house of socialist intellectual culture.

Concrete manifestations of the compatibility between religion and socialist society will be mentioned later. What needs to be pointed out here is that such compatibility is based on patriotism and socialism, under the guidelines of the Chinese Constitution, and not on the criterion of materialism, nor with the purpose of "wiping out" religion. In a country like ours, with a population of one billion, it is inevitable that there will be different levels of ideological thinking. In order to achieve our unprecedented and gigantic task of socialist construction, a latitudinarian policy must be adopted, for it is impossible to impose uniformity in ideas and beliefs. To launch debates on issues between theism and atheism is also harmful. Only by insisting on the four basic principles of socialism and by implementing the policy of religious freedom can a positive response be aroused in religious circles.

Compatibility has two sides. While religion should adapt itself to socialism, the Party and the state, and indeed the whole society, should handle problems of religion in a correct way.

Both compatibility and incompatibility will long persist, and their nature will vary with time. We must make unceasing efforts to overcome incompatible elements, so that compatibility can be promoted and the socialist modernization program favorably advanced.

Some people lay stress on the assumed antagonism between religion and socialism, holding that believers in their role as laborers can take part in socialist construction, but that the religion they believe in can only play an obstructive and disruptive role in socialist endeavors. This is contrary to fact and to truth. One's actions are always governed by one's thinking. The participation of religious believers in the modernization program is due in a way to their acceptance of patriotic education and socialist policies, but they are also bound to interpret their deeds in terms of their religious teachings. Some believers who take a negative and pessimistic attitude and stand aloof from reality have been influenced by their

religious beliefs; but some believers who are devoted to the motherland and are law-abiding, positive and enterprising, have also been motivated by their religious convictions.

## **II. The Basis and the Conditions of Compatibility**

A. Since social ideology is determined by social existence, it is an objective law of historical development that religion always changes in its attempt to adapt itself to social transformations.

Many religions have appeared in history, and in the tremendous movements of social change, some have been eliminated, some restructured, and some have kept on changing in order to accommodate themselves to social developments and have been able to survive the test of time. Take Christianity as an instance. As Engels points out, "Like any great revolutionary movement, Christianity was created by the masses."2 In the 1st century A.D., the Jewish slaves and poor harbored strong class hatred against the slave system and the Roman rulers, but after several uprisings ended in failure, they fell into utter despair. In such a situation of class struggle, Christianity triumphed over all other religions, and came into being by taking over certain aspects of Judaism. It declares that all men are equal, and preaches that people should confess their sins and repent, waiting for the coming of the Savior who will reward the good and punish the evil, and then people will enjoy an illusory bliss in the kingdom of heaven. At first, the ruling class took repressive measures against Christianity, and then they turned to utilizing it and made it into the state religion of the Roman Empire. "In the Middle Ages, with the unfolding of the feudal system, Christianity became a religion of feudal hierarchy consistent with and corresponding to such a system."3 "As seen in their theories, all the movements for religious reform that took place from the 13th century to the 17th century, and the related struggles waged in the guise of religion, were but the repeated attempts on the part of the city dwellers' class, urban commoners and the peasants that rose in rebellion together with them, to adapt the outmoded theological world outlook to the changed economic condition and the lifestyle of the arising class."4 During the preparatory stage of the Taiping revolution, slogans such as, "All men are brothers under heaven," "One world, one family, peace and tranquility for all" were proclaimed. Thus ideas of political and economic equality were introduced in the name of religion. At present, rapid changes and great upheavals are taking place on the international scene and the struggles for national liberation in the Third World are surging forward. To adapt to such trends, new theological thinking is constantly arising to serve one's own class or nation. Both history and reality bear witness to the truth that religion is not something static, but changes continually to suit the transformations of social existence. Hence, it is perfectly possible for religion to be compatible with socialist society.

B. The great mass of believers heartily support the socialist system, and this has laid the basis for the adaptation of religion to socialist society.

The masses are the deciding force in making history. When we inquire into the function of religion in the socialist period, we must first of all take into account the attitude of the millions of religious believers towards the new society. The victory of the new democratic revolution and the completion of socialist transformation are most profound and spectacular

changes in our history. The great mass of believers as well as non-believers have stood up, freed themselves from the sufferings of class exploitation and oppression, and become masters of the new society. They give whole-hearted support to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and to the socialist system. During the thirty or more years since the founding of new China, splendid achievements have been made in economic construction. Following the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, the Central Committee has shifted the stress of all work across the country to the socialist modernization program, set the goal of quadrupling the total value of industrial and agricultural output by the end of this century, started on the reform of economic structures, adopted a policy of opening to the outside world and led the people of all ethnic groups in the country to build socialism with Chinese characteristics.

All this has not only met the wishes of non-believers, but is also completely in line with the wishes of religious believers. Why do some people believe in religion? Marx has said the root cause of religion lies not in heaven but on earth. Engels said, "In the history of early Christianity, it had noteworthy similarities with the modern workers' movement. Like the latter, Christianity in its beginning was also a movement of the oppressed. Both Christianity and the workers' socialism propagate about liberation from bondage and poverty in the future. For Christianity, it is in the other world after death that such a liberation can be sought in the kingdom of heaven; for socialism, it is in this world that such a liberation can be sought in social transformation."5 The course of history has shown that the real emancipation of mankind can only be attained through the modern workers' movement under the guidance of Marxism, and in this struggle for liberation, religion is often utilized by the bourgeoisie and made into an obstacle to the emancipation of the workers. But the same quotation also helps us to realize that the bird of Christianity reflected the desire of oppressed people for liberation. Is it not true that many laboring people who came to accept religious faith in the old society were prompted by the same motive? Under the historical circumstances of that time, they placed their hope in heaven or in the next life. Today, socialist revolution has eliminated the exploitation of man by man, and opened up a bright perspective for creating happiness in the present life, bringing into realization the vain aspirations of their predecessors in generations past. A happy life in this world forms a solid basis on which religion can be compatible with socialist society. The change in economic status of the mass of believers, and the change in political attitude that has resulted, will bring about a change in ideas. When they try to comprehend the happiness brought about by new China, they will often try to find explanations in their religious scriptures, take their beliefs and doctrines as being consistent with the socialist society and do their utmost to fight for it.

C. With the extinction of the exploiting system, the class basis for the existence of religion has also disappeared, and this is the key to the fundamental change in the nature of religious problems in the socialist era.

During the long years of class antagonism in human history, the most important reason for the existence of religion was the existence of classes. All oppressing classes made use of religion as a spiritual bludgeon to maintain their ruling order. Lenin said, "Religion is the opium of the people - this dictum by Marx is the corner-stone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion. Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches, and each and every

religious organization, as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to befuddle the working class."6 Today this statement by Lenin is sometimes used by certain people to characterize all religions of every age, and is made the theoretical basis for explaining the social role of religion in the socialist period. This is open to question. It is quite clear that Lenin's words refer to his own `modern' time, i.e. the capitalist age. In China today, with the elimination of the exploiting system and of exploiting classes, the class basis for the existence of religion has disappeared. Those "religions and churches, and each and every religious organization," which used to be utilized as "instruments ... to befuddle the working class," have become religious undertakings managed by believers from among the people. How can we apply Lenin's statement to socialist new China without any modification? Comrade Zhou Enlai pointed out in 1957, "Now we take religious faith as only an ideological issue within the ranks of the people, and not as a political issue. Whether atheists or theists, materialists or idealists, all share in their support of the socialist system."7 The essence of the policy of religious freedom we are implementing, is to turn the question of religious faith into an issue of personal free choice, a private personal affair for each citizen. Such a change in the nature of the religious problem has a profound historical significance and provides the objective basis for our studies. Of course, this does not mean that religion now has no negative function. Yet with correct handling and proper guidance, religion can be compatible with socialist society. This has been proved by many historical facts since the establishment of new China.

D. The adoption of a proper policy towards religion by the Party and the state is an important condition for religion to be compatible with the socialist society.

Since the founding of new China, by continuing to uphold the scientific theories of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought and proceeding from the actual situation in our country, the Party and the state have adopted a series of appropriate general and specific policies concerning religion. These include: implementing the policy of freedom of religious belief, resolutely rejecting any suggestion or practice of abolishing religion by administrative or other compulsory means, and consistently protecting the right of citizens to religious freedom; eliminating imperialist influences supporting the anti-imperialist patriotic movement of the Catholic and Protestant churches striving for independence and autonomy exposing and cracking down on counter-revolutionaries and other hiding under a religious cloak, abolishing feudal prerogatives any oppressive exploiting systems in religion's name; educating believer in patriotism, winning over, uniting and educating religious personages, establishing and developing the patriotic united front encouraging the positive role of patriotic religious associations, etc These policies and measures have brought out the initiative of the religious believers in building new China. Since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, the Party Central Committee has corrected the ultra-leftist line pursued by Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four," and reasserted and developed the correct policies in dealing with religious issues. It is stressed that in the present stage, the basic political and economic interests of believe and non-believers coincide, whereas their ideological differences is comparatively secondary. The purpose of implementing the policy of religious freedom is to unite the people of all ethnic groups in this country to build a modern and powerful socialist country. With the gradual implementation of the various policies on religion, believe and non-believers will be more closely united in the struggle to

achieve modernization.

E. Guided by patriotism, coordinated efforts on the part of religious circles for national reconstruction are an indispensable condition for the realization of compatibility.

Chinese people, religious believers included, have a fine patriotic tradition, and they have waged together incessant struggles for national and social liberation. Compared with Europe, the religious situation in China has its own markedly different characteristics. In the Han areas where the great majority of Chinese people live, the percentage of believers is rather low. There has never been a state religion in our history, and the relation between religion and politics has not been as close as in Europe. During the period of democratic revolution in China, the different religions were in varying degrees dominated and utilized by the imperialists and the domestic reactionary classes; some religious leaders took a pro-U.S. and anti-Communist stand; while some counter-revolutionaries made use of religion to carry out sabotage. But the majority of religious personages, although influenced by anti-Communist propaganda and suspicious of the revolution (fearing in particular the destruction of religion), were discontented with the reactionary rule. What is worthy of special mention is that in semi-feudal and semi-colonial old China, there were religious leaders who supported and participated in the democratic revolution.

All this is quite different from the religious situation before and after the October revolution in Russia. Following the liberation of the whole of China, since the Communist Party continued to carry out the united front policy which had proved to be effective in the democratic revolutionary period, the great majority of people in the religious circles, with patriotic forces in the lead, were able to draw a clear line between the enemy and ourselves, and to raise their patriotic consciousness fairly quickly. In July 1949, Mr. Wu Yaorong, a well-known religious leader, published an article entitled "The Reform of Christianity" in the Shanghai newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*, in which he pointed out "no religious belief or religious thinking can be immune from the influence of social systems or social environments." He proposed an orientation for "reform," such as "breaking away from the capitalist and imperialist structures," "putting into practice the principles of self-government, self-support and self-propagation initiated long ago," identifying ourselves with the powerful current of the times, . . . opposing the imperialist schemes to instigate new wars, opposing all the old forces that exploit and oppress the people, making common efforts to build new China under the banner of new democracy." The "reform" advocated by Mr. Wu was in fact an attempt to make religion compatible with new China. In 1951, he put forward the watchword of "devotion to the motherland and devotion to the church," combining religious faith with patriotic ideas. His proposals reflect the inner desire of all patriotic believers. In the past thirty years and more, patriotic persons of different religions in all ethnic groups have made great political progress, leading believers in the unceasing task of rejuvenating China.

### **III. The Manifestations of Compatibility and the Process of its Achievement**

As has been said before, the liberation of China has won the support of the majority of believers, and provided the basis for the compatibility between religion and the new society. But things are always more complex than they appear. For historical and social reasons,

acute class struggles have existed in the religious field. In our modern history, the colonialists took control and made use of the Catholic and the Protestant churches as tools in their invasion of China. On the eve of our national liberation, the imperialists designed a series of "emergency" measures, dreaming that the church could be preserved as a last ditch in their stand against new China. In the early days of the People's Republic, the Roman See of the Catholic Church and the foreign missionary societies of some Protestant churches gave directives to missionaries and counterrevolutionaries in China to engage in sabotage under the cover of religion and to poison the minds of believers so that they might become skeptical, resentful or even opposed to the Communist Party and socialism. Buddhism, Islam and Taoism have for a long time been dominated and utilized by the feudal landlord, serf-owner and bureaucratic capitalist classes. Among certain ethnic minorities where almost all members are religious adherents, forms of theocracy did once exist, and religious institutions were often so closely integrated with the feudal system that the majority of believers were for generations in bondage politically, economically, culturally and in their life-style and customs, thus hindering the prosperity and the development of these ethnic minority groups.

All this is quite incompatible with the new social system. As the people's government has adopted a series of correct policies and measures, strictly distinguished between two different kinds of contradictions, differentiated political issues from religious questions, relied on the patriotic forces in religious circles, mobilized believers to carry out necessary political struggles and democratic reforms, incompatibilities have been gradually overcome, and the religious situation has undergone a fundamental change.

During the ten years of turmoil (the Cultural Revolution), the Lin Biao-Jiang Qing counter-revolutionary clique pursued an ultra-leftist line, which disrupted the compatible relations between religion and socialist society. Since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party, all kinds of correct policies with regard to religion have been reasserted and re-implemented, which have made it possible for compatibility to be restored and developed. The positive role religion can play for society among believers is manifested in the following respects:

A. Workers, peasants and intellectuals who believe in religion are engaged in developing industrial and agricultural production, raising scientific and technological levels and doing their utmost to open up a new prospect for our socialist modernization program.

The statistical data we have collected in regions where farmers and fishermen who believe in religion are concentrated show that the production output, quality of products, per capita income and quota of grain distribution do not lag behind the regions where nonbelievers live. This shows that religious faith does not hamper production. Believers, like non-believers, also yearn for an abundant harvest every year. In order to master science and technology, they subscribe to scientific and technological journals. In their minds, this does not conflict with praying for God's providence. According to our survey, in many places during busy seasons, churches and religious meeting places voluntarily suspend religious activities, and around these seasons, patriotic clergymen will exhort their people to do their best in their productive work and pay their agricultural tax with well-winnowed and dried grain. In urban areas, among doctors, engineers and other intellectuals with religious beliefs, are not a few outstanding

persons who are devoted to scientific research work and who have made new discoveries and inventions. In some places, local People's Political Consultative Conferences as well as religious bodies have organized forums at which believers who have made distinguished contributions to building a socialist material and spiritual culture are invited to talk freely about their own experience to spur each other on and provide encouragement to religious people. As some believers say, "To have a religious faith today means good prospects for this life and hope for the next; when I live I should do my best and after I die I shall go to heaven." Facts have also shown that for believers, religion can be said to be their "lifeblood." Whenever their religious faith or feelings are insulted and normal religious activities restricted or banned, they will be given to doubt, dissatisfaction, dissension and discord, and may even be enticed by evil men into deeds detrimental to others as well as to themselves. Whenever religious faith or feelings are respected, and normal religious activities protected, they will be easy in mind, united in purpose with the people and do well in their production work without neglecting their religious activities. This shows that resolute implementation of the religious policy is an important task related to our modernization program.

B. By calling on patriotism, certain ideas and beliefs promoted by the religious circles can mobilize believers to take an active part in the current modernization program.

In its long course of development, religion has assimilated the rich results of human thought and formed a very complex ideological system. The theological theories of different religions not only contain fallacies that defend exploiting systems but also ideas that reflect the rightful desires of oppressed people. What religious propagandists advocate, refrain from, or are opposed to, always reflects the characteristics and demands of their time. Socialism has brought about happiness in life and good future prospects for all people including believers, hence negative and pessimistic theological thinking cannot square with reality, and so when religion is used by reactionary elements in the religious circles to oppose new China, this has caused perplexity and doubt among believers. Owing to the guidance given by patriotic religious leaders, new ideas have begun to appear in religious teaching. Such teachings as, "devotion to the motherland and devotion to the church," "adding splendor to the land of our country and giving service to fellow-beings," etc. have helped believers solve their perplexities in religious thinking, to accept willingly patriotic and socialist education and to participate actively in socialist construction. In one city a medical doctor who is a believer, inspired by the religious teaching: "he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen," always serves his patients whole-heartedly. Once he was invited abroad to treat cancer patients with a combination of western and traditional Chinese medicine and received high praise there. After he came back, he gave the whole remuneration of more than 30,000 U.S. dollars he received to his own hospital. This instance shows that, in the present day, certain religious ideas and beliefs can play a positive role in mobilizing believers to take part in socialist construction. At the Council meeting of the China Buddhist Association held in December 1983, its president, Mr. Zhao Puchu, stressed the importance of promoting "human society Buddhism" and the need to "consciously take as one's own responsibility the realization of paradise (*sukhavati*) on earth," so that all Buddhists can play their part in the socialist modernization program and so further develop the compatibility between religion and socialist society.

One question is worth attention: In socialist society, religious leaders influenced by patriotic thinking are consciously and unconsciously, and in varying degrees, trying to make certain readjustments in the interpretation of their doctrines in order to adapt them to the new society. How should we evaluate such a trend? In past years, many people have held a negative view and regarded it as a way to "beautify" religion, making it "even more deceptive." In the late 1950s, efforts on the part of patriotic religious leaders in this respect were interrupted, and the unfortunate result was their alienation from ordinary believers. Now as we assess the historical lessons, we see that such readjustments in religious propagation are not only beyond reproach but should be welcomed. First, this at the very least is a civic right guaranteed by the Constitution since freedom of religious belief implies the freedom to readjust religious thinking. Second, if readjustment is not allowed, then only negative teachings inconsistent with the new society can be propagated, and who will benefit? Maybe, in the view of some people, this will hasten the early extinction of religion. But facts have shown that this is merely a subjective illusion produced by leftism. Furthermore, in the long run, such readjustments (called by religious leaders "self-propagation" or "theological reconstruction") conform to objective needs, and are an inevitable trend beneficial to the society. Starting from their religious beliefs, it helps believers overcome their difficulties in accepting patriotic and progressive ideas, in taking a positive attitude towards life and in cooperating with others to build a "paradise on earth."

C. Certain religious moral teachings can guide believers to reject evil and do good, and this is favorable for the stability and unity of society.

Religious morality in its essence is a human social moral code in the name of religion. It can have a greater restrictive effect on believers. In the totality of ethical and moral requirements in socialist society, there are different levels, communist morality being the highest level, constituting the moral demands for the advanced elements. This totality also includes lower levels of varying degrees. Our survey has shown that, in actual life of the present stage, certain religious moral codes, such as those against theft and robbery, against sexual immorality, against avarice, against lying, etc. are beneficial to society. As the exploiting system has been abolished and the contradictions among the people have become the dominant ones in the society, religious virtues such as patience, forgiveness, equality, and love for others can be helpful in handling such contradictions. Our survey in the rural areas indicates that quite a number of families of believers, being bound by religious moral obligations, can better handle the problems between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, between husbands and wives and between sisters-in-law, and often win titles of "model families." The concern which believers have for one another can to a certain extent unite people to overcome difficulties. It must be pointed out that such good deeds on the part of believers do not belong to the category of communist morality. But so long as religious morality teaches people to refrain from seeking private gain at public expense or harming others to benefit oneself, and encourages people to do good deeds, we must affirm its positive social function in a realistic way.

D. Carrying on the religious tradition of giving service to public welfare will contribute to the building of a socialist culture of the mind.



All religions exhort people to be kind to others, requiring them to do good deeds in "this world." For instance in the old society, some religious bodies and believers raised money to build bridges and pave roads, to found social welfare institutions and charitable organizations, etc. Today, continuing such a tradition, people in the religious circles are operating undertakings of public benefit, such as cultural continuation classes, professional training courses, child welfare institutes, welfare work for handicapped people, protection of religious relics, afforestation of mountain regions, etc., and such efforts in building a socialist culture ought to be commended.

E. Religious circles have a specific role to play in safeguarding world peace.

In the past thirty or more years, religious leaders in China have advanced understanding and friendship between our people and people of other countries through their contacts with the outside world. In opposing aggressive wars and safeguarding world peace, they have made a valuable contribution. Today, in order to be able to devote ourselves entirely to construction, we need a peaceful international environment even more. The peoples of the world also need peace. To oppose the slaughter of human beings and endorse peace is a doctrine embraced by the great majority of religious believers. For the two billion and more believers across the world, 'peace' is their common language. Therefore, to develop the relations of our religious leaders with the outside world, and promote understanding and friendship between our people and people in other countries can help to safeguard world peace.

#### **IV. Sustained Efforts to Overcome Incompatibilities for the Promotion of the Modernization Program**

While we affirm that basic changes have taken place in our religious situation and religion can be compatible with socialist society, we must also be aware of factors of inconsistency which will long persist. These are seen in contradictions of two different natures.

A. Criminal activities and counter-revolutionary sabotage under religious camouflage.

After the exploiting class as a class has died away, class struggle is no longer the main contradiction in society. Yet due to influences arising from certain domestic and international factors, class struggle will exist to a certain extent for a long time. Some elements hostile to socialism will utilize religion to carry out all kinds of disruptive activities, such as using religion to disseminate reactionary propaganda, to swindle people out of their money, to disrupt public order and security, and to impair the health of citizens.

We must continue to be on constant alert against the anti-China activities of antagonistic elements in international religious circles. They attempt in every possible way to interfere and meddle in the affairs of our religious bodies and control them and try to sabotage the independence and autonomy of the Catholic Church and the "Three-Self" Patriotic Movement of the Protestant churches in our country.

B. Under certain conditions, some traditional religious ideas, beliefs, regulations, institutions and activities have a negative impact on ordinary believers.

Seeking happiness in the "next world" is a basic belief of many religions. On the premise of seeking greater common ground with socialism, we can preserve this lesser "difference" with regard to religious faith. But some people who have encountered frustrations in their lives may try to seek a spiritual refuge in religion, and if they have not been properly guided by patriotic clergymen, they will sink deeper and deeper in the quagmire of fatalism, becoming disheartened and pessimistic, affecting their work and study. This is the narcotic effect of religious ideas in a new situation. There is a rather typical instance in a rural area where a young girl starved herself to death after she was told that prayer with fasting could transport her to heaven.

The different religions often deal with human relations in terms of whether one professes their beliefs or not. Around the time of liberation, imperialists and reactionaries enormously exaggerated the saying that "believers can not be yoked together with unbelievers," and roused believers against the Communist Party. Although such a fallacy has been refuted by patriotic people in religious circles, its negative influence still lingers on to some extent, making some believers confuse friend with foe, and right with wrong, affecting their unity with non-believers, and making them liable to manipulation by evil elements.

At present, not a few people recently converted to religion are prompted by the desire to have their illnesses healed, and this is specially true in the rural areas. It is a commonplace that when religious believers fall ill, they will pray to God. This problem cannot be fundamentally solved until the material life and cultural level of the people have been gradually raised, medical science and public health care have made continual progress, and people have been constantly given education in scientific knowledge. Its realization will take a long time. The issue facing us today is that some people play up the idea that diseases can be cured by praying to God and they refuse any kind of medical treatment. We must educate these people and dissuade them from such a practice.

To carry on normal religious activities is a civil right protected by the state. At present, the primary task of the people of the whole country is to devote themselves to national construction, and religious activities should be properly arranged so that they will not affect production. But there are some people who put undue emphasis on seeking "spiritual" satisfaction, and by multiplying religious activities and fanning up religious fanaticism, hamper production. We ought to educate them and give them proper guidance. On the other hand, to interfere with normal religious activities on the pretext of production is also forbidden by the Constitution.

Prior to Liberation, there existed a close integration of religion with education among certain ethnic minorities, for whom temples were at once religious institutions and places for education. After Liberation, the policy of separation between religion and education has been implemented, and there have been essential changes in this situation. But since the ten years of turmoil, interference on the part of religion with education has reappeared in some places, such as compelling school children to learn religious scriptures, disturbing order in the

schools, etc. This goes against the principle stipulated in the Constitution that "religion must not impede the educational system of the state." Of course, except in special cases, these happenings are mainly contradictions among the people.

The above are inconsistencies coming from the side of religion. As regards cadres of the Party and the state, if they fail to implement the policy of religious freedom, incompatibility will also arise. Nowadays, in implementing the policy of religious freedom stress must be still laid on correcting 'leftist' deviations, but we must also avoid and overcome the laissez-faire attitude towards criminal activities committed in the name of religion. Therefore, only by resolute implementation of the policy of religious freedom can we unite religious believers in the common effort to build our country.

#### **Notes:**

1. Deng Xiaoping, "Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth from Facts and Unite as One in Looking to the Future," *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping [English edition]*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), p.154.

2. Engels, "The Book of Revelation." *Complete Works of Marx and Engels [Chinese edition]*, Vol. XXI, (Beijing: People's Publishing Press, 1965), p. 11.

3. Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of the Classical Philosophy in Germany," *Complete Works of Marx and Engels [Chinese edition]*, Vol. XXI, (Beijing: People's Publishing Press, 1965), p.349.

4. Engels, "Socialism of the Jurists," *Complete Works of Marx and Engels [Chinese edition]*, Vol. XXI, (Beijing: People's Publishing Press, 1965), p.545-546.

5. Engels, "On the Early History of Christianity," *Complete Works of Marx and Engels [Chinese edition]*, Vol. XXII., (Beijing: People's Publishing Press, 1965), p.525.

6. Lenin, "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion," V .1. *Lenin Collected Works [English edition]*, Vol. XV, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p.402-403.

7. Zhou Enlai, "On Problems Concerning Our Policy towards National Groups," *Selected Works of Zhou Enlai [Chinese edition]*. Vol. 11, (Beijing: People's Publishing Press, 1984), p.267.

*SASS Papers. 1986 (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Science Press, 1986), p.369.*  
*translated by Qiu Shi*

## 11. Christianity and Western Civilization – Zhao Fusan

Comparative studies of Chinese and Western civilization have recently attracted considerable attention in the academic world. People have been discussing this issue ever since the May Fourth Movement began in 1919. Those who wish to undertake comparative studies of Chinese and Western civilizations must first have a basic understanding of each civilization.

In the May Fourth period the two most influential scholars engaged in comparative studies of Chinese and Western civilizations were first Liang Shuming (1893-1987) and later Hu Shi (1891-1962). In "Chinese and Western Civilizations and Their Philosophies" Liang declared: "Western philosophy is inclined towards the external, it is especially well developed in areas pertaining to the natural world and inanimate objects. The result of this has been a neglect of human affairs; a special feature of its philosophy of life from the past to the present... to put it succinctly: is esteem for rational thought." He also stated "Hebrew thought ran almost counter to human well-being, it did not lead one forward along the road of life, but rather turned its face towards the past."

Chan Yuemin, the deputy section head of the Western Europe Section of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences wrote an article in *Chinese Social Science* (No.5) entitled, "An Outline of the Philosophy and History of European Unification." He pointed out that every aspect of culture in each European country was formed under the influence of Christianity. In fact we can also see the influence of Christianity in North American, South American and Atlantic cultures.

The study of ancient Chinese thought cannot be divorced from Confucianism and Taoism, while that of Song and Ming-dynasty Neo-Confucian thought must take Buddhist ideas into account. Naturally, then, the study of Western civilization cannot overlook the spirit inherited from Judeo-Christian thought and Greek rationalism. Of course this will touch upon the evolutionary development of Christianity from Judaism and its effect upon Western civilization and thought. This essay will undertake a cursory investigation of the relationship between Christianity and Western civilization. I intend to discuss:

- (1) The inherent relationship between religion and civilization.
- (2) The various forms of the historical relationship between Christianity and Western civilization.
- (3) The influence of Christian teachings upon Western thought.

What is the inherent relationship between civilization and religion? This can be viewed in two ways: (1) in the relationship between religion and primitive thought; (2) in the relationship between religious thought and rational thought.

Religion is a product of history. It is commonly defined as the belief that beyond the real world there exists a mysterious realm and power, supernatural and superhuman, which rules

over nature, society and human beings, and therefore inspires fear and adoration. But how did this come about?

## I

Over the past fifty years philosophy, psychology, anthropology and sociology have all pursued the question of the origins and development of primitive human thought and the laws which governed it. The materialist criterion for the differentiation of humankind from animals is the manufacture of tools for production. But there is another aspect we must consider - that which makes humans human and differentiates them from other forms of life: their advanced thought processes. Any animal has the survival instinct accumulated over the ages. Humans, however, are not satisfied merely with meeting the material needs for the basic necessities but are concerned with spiritual activity as well. The need for survival was the starting point. Humankind perceived the surrounding world - the alternation of day and night, floods, the growth and withering of plants, the individual's own mental and physical worlds - through the senses, and through a long process of accumulation and repetition experience took shape as ideas. By a long process of trial and error, humankind gradually came to be able to relate various things and ideas and discover the causal relationships among them. The French scholar Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1857-1939) in *Primitive Mentality* came to the conclusion, based on his prodigious research into how the mythology of primitive tribes entered human language and thought, that for the most primitive humans forming these ideas one by one was a very difficult thing and that discovering among all these things a causal relationship was even more difficult.

Archaeological findings have shown that in the Stone Age (30,000 BC - 10,000 BC) humans had already placed special emphasis on reproduction, life and death, and food. Views on celestial and terrestrial spirits seem to have developed later; only when abstract thinking had reached the point where simple reasoning was possible, did primitive humans begin to believe that there existed a spirit behind all things. Whether they called this "spirit," "life force" or "God" is no more than a matter of terminology, the essential point is that it demonstrates that primitive man's thought processes had attained a certain level. Once human consciousness began to take form it had to go through the necessary transition from perceptual to rational knowledge. Starting from the need for survival, human beings attempted to understand nature and life itself, sought out the causal relationships among all sorts of natural phenomena and tried to grasp clearly the connections between natural and biological phenomena. This was the earliest rational activity. However, in the beginning, when two events occurred simultaneously by chance, such as an old person dying and a baby being born at the same time, they were often viewed as necessarily connected. In the very beginning people could not conceptually differentiate the two completely different events of birth and death; for example, they felt that after death the person would be restored to life or that the soul would not be destroyed. The objects found in tombs of this period are evidence of this concept. This is a result of the many limitations of primitive humanity. If we wish to explore the origins of religion, we must explore the appearance of human consciousness. In the course of these explorations we find that once human consciousness was born, there gradually took shape, out of attempts at rational explanation of the world, what would later be called "religious" points of view such as "there is a spirit in all things" and "the soul will

not perish." Some scholars of religion assert that religious consciousness accompanied the appearance of humankind and developed along with it; however, we can see from the materials discovered in archeological excavations that this is not so. It developed gradually. From the stages in the development of religious consciousness of primitive people we can see their primitive attempts at rational thought. Even though their views are immature and not in accord with objective reality, they are the product of humankind's first attempts to think rationally. We cannot dismiss them out of hand. In any event, religion was primitive humanity's first rational thinking. Simply because the development of modern science has far outstripped that of the ancient era or because religious views of the world were inaccurate, we cannot deny the position and function of religion in the history of the development of human consciousness. The sum of the knowledge of ancient peoples about nature, society and life later came to be termed a "religious" system of interpretation. It in turn influenced the entire society of the ancient peoples. Therefore, it forms a vital link between religion and civilization.

## II

The Roman Empire reached the highpoint of its development in the second century A.D. and afterwards entered a gradual decline. In the fourth century the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as its official religion and abolished the emperor worship which had begun with Augustus (63 BC - 14 AD). The aim was to use the force of this newly flourishing religion to prop up the weakened empire. In the end this was a futile attempt. The political, economic and social contradictions had clearly corroded the basic structure of the Empire. In 410 Rome was captured by Germanic tribes and in 476 the Roman Empire in the West was destroyed. Over the next three centuries the Germanic tribes overran Western Europe. All that remained were ruined cities and what was, in a spiritual sense, the shadow of the Empire - the Christian Church. In order for the Germanic tribes to establish their own regimes, they needed a system of regulations regarding land; they needed laws, courts and literate clerks to explain the laws and so forth; in this way the clergy of the Christian Church joined forces with the Frankish rulers. During the Roman Empire the Christian Church had developed a system of institutions, religious regulations and episcopal tribunals to adjudicate disputes. All these were gradually adopted by the Frankish rulers; this brought the Christian Church and the Frankish Kingdom closer.

Christianity had followed the Jewish scriptures in its laws. The Ten Commandments are recorded in Exodus 20: 3-17. The first four regulate the relationship between God and the Israelites, the last six set forth regulations concerning Israelite society. According to ancient Jewish law, anyone who broke one of the Ten Commandments should be put to death. These were the basis of the legal and ethical norms of Europe in the Middle Ages. The Roman Empire had laid down the famous "Roman Law," but the Germanic tribes discarded it after the fall of the Roman Empire and church regulations and commentaries on the Bible were the bases for judicial decisions throughout the entire Middle Ages. Up until the middle of the eleventh century there were no specialized legal scholars. It was only in the 250 years which followed, in the struggle over rights between Kings and the Papacy that each side required legal scholars (all drawn from the clergy) who could set forth arguments supporting one side over the other. Thus began the specialized legal scholars who were the forerunners of

lawyers. These legal experts revived Roman Law, formulated national laws and gradually completed a civil law following on the development of the commodity economy. The Pope in Rome created a group of legal scholars to serve as church officials, so monarchs began to nurture men of legal talent to serve as government officials. This had a far-reaching effect on the shape, structure and organization of European government.

Christianity and morality are inseparable. Laws are used to regulate people's outward social behavior. They are the minimal norms of social behavior which people must respect; how then, in the various stages of a continually developing society, can people be made to conscientiously respect the norms of the society and preserve a normal social order? In ancient times when people began to consider this question they had some dim perception of the relationship between moral consciousness in real life and people's spiritual life. At the same time they perceived that there were no limits to the pursuit of virtue. Thus Plato pointed out that the greatest good could only be attained by "a flight of the soul." Plato began with rational thought, proceeding finally to a mystical religious concept. Although early Christian thought was heavily influenced by Platonism, in the sphere of ethics and morality, it began with religious faith and proceeded towards reality. From the Ten Commandments given by God, Judaism developed 613 moral precepts as fixed religious laws. An important aspect of Christianity's reform of Judaism was the abolition of these over-elaborate formalities. In the moral sphere the only command was to "love God and love thy neighbor." Christians brought the two together, harmonizing people's inner moral consciousness. They believed there was only one principle governing what people should and should not do: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." This comes close to the ancient Chinese thinker Mozi's doctrine of universal love. Christians declared this was God's will and commandment and that God watched over all human activity and rewarded those who obeyed Him in all ways and punished those who violated His commands. This strict demand for a moral life was one reason the early Christians were able to attract non-believers to join them. It is a common theme in ancient thought that religious faith gives strength to morality. It may take the form of religious doctrine but it seeks to resolve actually existing social problems. By comparison with contemporary society, the ancients used archaic and religious language to raise and resolve compulsory behavioral rules and to elicit voluntary observance of these by their adherents (morality). For historical reasons, the relationship between Christianity and morality in Europe has always been very close. This is true even to this day.

There is also an historical background to the relationship between Christianity and education. We can see that the origin and development of educational systems and organizations was inseparable from the Christian Church. John of Salisbury, (1115-1180) one of the Christian humanist scholars at the Cathedral School in Chartres (southwest of Paris), had a tremendous influence on later generations. John of Salisbury possessed a rich knowledge of philosophy and logic, but he believed the principal aim of the school should be moral education and so he emphasized the importance of humanist studies. His thinking directly influenced the premier writer of the Italian Renaissance, Petrarch (1304-1374), and the greatest humanist scholars during the Reformation, Erasmus (1446-1536) and Sir Thomas More (1478-1535). The universities which appeared after the twelfth century, such as the first one - the University of Paris - were developed from a Cathedral school base. The University of Bologna in northern Italy which became famous for legal studies, the University of Padua in southern

Italy which became known for medicine, and Oxford University, as well as other early universities in Europe, were all established under the patronage of bishops. The significance of these universities lay not only in their breaking through the narrow confines of the educational content of the monastery education which preceded them, and introducing an argumentative method of thinking, but also because given the fact that they were all established in cities, they reflected the thinking and culture of the newly rising urban classes. The courses of study these universities required of students, the texts they set, and the classification of degrees for graduates, have prevailed in Western higher education to this day. Therefore if we wish to study the history of Western education we must touch upon the history of Christianity.

European arts such as painting, sculpture, architecture and music are all inseparable from the ideas and activities of the Christian Church. This is even more apparent in literature. The entire literary corpus of the Middle Ages had Christianity as its subject matter. In the early Renaissance the *Divine Comedy* of Dante (1265-1321), the sculptures of Michelangelo (1475-1564) and the painting of Raphael (1483-1520) still dealt with Christian subjects. Dante was greatly influenced by the theology of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). The later English works, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* by John Milton (1608-1674), *Pilgrims' Progress* by John Bunyan (1628-1688), immortal classics of the Russian authors Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) and Feodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), and the French writer Victor Hugo (1802-1885) had Christian ideas and themes at their core. The reason for this may well be that any literary work cannot be separated from humankind and even though people may have the impression that religion has God at its center, it is actually mostly concerned with human life. The ancient Greek philosophers gave the command "Know thyself." The fact that there is no abstract theory of human nature does not mean one should not consider human life in concrete terms. In the West, both Christian thought and literature have explored this question in their different ways, and this may help to explain the close relationship between the two.

Let us consider the relationship between Christianity and European philosophy. Before the destruction of the ancient world, Christianity had assimilated Neo-Platonist philosophy. Throughout the Middle Ages philosophical questions, such as the origins of the universe, the universe itself, the value of human life, ethics, the significance of world development, and logic were all raised in the context of Christianity. And did conducting these inquiries under the auspices of Christianity hinder the development of society? This will be discussed below. Here I will just point out that in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, which Engels termed the prelude to the rise of the European bourgeoisie, two of the principal leaders, Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564), were both heavily influenced by the fifth century theologian Augustine.

The relationship between Christianity and Western languages is also very close. For example, the story of God creating Adam and Eve, that of the serpent luring them to their fall, the symbol of peace, - the dove holding an olive branch in its mouth - the words angel, Satan, prophet, prophesy, repentance, salvation, heaven and hell used in the West, are no longer confined to Christian terminology but are a part of everyday language. In the fifth century, Jerome, one of the Doctors of the Western church, translated the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into popular Latin, which had a long-lasting influence on the Latin of the Middle Ages. In the early seventeenth century King James I (1603-1625) of England commissioned



the translation of the Bible into English. This translation made great use of Jerome's rendering, and the resultant King James Bible made a great contribution to the English language. Luther's translation of the Bible into German made a similar contribution to that language. (In passing we might note that even though the Chinese consciousness of religion is a bit low, if we consider the origins of some Chinese compounds, we will find that many words which we use every day are derived from Buddhism: schoolwork (*gongke*) close the door (*biguan*), result (*jieguo*), cause (*yinyuan*) and consciousness (*juewu*). Moreover we have absorbed some terms from Western religion as well, for example, *libai* as equivalent to *xinggi*, meaning week. If we lack an understanding of Christianity we will have difficulty comprehending a number of common words in Western languages.

Even the development of Western natural science is inseparable from Christianity. It is well-known that for a long time there were contradictions between the development of science and the Christian Church, but there is another side to the picture - the two were also closely connected. We can come to realize this through the study of the history of science. In both ancient times and in the Middle Ages it was the clergy who conducted scientific research. For example, the noted English philosopher and Father of experimental science, Roger Bacon (c.1220-c.1292), was a Franciscan monk. His books such as *Opus Majus* were presented to the pope. Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo (1564-1642) were both monks. Often people consider only the contradictions between science and religious beliefs and neglect their common feature - both have a great interest in the mysteries of nature and life. Some undertook their investigations out of religious devotion. However, their findings came into conflict with teachings handed down by the church since ancient times, and so were harshly suppressed by the church. This is the way objects interact with each other dialectically. And this also explains how, in the history of their mutual development, though the contradictions between science and religion became important, the two were also inextricably linked. (In passing we might note that we can see a similar situation in the relationships between Taoism and medicine and chemistry and Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan medicine.)

The impact of Christianity upon the daily life of Western peoples can be seen everywhere. People may not often go to church to worship, but Christianity still permeates their lives. Given that culture is the sum total of a human community's way of thinking, system of values, social organization and way of life as these have been shaped by history, with economic activity and the means of production as its foundation, and language and thought as the heart; given also that upon this foundation and thought in each age are produced a society's political organization, science and technology, law, morality, literature, art, philosophy, system of values and way of life and that all these are embraced by what we call culture, then one can see in all aspects of European history and social activities the extremely close relationship between Christianity and culture. Moreover, the development of Christianity itself is a part of European civilization, because even though it emphasizes faith, it has always in every way appealed to people's reason and found expression in human thought and action.

### III

Over its two thousand years of development, Christianity has absorbed ideas from western Asia and Greece to form an integrated system of thought - theology; which includes ontology, the Doctrine of Man, the Doctrine of Salvation and eschatology as its four main branches.

First we will see what questions are raised by ontology (or the Doctrine of God) in Christian theology. In philosophy, all questions about the world are in the end reduced to that raised by Leibniz (1646-1716): why does the world exist, why is there something; why not rather nothing? This is a basic question of philosophy. Plato stated in *Timaeus* that the creator formed and created everything in the universe, including humanity according to an eternal and unchanging form. What is surprising is that 3000 years ago, five centuries before Plato, the Hebrews raised the same question, following from Mesopotamian thinking. The ancient Hebrews used archaic and religious language to address indirectly and vaguely the question which later generations would raise and attempt to answer - Why does the world exist or "be" rather than not? They believed it was "God" who created the world out of "nothing" and thus made "being." In this form it is religious teaching or myth, but it is essentially the same question raised and explored by Laozi, Plato and Leibniz. In the history of philosophy a standard measure of the level of the thought of a given age is what sort of philosophical questions are posed. It is extremely difficult even to pose such a question, let alone answer it. It is truly amazing that the ancient Hebrews could pose such a profound question and attempt to answer it. It was only because their thinking had not yet reached a high level of abstraction that they could only employ concrete images to express their thoughts and thus stated that "God" created all things and that God created man in His own image. As to this, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) asserted "It was not God who created man in His own image, but rather man who created God in his own image." This was a common idea in Feuerbach's time and it must be given its place in intellectual history. However, here we are only interested in the origins and development of religion, and the question raised by Judaism and Christianity of where humankind and the world came from is a natural philosophical question. The language used by religion is certainly archaic, but language is only a vehicle for thought, merely an instrument, and the question put here is a fundamental one.

The content of ontology in Christianity is not limited to the commonly-stated "God created the earth and all things in it." What was the relationship between God and the created after creation? Once people came to appreciate this point, what meaning did it have for human life? These are in fact questions involving our basic attitude to the world and to life, and fall within the scope of Christian ontology.

The first point concerns how we view the changing world. The ancient Greeks held that all things were constantly in flux. Plato strove to find an immutable "form" behind the things in flux. Faced with a changing society, the Taoists of ancient China turned back towards an ancient primitive Utopia. Christianity was different. At the core of the doctrines of Christian theology is the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit - one God in three forms. From the standpoint of the history of religion, this was originally a pagan idea, not a Christian one. It is a product of the mingling of Christianity and the Greek polytheistic religions of the eastern Mediterranean. However, two to three hundred years after it took

shape, this doctrine of the Trinity had great influence upon Western thought. It raised questions which are both transcendent and practical. It asserts that God transcends the world and is at the same time a part of it, that human society is the embodiment of the will of God in human history. This was the first time human history was affirmed, and professed to have meaning. This was a new viewpoint raised by Christian thinkers in the ancient era. Though expressed in a religious form, its affirmation of meaning in history is the same issue we attempt to elucidate today. The first to give a relatively complete affirmation of history in terms of the history of philosophy was Augustine (354-430), a doctor of the Western Church and a Christian theologian. He lived at a time when the ancient world was falling apart, its society in disorder. People could not make a living, they saw no hope for the future. In such an environment he was able to penetrate historical phenomena in order to seek its essence and he considered it to be meaningful. Another Doctor of the Western Church, Jerome, used the Ecclesiastical History written by Bishop Eusebius in the fourth century as a basis for his compilation of a chronological table of great historical events. This represented a breakthrough in the way history was written, surpassing the previous practice of writing national histories and in fact originated the viewpoint that the world had a common, integrated history and widened the field of vision of historians in the Middle Ages. Fifteen hundred years later the main currents of Christian thought still affirm history and do not negate the real world.

This leads us to a philosophical question about the fundamental attitude towards human life. Here we might mention the differences between Christian thought and that of ancient Greece and India. The ancient Indians held that life was endless and unlimited suffering - "striving and failing," "sadness at meeting," "happiness at parting," - the real world was but a revolving wheel in which undying souls endlessly reincarnated in suffering. Only if one completely denied the world could one escape from this suffering. Although the ancient Greeks had no idea of reincarnation, they felt that humanity was forever at the mercy of fate. The Greek tragedy Oedipus Rex is an extreme expression of this. The Pythagorean school believed that numbers exerted a decisive force on human fate, a common belief in ancient times. Christianity was different. It had an integrated view of history and held that the development of human society was due to God's acting in history out of His providence for humankind. This is what is meant by "God in the world." However, at the same time, God is not of this world, and He is above this world; this is what meant by the "transcendence of God." The basic Christian attitude towards life developed from this: affirming the basis of the real world and at the same time trying hard to transcend it, and seeking to maintain an equilibrium of thought among the contradictions of the real world. Living in the real world with constant changes, one constantly hopes and occasionally despairs, as though spiritually adrift in the ocean. How can one maintain equilibrium of heart? Proceeding from this, Christian thinkers worked out both practical and transcendent issues. On the one hand, people live in the real world, while on the other hand they strive to escape from real society to a life of sober contemplation. This is the application of the concepts of the "immanence" and "transcendence" of God to real life. In fact, it provides people with the attitude with which to handle the contradictions of the real world.

This offers a contrast with ancient Chinese philosophy. In China the Confucianists emphasized people's social responsibilities, one could say they advocated a philosophy of

this world. The Taoists, on the other hand, counterposed the natural world with society, and were a bit more "otherworldly" than the Confucians. In *Zhuangzi* it says: "The Confucians swam inside the place, the Taoists outside it." The "place" is society. In Chinese philosophy Confucianism and Taoism are both mutually opposed and mutually complementary. People in ancient China approached life under the influence of these two schools of thought and realized that there must be a mental or spiritual balance between being "in this world" and "outside this world." However, in ancient Europe it was Christianity itself which provided the balance between these two views and gave humankind the required spiritual equilibrium.

Secondly, let us consider the relationship of Christian theology's "Doctrine of Man" to philosophy and anthropology. The Doctrine of Man asserts: Man was created in the image of God, but is different from God. Man has two natures, one is divine, tending towards unlimited potential for the good, the true and the beautiful; on the other side there are also unlimited appetites originating in the self. These two sides constantly struggle within humans, forcing them to develop by struggling against themselves. This is the view of the human condition provided by Christianity. Many Western works of literature revolve around this theme and expand upon it; if one lacks an understanding of the background of this idea it will be truly be difficult to understand these literary works. The editor of *The Cambridge Modern History*, English historian Lord Acton (1834-1902), wrote a letter to a friend which contained a statement often quoted in the West: "Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely." This idea has its origins in the Christian "Doctrine of Man."

Christianity considers humans to be the most wonderful objects in the natural world. Augustine says in *The City of God*, 21:10 ". . . this other mode of union, by which bodies and spirits are bound together and become animals, is thoroughly marvelous, and beyond the comprehension of man, though this it is which is man."<sup>??</sup> Augustine, following Plato, held that the spirit and the flesh are conceptually distinct. This idea has had a far-reaching effect on Western thought. However Augustine did not just stop at Plato's idea, here he is trying very hard to discover how the two may be reconciled. However, in the fifth century natural science was unable to provide any scientific explanation; what explanations existed were insufficient to answer the questions raised by Augustine's philosophical speculations. In the seventeenth century the French scientist and philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was still pondering: "For Man, he is the most wonderful object in the natural world; because he cannot comprehend what flesh is, nor can he comprehend what the spirit is, and there is nothing more incomprehensible than how the flesh can be joined to the spirit; this is the greatest of his difficulties and this his very existence." Natural science can analyze and explain the structure and functions of the human body, its physiology and psychology, but people need to inquire into the value and meaning of life.

Christianity holds that a person must reflect upon him or herself. A person living in the real world has unlimited potential to seek the true, the good and the beautiful. We call this a later "greatness." But there is another side to this: one cannot help but be aware how insignificant one's own material existence is in the long course of history. People always

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\* *St. Augustine, The City of God*, tr. Marcus Dods, Modern Library edition (New York: Random House, 1950).

seek their own well-being - this is a traditional European idea - but at the same time people must realize that their individual well-being is temporally limited and evanescent, and this causes them great suffering. People are always searching for something, and there is no limit to their desires, but people themselves have limitations. Christian theology characterizes these as "sins," in fact you could say it is a reflection of the contradictions of real life in a person's mind. The word "sin" in the Greek Bible connotes an arrow that has missed the target. Here it is used to indicate that though people always strive for their ideals and goals, the subjective cannot control the objective, and since people also have their individual limitations, the goals they pursue are often very difficult to realize. We cannot avoid failure in life and it is certainly very painful. Living in such a reality, we cannot help but ask an even more basic question: What is the meaning our own existence? Asking this question can bring on even great suffering. Failure to ask ourselves this question means living ignorance. In that case, how are we different from the other animal!

The Doctrine of Man also addresses the question of death. Only humankind thinks about death. We draw nearer to death with each passing day from the moment we are born into this world, but we also grow each day. Life and death together permeate and penetrate our entire lives. Usually people forbid the mention of "death" and refuse to give it any serious consideration, as if it would stand in the way of seeking life's pleasures. In the Gospel of Luke (12:16-21) there is the parable of a foolish rich man who thinks that by accumulating numerous possessions he can satisfy his soul. This has been used as a warning to people - no one can escape the hands of death. Does this counsel represent a pessimistic view of life? Yes and no. Such counsel can clarify for people the limits of their destiny and from this ultimate limitation bring them to a realization that the individual is limited in all things. Thus it will be easier to attain self-knowledge. This is extremely important and extremely difficult for each person. At the same time it teaches people how they should live their lives - if this day were the last day of your life, how would you live it? This is a very serious question about our view of life and is certainly worth pondering. To ponder death is to ponder life. Confucius said "If one is ignorant of life, how can one know death?" This is actually only one side of the issue. Christianity presents the other side - "If one is ignorant of death, how can one know life?" Let people explore the meaning of life within these contradictory poles and through an understanding and critique of reality, go in quest of their ideals.

The Christian Doctrine of Man does not merely view humanity as isolated individuals, but places them in the world and links each one to other people and then raises questions. Genesis (3:6-10) tells us that after Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit, they discovered that they were naked and hid themselves among the trees of the garden. Yahweh could not find them and asked Adam "Where are you?" Even though this story is a myth, it embodies a very deep philosophical question: Where, within this vast earth, this confused and complicated world, can people settle down to lead a peaceful life? Similarly, Genesis (4:3-9) recounts that when Cain killed his brother Abel out of jealousy, Yahweh asked him "Where is Abel your brother?" This, too, embodies a profound question of social ethics and morality - how should relationships between people be conducted? This story reflects the fact that at least 2500 years ago, Hebrew social ethics and morality had reached a stage of development which held that the existence and growth of a person was inextricably related to the relationships between human beings. That the ancient Hebrews

raised such issues indicates that this people wished to inquire into its own position in and impact upon the long course of history and the various nations which made up the ancient world, and probe relationships among persons. Later Christian thinkers would raise these questions again in different forms and these became questions that have been explored throughout the history of Western thought. If we deny the substance and significance of these questions because they employ archaic language and religious terminology, then it will be very difficult to understand the development of Western civilization.

Let us now consider the Christian doctrine of soteriology (or the Doctrine of Salvation). Christianity was originally a new sect of Judaism. Jews believed the Messiah would be a hero of this world who would save his people. Judaism originally had no concept of the hereafter. Thus the Jewish scripture, the Torah (a part of the Old Testament) recounts that when Moses reached the age of 120 years, "he went to sleep," and no one knew where he was buried. In the first century Christians proposed the concept of life after death, which was absorbed from the Eastern mystery religions popular in Greece at the time. Later Christian theology held that people are inescapably egocentric because they have "sinned;" this is not "sin" in the social sense of violating laws, but refers to putting the self at the center in a spiritual sense, and sinking into a state of endless inner torment as a result; this is what is meant by "original sin." So how can salvation and release be attained? To rely upon oneself would be no different than trying to lift oneself up by one's own hair - it simply can't be done. Should we rely on others? At best, that would be the blind leading the blind. Who can save another? Christianity teaches that God out of His love for the world "gave of Himself," and embodied part of himself in a human being - Jesus - who would go among mortals and experience all their suffering and despair, one with them except that He had no sin. Through Him humankind would be saved, turned away from their egocentricity to be centered on God and others (the objective world), released from the cage of self-centeredness to be spiritually "saved." This idea had already appeared in the latter half of the first century in Paul's Epistle to the Romans and after the eleventh century it gradually became a central doctrine of the Christian Church. If this principle had been proclaimed in philosophical terms at that time, probably very few people would have been able to understand it. Christianity moved people with a living image which could not fail to cause people to believe and follow.

If one is to attain salvation, Christianity demands that one renounce the past and be reborn. Up to the Middle Ages this meant that a life of contemplation apart from the world was the highest ideal. But after the rise of the Christian humanists in the twelfth century, avoiding the world was no longer encouraged; rather, one was to renounce egocentrism and enter the world.

The Latin origin of humanism is *humus* meaning earth, which involves the story in Genesis of God creating Adam out of earth. The rise of humanism in the Middle Ages was a reaction against narrow piety. This is one of its principal characteristics and humanism is usually explained from this viewpoint. However there are two aspects of humanism: one is the recognition that all persons, no matter how humble their social status, are of equal worth and humanism reaffirms that worth; another aspect is its opposition to egocentrism. Affirmation of human worth would later be developed by bourgeois thinkers into the modern Western concept of "individuality." The implications of individuality and egocentricity are

utterly different in the West. To affirm that a person is an individual, someone to be valued, whose worth is inseparable from his or her individuality, is not to imply that one should be concerned only with self-benefit nor is it to advocate self-aggrandizement - the two are different. This is an important point for understanding Western thought and culture. Christian humanism teaches that Christians must be reborn, no longer arrogant and conceited. Human beings are placed on the same level as God, but this encounter with the infinity of God brings humans to a realization of their own finiteness and makes them humble. "Humility" is derived from the Latin word *humilitatis* which comes from the root *humus* (earth). Thus "human" and "humility" are both derived from *humus*, implying that humans should be aware that their place in the universe over the long course of world history is as negligible as that of mud. People must realize the limited nature of human knowledge, action, capabilities and even rational thought and thus acquire a sense of humility. This is the basic attitude towards life which Christianity demands of its adherents.

Confucius also said "Eschew foregone conclusions, predetermination, obstinacy and egoism," but this is just advice on how to conduct ourselves; Confucius (at least in this case) has given us no theoretical explanation. Christianity, proceeding from the theoretical foundation of the Doctrine of Man, teaches that the view people should take towards life primarily stems from having a realistic, factual view of themselves. Thus we can demonstrate that a person should maintain a rational humble attitude. Here Christian thinking differs markedly from the ancient Greek or Renaissance views, and complements them. Christian theology's view of human nature is not "human beings' original nature is essentially good," nor does it advocate "the liberation of the individual," and it certainly does not promote the free development of natural instincts. Rather, through an analysis of people's inner state, it reveals the conflicts there and by pointing to a higher spiritual plane, enables people to attain freedom. Both Goethe's (1749-1832) *Faust* and Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* revolve around this theme. The inquiry into human emancipation from the contradictions of both external reality and internal being has had a profound influence upon Western thought and culture.

From this we can proceed to another idea which has had great impact in the West - tolerance. The idea of tolerance was not indigenous to the West. The church courts of the Middle Ages which dealt with heresy were anything but tolerant. From 1163 when the Pope asked secular rulers to suppress heresy, up until the seventeenth century, countless people who were judged to have contravened "orthodoxy" were burned at the stake. Orthodoxy is derived from the Greek words "true faith." Later on in the sixteenth century in Western Europe there began a period of over one hundred years of "religious wars" in which the traditional feudal ruling class and the old religion struggled against the newly risen bourgeoisie and the new religion in the name of preserving orthodoxy. Europeans had gone through a century and a half of narrowly sectarian, life and death struggle until the late seventeenth century and the appearance of John Locke's (1632-1704) *Epistola de Tolerantia* when they were finally awakened to the possibility of tolerating groups with different religious ideas. This tolerance of different religious ideas also extended to tolerance of all kinds of other ideas, thus allowing people freedom of thought and judgement, and allowed the toleration of views at odds with one's own or with tradition.

From this idea of tolerance developed an ideal that is known in Western political thought as "liberalism." This word should really not be translated into Chinese as "freedom-ism" (*ziyou zhuyi*), because the English term has positive connotations while the Chinese is a pejorative term for going one's own way and having no concern for others. Liberalism might be translated as "being enlightened" (*kaiming zhuyi*) indicating that one's own thinking is enlightened and one can respect views different from one's own. This is a very important idea in modern Western political thought. Of course its origins are not simply the intellectual one described above. It is also a product of the actual political history of the West.

Finally, we come to "eschatology" in Christian theology, which means that at the end of the world God will judge all the living and the dead. The good will all receive eternal life, the bad will all be damned to hell. There are two important social ideas here - one is that everyone can attain salvation, the other is that God judges all people by a single standard: whether they have done good or evil. This transcends the bounds of nationality, class and culture. In the ancient world these ideas were a factor for revolution just as Engels has said. Amid the misery of their lives ancient peoples developed a longing for an ideal society. "Travel the way of justice, the world is for everyone" was the social ideal in ancient China. The Hebrews' social ideal can be found in Isaiah (the first thirty-nine chapters of which were written eight centuries before Christ). In Chapter 2 verse 4 and Chapter 11 verses 3 to 9 we find this expression of their social ideal: "and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." This was the ancient Hebrews' desire for a peaceful world. In the same way the Stoics of ancient Greece advocated "all men are brothers" as a social ethic. Christianity inherited this idea and it became the desire of Europeans throughout the ages: that all people treat each other as equals. Only after we appreciate this can we understand why, in fourteenth to sixteenth century Europe, oppressed races and peoples rose up many times under the banner of Christianity. In the history of Western political thought and socialist theory, the earliest Utopian socialist ideas were very closely related to Christianity. The famous Utopian socialists Robert Owen (1751-1858), Fourier (1772-1837), and Saint Simon (1755-1825) were indissolubly bound by Christian thinking.

As in all systems of thought, there have been various streams within Christianity which have given rise to various sects. The discussion above has relied on classic Christian works to examine the main currents of Christian thought over the past two thousand years. But this general picture is sufficient to disprove the notions that "Hebrew thought ran almost counter to earthly well-being, . . . did not follow the path of life and lead men forward, but turned back towards the past." To say that the West only emphasizes material things is a distortion. These views are similar to the popular idea that religion "is superstition which allows people to escape from reality." In fact, the field of intellectual history is extremely complex and one cannot separate religious viewpoints from other intellectual activities. At present Chinese academics have already begun to investigate the relationship between Buddhist thought and Neo-Confucianism and we must likewise investigate the relationship between Christian thought and Western culture. In his correspondence with young scholars during his later years, Engels often asserted that to understand any aspect of people's activities of material production one cannot ignore their spiritual life; in particular one should not neglect thought and culture, including the effect of religious viewpoints upon the historical process. This is helpful in our



investigation of the relationship between Christianity and Western civilization. Christian thought was greatly influenced by the ideas of ancient Greece from Plato to Aristotle as well as by the ideas of western Asia. These two complemented each other and both are sources of European culture. Their influence on the historical development of that culture must not be neglected. Of course, merely to focus on Christian thought to explain Western civilization could lead to errors, because thought and practice are unavoidably at variance. Furthermore, Western civilization is not entirely a product of Christianity. However, an attempt to explain Western culture which ignores Christian thought may be an even greater error and would deviate from history and from the scientific principles of history.

*Xinhua Wenzhai, October, 1987, p. 154*  
*translated by William J. Dockery*

## **12. Address to the Seventh Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference – Zhao Puchu**

Mr. Chairman and Members:

I speak on behalf of the members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) from religious circles.

We fully approve the report of Vice-chairman Chen Xuesen on the work of the Sixth CPPCC and unanimously endorse Acting Premier Li Peng's report on the government's work given at this First Session of the Seventh CPPCC.

We are most enthusiastic about the outstanding achievements of the Standing Committee of the Sixth CPPCC and those of the State Council over the past five years in domestic and diplomatic affairs as well as about the goals, guiding principles and tasks in construction and reform set out for the next five years. Religious believers in all ethnic groups in the nation, under the leadership of the Party, have already laid the basis for continued concerted effort, together with all the Chinese people, for making new contributions to national unity and revitalization and to world peace.

The five major religions of China have millions of adherents among dozens of ethnic groups. Upwards of ten such groups, mainly those found in border areas, are entirely composed of religious believers. Four of the religions found in China are world religions. Two-thirds of the world's population are religious believers. Religion has made important contributions to Chinese history and culture, leaving us a rich and splendid legacy. Religion is involved in politics, economics and culture; it has a mass, ethnic and international character, and is long lasting in nature. Practice has shown that if we are to maintain and develop the present political situation of stability and unity, both for the present and over the long term, the policy of religious freedom must be fully implemented, the broad masses of religious believers must be united to the whole people so as to inspire them to be patriotic and to build socialism, and a compatible relationship must be established between religion and Chinese-style socialism. All these actions have a positive role and are of vital significance in furthering and hastening reform, in broadening openness to the outside world and in sustaining the stable development of the economy, revitalizing and unifying the nation, and in securing world peace.

In view of the above, and in accord with the fundamental spirit of the documents of the Thirteenth Party Congress, we believe that there are three major leadership tasks which must be seriously addressed.

### **(1) Continue to Implement Religious Policy**

Since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh CPC, the Party and government have made some important decisions with regard to religious policy, achieving a great deal by tackling many difficult tasks. The national CPPCC sub-group on religion, religious organizations, and religious leaders have been of great help in assisting the relevant departments in the Party

and the government through investigation and research, drafting legislation, making policy and solving practical problems. However, in comparison with other areas, the implementation of religious policy has proceeded more slowly and unevenly, and has faced greater obstacles and problems. The implementation of religious policy cannot be taken lightly. It requires a sustained effort aimed at resolving outstanding problems, the continued existence of which has made policy implementation increasingly difficult.

The first issue is that of venues for religious activities. We must achieve a suitable balance between the number of venues and their dispersal among geographic areas and religions, and the religious needs of believers. The opening up of friendly overseas contacts and relationships among religious circles must also be taken into consideration. Those venues which were closed or taken over by other units during the Cultural Revolution should be returned forthwith and restored to their proper use. In the case of those which were appropriated or remodeled for other purposes prior to the Cultural Revolution, priority should be given to the needs of the religion involved; the present tenants who confiscated the sites should not be protected. Cases involving the return or restoration of buildings should be firmly dealt with. If no repair work is necessary ownership should be clarified and the question of financial compensation reasonably solved. We must deal cautiously and correctly with places in which, for whatever reasons, adherents of a religion choose to congregate and lead their religious lives. In the case of Buddhism, temples, shrines, monasteries, and convents would originally have been the venue for Buddhist religious activities, but at present, these are not being used. This is primarily due to the Cultural Revolution, though there were similar instances before that event. For some years the number of temples approved for religious activity by the State Council has been limited and has not entirely met the needs of either Chinese or foreign Buddhists. At the same time, there are a number of temples closed or confiscated during the Cultural Revolution which have still not been returned. Temples with great influence at home and abroad confiscated before the Cultural Revolution which are still being used for other purposes must be returned. This is an abnormal state of affairs and should be redressed. It is both unrealistic and irresponsible to suggest that only those temples already on the list need be reopened, while the rest need not be returned or reopened, and may even be destroyed.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, many ancient and well-known temples were designated as cultural monuments, but this fact did not alter their fundamental character and function as places of worship, nor did it alter the rights of Buddhists to administer them. These temples were religious venues first; their confiscation or designation as cultural monuments came second and it was this designation which allowed the occupiers to appropriate administrative and other rights. What is the sense of reversing the situation and calling the process by which Buddhists would repossess the temples and by which the temples would be restored to their original function and appearance as "altering the use" of a cultural monument, or of requiring Buddhists to seek permission from the usurpers? This is intolerable!

There is a passage in Document 101 which deals with the relationship between protected cultural landmarks and religious venues. Though Vice-chairman Panchen and I feel there are many problems with this section, it is still being defended in the Seventh National People's Congress. Panchen and I wrote a letter on this issue to Acting Premier Li Peng which has

received serious attention from the State Council and the Party Central Secretariat, which have taken it under investigation.

Religious venues include the famous mountains sacred to Buddhism and Taoism: Wutai Shan, Emei Shan, Putuo Shan and Jiuhua Shan. The scenery is admittedly beautiful, but the basis of their world-wide renown and their attraction for Chinese and foreign believers and tourists for thousands of years, lies not primarily in the scenery but because all know of their religious character as sites sacred to the four great Bodhisattvas. If this religious character were impaired, Jiuhua Shan could not compare with neighboring Huang Shan for scenery; Putuo Shan would be one tiny island in an archipelago; and there are many mountains more beautiful than Wutai or Emei. Plans to develop famous Buddhist and Taoist mountains must preserve and protect their religious features and characteristics, thus benefiting both religion and tourism. If these mountains are turned into nothing more than tourist attractions, tourism will suffer as well.

Any discussion of religious venues must include the tremendous problems in religious work in Henan. The two most famous temples in China are located there; the White Horse Temple in Loyang, one of the first Buddhist temples in China and Shaolin Si in Dongfeng, the founding temple of Chan Buddhism. The situation is very serious and the problems, particularly those affecting Shaolin Temple, have continued to mount. The first Buddhist monk to return to the mainland from Taiwan to stay at the White Horse Temple was unable to remain in Henan. Regardless of his own culpability in the matter, his case illustrates the problems in the work of the leading department in that area.

There are two famous temples in Kaifeng, the Xiangguo Si and the Iron Pagoda, but Buddhists there have nowhere to carry on their religious lives. The Venerable Jing Yan, aged 96, head of the Henan Buddhist Association and honorary member of the board of the Chinese Buddhist Association, has for years been making the rounds of official bureaus seeking the return of one of these two temples without success. This eminent gentleman and aged Buddhist elder still lives in a run-down private home.

A Xiangguo sect in Japan organized a group visit to the Xiangguo Si. The local authorities in Kaifeng prevailed upon Jing Yan at the last moment to join the group in their worship as abbot of the Temple. This year these Japanese friends of Xiangguo Si once again requested permission to worship at the Temple. I heard that the mayor of Kaifeng sent a telegram to Japan informing them that Xiangguo Si was not used for religious purposes. They might come to sightsee, but not to worship. No thought was spared for the international political implications involved, the repercussions for Sino-Japanese friendship, nor for the important contributions to normalization of diplomatic relations made by Buddhist circles in both nations. The mayor's action displayed ignorance of religion and political immaturity.

The second issue concerns temple buildings and property. Temples and related buildings have always been designated "property of society," a type of ownership which has not been stipulated in the Constitution. This has been taken to mean "state ownership" and has been used as an excuse for the arbitrary expropriation of temple buildings. This situation must be rectified. The boundaries of some temples which have been permitted to reopen have

basically been limited to the line formed where rainwater drips from their eaves. The original mountain and forest lands have yet to be returned to them. New and reasonable boundaries must be drawn, formalized and mutually acknowledged in deeds of ownership. Relics and other property confiscated during the Cultural Revolution have not been returned in full. They must be returned and compensation must be paid.

Third, the issue of salaries for religious intellectuals must be settled. Each religion has a number of intellectuals engaged in research, teaching or editorial work. Some of these are scholars and experts, highly accomplished academics. Their compensation has not been in line with the specialized and technical nature of their work. With minor exceptions, religious professionals, even those engaged in leadership tasks in religious organizations, institutes of learning or cultural units, receive a living allowance, but no salary and build up no seniority. Their work differs from that of other workers in the unit, but their pay is the same. This issue must be properly settled.

The primary reason for the serious difficulties in the implementation of religious policy can be found in the influence of leftism in the guiding ideology which has not been thoroughly eradicated. Because of this, neither the *de facto* existence and development of religion in the primary stage of socialism, nor the mass, ethnic, international, complex and long lasting character of Chinese religion are recognized. There is the mistaken idea that religious work means the weakening and destruction of religion by administrative measures. In fact the basic starting point must be to respect and protect believers' religious freedom, and to unite the broad mass of religious believers with the whole people in the common struggle to build up a Chinese-style socialism. Some comrades new to leadership work lack any knowledge of religion and are unfamiliar with religious work. Some comrades, knowing there is "leftism" involved in religious problems, speak of openness on an economic level, but are rigid on religious questions. Other important problems are the obsolete and inflexible system of leadership and administration and the weakness of laws related to religion.

## **(2) Institutional Reform Is Needed**

The serious abuses of over-concentration of power and monopoly of function in the system of leadership and administration for religious work which has grown up over the long term, are completely out of place in the present atmosphere of reform and openness. They impede the development of religious work, so reforms must be actively yet prudently undertaken. The core issue in this reform is "separation of government and religion." This follows from the spirit of Zhao Ziyang's report to the Thirteenth CPC regarding the separation of Party and government, of government and enterprise, reform of the cadre system, and rationalization of the relationship of Party and administrative organs to people's organizations. "Separation of government and religion" refers to the fact that the responsible government departments have a separate function from religious organizations, temples and churches and does not suggest that the institution of a state religion exists in China. The crux of "separation of government and religion" lies in rationalizing the leadership of administrative departments and the right of religious organizations to govern themselves according to their own characteristics. Religious believers themselves should have control of religious venues and this control should be institutionalized. Responsible government

departments carry out the leadership of the state administrative organs toward religion, implement the policy of religious freedom, safeguard and monitor the Constitution and related laws, regulations and policy, and coordinate the interaction of religion and other sectors of society. We must reform the mechanistic practices of the administrative and leadership system and its methods in working with religious organizations. Religious organizations must become true people's organizations which carry on their work independently and according to their special characteristics, enjoying the right to administer their own personnel, property and affairs under the leadership of Party and government and within the scope of the Constitution, laws and policies of the nation. This is the only way to strengthen and improve the leadership of government administrative departments and at the same time give full play to the role and vitality of religious organizations.

### **(3) Strengthen the Legal System**

Drafting a new religious law is of the utmost urgency. Only when we have such a law will the citizen's right to freedom of religion as stipulated in the Constitution become a reality and receive the full protection of the law. Only when we have such a law will legal problems in religious work be dealt with according to the law and not according to personal connections. No one will then be able to influence the workings of the policy on religious freedom with a word to some official. When we have such a law, any problems involving religion which arise between believers and non-believers, or between the masses and those in public office, will be dealt with according to the law.

In drafting a good religious law, we must first further emancipate our thinking, and break the bonds of outmoded preconceptions. We must exemplify the requirements of reform in the system of leadership and administration of religious work, open up new ground, develop new attitudes, enter new realms. The focus must be on the protection of the proper rights of religious believers, religious organizations, churches and temples. During the drafting process, persons from religious circles must be fully consulted, and a broad spectrum of views must be sought from religious workers and those in the legal profession. At present, the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council has organized a special group to undertake this task, and religious bodies are doing their utmost to assist them, with a number of leaders from religious circles preparing a proposal for a draft law on religion. I believe that a religious law which embodies Chinese characteristics and which correctly sets out the relationship between the state and religion will appear in the near future.

Thank you.

*31 March 1988*

*Religion, No. 1 (1988), p.1.*

*translated by Janice Wickeri*

## SERMONS

### **13. God is Our Guard and Eternal Home – He Huibing**

Text: Psalm 8:3-9

John 11:25-27; 12:32-36

Hebrews 3:6

The ninth day of the ninth lunar month which fell a few days ago marks the traditional Chinese Double Ninth Festival of Chongyang. This also happened to be Senior Citizens Day. The nation has set aside this day to show its respect and concern for the elderly. In my home town of Guangzhou, Double Ninth is a day for ascending to high ground. On that day, men, women, young and old all go on outings, walking in the mountains, because this is the season when autumn skies are clear and the air crisp.

It is very significant to me that Senior Citizens Day falls on Double Ninth, for the elderly are approaching a venerable age, a time for ascending the heights on the road of life. We often say that seventy years is a lifetime, but I think this saying is probably out of date, because quite a few of the brothers and sisters sitting here today are over seventy. Today, with constant improvements in health care and the standard of living, youth has been greatly extended and it is no longer unusual to live eighty years. Our elder brothers and sisters should feel proud of their longevity. Life is good and it is good to be alive!

All of us hope for a long life. No one wants to leave this world and people try all sorts of methods to prolong life. At the same time, we contemplate the value and meaning of life. Is life's worth to be measured by its length? How can we avoid death? Where can eternal life be found? What is eternal life?

The twelfth chapter of the Gospel of John is concerned with this question of eternal life. Jesus is here recorded as saying: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also. . ." What does it mean to lose life? What does it mean to keep it for eternal life? Some think that death means loss of life, so they try all sorts of ways to prevent death, thinking this means they can hang on to life. In his "Hymn of the Crucifixion," Hans Hassler writes that those who have kept the faith, though they have died, live because of love. This means that generations of saints and believers continue to live. They live with us if we cherish one faith with them. We must also believe in life after death. Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

A short time ago, a classmate of mine at Nanjing Theological Seminary was killed when the house in which he was living collapsed on top of him. He was twenty-six, young and healthy. He had graduated from seminary with a heart full of zeal for service and returned to Xinjiang to work in the church when this sudden disaster struck. His classmates were devastated by sorrow; we could not accept the facts. Many could not take it in: why should such a good person, healthy, young and strong, suddenly meet with such a death? This classmate was big and tall, his energy extraordinary and he gave generously of himself without stinting. Wherever he was needed, there he appeared. Whatever the size of the task,



he was willing to lend a hand. Though he worked silently in our midst, we all knew him. His twenty-six years were blameless, a shining light. His death could not deprive us of his existence. Just the opposite, he really and truly existed, lived, among us. His death was so sudden, so inexplicable, but it brought us up short, and was a great revelation to us in our reflections on the meaning of life. When we had calmed down, we had time to think and to ask ourselves: What if I were to die tomorrow? Would I leave any legacy behind? What have I done for the world? Could I rest in peace? Zengzi says in the *Analects of Confucius*: "Daily I examine myself on three points." If we reflected like this every day, we would come to realize how important each day, each hour, each moment of our lives is, and we would know that today is our opportunity to witness to the Christian life, that now is the beginning and course of eternal life. In Hebrews 3:7-19 we find repeated exhortations to "seize the day." Here, today means the time while we yet live in this world. No one knows how long or short her life may be. We often speak optimistically of tomorrow. But we should take each day as our whole lives - tomorrow may never come. Only today is firmly within our grasp. We must do today's tasks today, make our obedience and faith in God a reality today. The eternity we seek is not divorced from today. Every moment of this day is a vital link to eternity. So the value and meaning of our lives do not lie in their length, but in whether we have wasted them

or not.

I often remember a poem I read as a child:

How precious life is,  
How wasteful to let it slip away,  
Let not the years pass in vain –  
Why grow old only to avail death?

This poem was written by a patriotic martyr as a legacy to his infant daughter just before his execution. The meaning is that life is precious, but lives of quiet resignation have no value. If we have not wasted our lives, then whenever we depart this world, our lives have not been lived in vain and there is nothing to regret.

Time marches silently on and human life is but a brief moment in time and space. Each time I become aware of my own existence as I live through childhood, youth, and adulthood, each time I reflect upon my life in relation to time and space in this world, this brief poem brings me out of the depths of these thoughts back to present reality - this moment on the path of our lives. Compared to eternity, our mortal lives are such fleeting moments! How shall we bring this fleeting life into eternity?

Our lives are moving silently onward. Amid the busyness of our lives and work, we have many troubles, anxieties and disappointments, and sometimes we complain, we are dissatisfied, but we never connect it with that dark word, death. This is only natural. Living is instinctual. Whatever happens, we don't think of death. Life seems to be a self-evident truth, while death is so impossible, so irrational. Yet, unreasonable things often happen in this world. There are some things which, though we cannot explain or accept them, we can deny, change or transcend. But death, this soul-quaking fact, this implacable, impenetrable force, threatens us, terrifies us. People are fearful of death because it turns beautiful life into nothingness. Death seems to be an end, a world of murky darkness, a world of silence. People fear death, they know not when they will die, nor where they go when they do.

But Christianity has a positive attitude about death. The opposite of death is life. Christians seek the source and direction of life, and know that eternal life exists. Christians are not afraid of dying, they do not fear death, but deal optimistically with it. Is this because they do not love this world? Because they have no passion for life? No! We crave a good life, a fortunate life. Our hope is that all may live in a harmonious, fine world, like the Garden of Eden God created in Genesis. This is the ideal human world as Christians know it, and we want all humankind to be able to live in this natural beautiful world, not simply ourselves. We are proceeding toward this place, day by day.

Death is a reality we must accept. People might reject truth, and perhaps they are able to lead meaningless lives, but they cannot avoid death. The reason we do not fear death is because our lives and deaths are linked together in a progression. This death is neither fearful nor absolute. Our Lord Jesus' death has won life for us. When he was lifted up on the cross, new life began from the earth, there was no suggestion that life was finished. Through Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross, humankind was given a new look at the value and meaning of life. His thirty-three years of mortal life established a pattern of God for us, one which we could follow. He paid the price for us that we might gain eternal life. Thus, from the very day they

know Christ, Christians' lives carry in them the death of Christ and through this God's eternity comes into our lives.

A moment ago we sang "God is our guard and eternal home while life shall last" and I was reminded of a sister who often sang this hymn in her last hours. Tuberculosis and death threatened her. She fervently hoped for a medicine that would cure her. She didn't want to die then. She had been a doctor in a village where life was very hard for over a decade, treating the villagers' illnesses. And now she had been transferred back to a city hospital, she was still young, she had a small child, she had her work. The hope and ideal of life made her crave existence while death threatened. When she knew her own life had reached its end, she did not lose hope. She did not complain how badly fate had used her. Instead she sang, full of hunger for life. She expressed her passion for life in song, in prayer, in praise. She did not pray that God would work a miracle to prolong her life because as a doctor, she was quite clear about her illness and the finiteness of existence. Her eyes were fixed on a vision of the eternal God. She was quiet, at peace, and her power to endure pain was amazing. Guiding the gaze of those around her, she turned their sights to that eternal home and died. But the will and optimism born of her faith enabled others to see that Christians see death as a mystery of eternal return. She was not a great or important person, but her death was a witness to her faith. Her life had been a shining light, she had paid out her whole strength for those who needed her.

All events, all forms of life on this earth are finite. But God has given humankind a mind to seek eternity. Through knowledge of God and through faith, our eyes see the way to eternity, the brevity of human life and the will to seek eternity. Because mortal life is finite, we cherish it, we take good care of it. As Christians, we have a passion for life and cherish bodily health because our bodies are God's vessels and are parts of the body of Christ. Only by glorifying God and sharing in God's work can we enjoy the eternity and fullness of God. If our lives were very long, but devoid of passion and light, if we knew nothing of seeking direction in our lives or of the existence of eternity, then we would be like a drop of water on a leaf, evaporated by the sun's light, gone without a trace. This is true death. But if that drop of water were to fall into the ocean, even though its self would be lost, its minute existence would have been joined to the infinite.

People fear death because they do not know the Way of life. Many people want a long life, but never find the mystery of life; some even exhaust all possible means to find a medical way to prolong the life of the body. But till now, they live in fear of death all the same. No one has yet found any material thing which will give eternal life to the flesh.

Christians already live in Christ Jesus and have received the way of eternal life. >From the time when we accept Jesus Christ with our whole soul and body, we never again need fear death because we know there is an everlasting home for us, we know there is hope for the future and we know how we should live each day, each moment. We know we no longer live only for ourselves, we have entered the course of new life and share in the life of God. People come into eternal life in this time, on this earth. They gain minds of peace, tranquility and holiness in the midst of their everyday lives. This kind of mind inspires us to express in our lives love for others, selfless service and dedication. Helping others is our happiness. We

uphold and show care for good things. Faced with hardship and suffering, we do not lose heart or hope; faced with failure, we are not discouraged.

If we show forth our faith in all the moments of our lives, then our lives are powerful, shining with light. We will be able to overcome all difficult obstacles in life and lead peaceful, happy, strong lives, filled with vitality and hope.

*translated by Janice Wickeri*

## 14. Divine Love – Wang Weifan

When Mary and Joseph took the infant Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to God, Simeon, coming into the temple and taking the infant up in his arms, blessed God, and said to Mary: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed"(Luke 2:33-35).

Some thirty-three years later, as Jesus was being nailed to the cross by the Roman soldiers, he saw his mother Mary standing beneath the cross with John, the disciple whom he loved, and said to his mother: "'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home"(Jn. 19:26-27).

Three disciples of the ancient church are buried in a churchyard in Ephesus. Timothy is one; Paul put him in the church in Ephesus as a young man to do the Lord's work. He experienced weakness, tears, even loss of faith when faced with the difficulties of his work (2 Tim. 1:3-4; 6-7), but Timothy showed himself worthy of having been personally trained by Paul as the second generation of the Lord's servants. He struggled to the end, never setting foot outside Ephesus. Of the other two saints of the early church buried in Ephesus, one is John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the other is his mother Mary whom Jesus entrusted to John.

Jesus, on the cross, knew that he could no longer fulfill the role of a mortal son to the woman who bore him, but why should he have entrusted his own mother to John? Not simply because John happened to be the only disciple there at the time, but because this John, whom Jesus loved, would, with his love, be able to comfort and heal her soul, pierced by the sword.

It was not only in the instant as Jesus was being nailed to the cross on Golgotha that Mary's heart was pierced. Rather it was wounded time after time for Jesus' sake, until, at the foot of the cross on Golgotha, it was pierced through.

When Jesus was twelve, Mary and Joseph had searched everywhere for him while he was in the temple. Finding him there at last, his mother said: "'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.' And he said to them, 'How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'" The young Jesus, only twelve, knew that he had a heavenly Father and another home. He no longer belonged completely to Joseph and Mary. Mary had no way to understand her son's words, but she kept them in her heart, and some premonition of the future loss of her child pierced that heart (Luke 2:41-51).

At the age of thirty, Jesus bade farewell to his mother and siblings to set about his work. Because he continued to heal the sick even on the Sabbath, he ran afoul of the Pharisees who then colluded with the Herodians, plotting to destroy him (Mk. 3:1-6). When Jesus was healing the multitudes, he was so busy he paid no attention to eating. His relatives wrongly

thought he was beside himself, and the scribes who came down from Jerusalem cursed him as possessed by the devil (Mk.3:20-22). Mary came to him with his siblings, perhaps hoping thereby to persuade him to return home and hide himself away. But when Jesus heard: "Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you." he replied: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk.3:31-35). He was no longer subject to Mary, but to those in need of salvation. He was no longer subject to the usual familial ties but to another, spiritual family, joined together by doing the will of God. The Bible does not record Mary's response, but we can imagine that she was cast down. The pain of losing her beloved son pierced her heart yet more deeply, leaving an ever-deeper wound. Mary may not have returned home after this, but followed along with several other Galilean women, following her son, with an anxious mother's heart, until she reached the foot of the cross on Golgotha (Luke: 15:37-41; Jn. 19:25).

When Jesus was hung upon the cross, entrusting Mary to John, who can say what depths of human affection were contained in his last cry of "Mother"? And it was this final cry of "Mother" which rent Mary's heart. On the cross, Jesus' hands and feet flowed with blood; beneath it, Mary's own heart, pierced through, also bled. For Mary, misunderstood and reviled for Jesus' sake, fatigued and anxious, was losing her son forever.

Yet, the same moment that Mary was losing the deeply-loved son that God had given her, was the very moment that she dedicated that son to God anew and dedicated him to the whole of humankind. A mother's love has within it dedication, sacrifice, and the ability to return to God and humanity that which is most beloved. Just as the Holy Spirit brought about the incarnation of Jesus through the virgin birth, so in the same way the image of Christ took shape in the mother-love of Mary.

The German artist, Kathe Kollwitz (1867-1945), portrayed many mothers in her engraved prints, of which someone has said: "There is no other German artist who has portrayed women through engraving, woodcuts or sculpture with the same fullness of sympathy that she has, particularly in dignified images of suffering women workers." When I was young I saw one of her works, "Bread," introduced by Lu Xun. The picture showed the back view of a mother with an undernourished child, its face upturned to the mother, asking for bread to ease its starvation. The mother's head was bent, perhaps she was crying, perhaps wiping away tears. Her broad shoulders gave one the sense that she was bearing all the burdens of the family, the class, even her people's sufferings! From this it is evident that a mother's love suggests the verse from Isaiah: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Is. 53:4).

In human history, disasters affecting peoples and ethnic groups all come finally to rest on mothers' shoulders. During China's Cultural Revolution, nothing but the steely determination of thousands of mothers steadied the tremors threatening thousands of homes and saved them from destruction. Could we not say that it was these same mothers who saved our people from the brink of final disaster and shored up with their shoulders our faltering national edifice? If so, we can see that mother love also means: "But he was wounded for our

transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5).

From the 1930s to the 1970s, I knew an elderly mother of six. During the years of our people's suffering, she, like thousands of other Chinese mothers, struggled to raise her children. She died in early 1971, and when she was cremated, only three children stood beside her. Her youngest and best-loved son was undergoing detention and interrogation for "counter-revolutionary crimes," and even though his mother was now ashes, he was unable to return. Today, all six children are married, have jobs and are quite successful. The old woman is dead. This is mother-love: "She will see the rewards of her suffering and be satisfied, asking neither payment nor a word of thanks." Perhaps this is why our thoughts dwell on the Holy Mother Mary, who lies buried in a cemetery in Ephesus, during Passion Week each year.

All human mother-love is embodied in the person of the Virgin Mary. And in the mother-love of Mary herself we find an image of the suffering Christ: a divine heart pierced by a sword and silently bleeding, yet returning this divine love to God and to all humankind! In this sacred mother-love, any isolated suffering heart can seek warmth; any reviled and wounded heart can be comforted. And through the warmth and comfort of divine love, every isolated, suffering, reviled and wounded heart can be transformed with the great love which can be returned to God and to all humanity!

*translated by Janice Wickeri*



## 15. The Lord Comes in Search of Me – Luo Zhenfang

Text: John 21:1-19

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, let us consider together the Lord's appearance to His disciples on the shores of the Lake of Tiberius, that is the Sea of Galilee, on the day of His resurrection from the dead. Just when the disciples had lost all hope and were feeling uncertain about the future, the Lord himself came in search of them. In ages past, the Lord has always come in search of those he has wanted to save. Likewise at this time he comes in search of us. Therefore, I have chosen the topic "The Lord Comes in Search of Me" to share with you my understanding of this passage of scripture for our mutual encouragement.

First, we believe that the resurrection of the Lord is not what is known in common religious terms as a spiritual experience or an apparition. The disciples did not have a vision of the Lord, nor was it a so-called spiritual resurrection. When Peter was preaching in the house of Cornelius, he said with regard to the resurrection, "But God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:40-41). From these words of Peter, we can see that for forty days after Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples and ate and drank with them and discussed with them the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven.

According to the tradition of the ancient church, Peter was the first overseer (bishop) of the church in Antioch. It is said that the second overseer of this church was Ignatius. He is a highly respected church father because he suffered martyrdom for the Lord in Rome. In a letter to the church in Smyrna, Ignatius wrote: "We know and we believe that after the Lord rose from the dead, He had a body of flesh. When he came before Peter and his companions, He said to them: 'Touch me and see that I am not a disembodied spirit.' As soon as they touched Him, they believed. They firmly believed that Jesus was a real flesh and blood person. . . . After His resurrection, like any flesh and blood person, He ate and drank with His disciples." The New Testament, the Apostolic Church and the Church throughout history all bear witness to the resurrection of the Lord. The Lord's appearances to the disciples were a return in person to the company of his disciples, after He had conquered death.

The resurrected Lord came in search of his disciples. What were their circumstances? After the Lord died upon the cross, the disciples were in great distress and considered everything lost. At a time of great despair and emptiness of heart, Peter said: "I am going fishing." Once, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the Lord called Peter and gave him the commission, "From now on, you will catch men." However, now he had completely forgotten that call and commission of the Lord. They labored the whole night, and what was the result? The Bible clearly tells us, "That night they caught nothing" (v.3). In fishermen's experience, the best time for catching fish, i.e., when it is easiest to catch them, is at night. But they worked the whole night through and caught nothing. Jesus once said to his disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Let's pause to think

for a moment: when we are separated from the Lord, aren't we also like the disciples, laboring all night and catching nothing? On that day, when the disciples were in a situation of failure, the Lord sought them out. Likewise, when we run to and fro in the wilderness like lost sheep, our Lord, the great shepherd of his sheep, comes in search of us.

"Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus" (v. 4). The strange thing is that while Jesus is on the shore speaking with the disciples, they do not know it was Jesus. Why is it that the disciples who have lived for such a long time in the Lord's company cannot recognize Him? I think that the first reason is that the disciples are of the opinion that the Lord is dead, and their own hearts are full of despair. Also, after Jesus conquered death and rose up again, he became a glorified Lord, a victorious Lord. His body changed into one which was full of glory. It never occurred to them that the Risen Lord would come in person to look for them. The second reason is that they were, at that time, following a path of separation from the Lord. Their sin of abandonment of the Lord caused their eyes to be blinded. When we are separated from the Lord, we feel like God is far away from us, out of touch with us. Why do we have such feelings? Because the eyes of our souls are clouded. Just as the Lord Jesus said: "If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Mt. 6:23).

The Lord asked the disciples if they had anything to eat. He told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat and they would catch fish. Here we see that the Risen Lord was concerned about the needs of His disciples. When we are far from the Lord, we feel that the Lord is not concerned about our lives. But this is wrong thinking. God created the sun, which every day gives light and heat to our planet. In this way, grains, vegetables and fruits can grow. Our Lord nourishes us at all times. Even when we are forgetful of the Lord's graces, He is still concerned about our daily livelihood.

At the Lord's words, "They cast it (v.6)." They did not know it was the Lord. Why then, would they cast their nets at his word? They heard what the person on the shore said to them, but they may not have believed what he said. They were only casting their nets as an experiment. They were only going to give it this one last try. But the results far surpassed their expectations. They let the nets down, but in the end could not haul them in because the catch was so great. Sometimes we also take a "try and see" attitude towards the Lord's words. Just as the Psalmist said: "O taste and see that the Lord is good! Happy is the man who takes refuge in Him" (Ps. 34:8).

They had labored all night and not caught one fish, but because they listened to this person's word, they immediately netted many fish. At this moment, the disciple whom Jesus loved said: "It is the Lord!" (v.7). The disciple whom Jesus loved was John. When the Lord was crucified on the cross, the other disciples fled. Only John stood at the foot of the cross. On the third day, the women, Peter and John discovered that the Lord's tomb was empty. The first to believe that the Lord had risen from the dead was John. On the day the Lord rose, He appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. But because their eyes were blinded, they did not know that the person talking with them on the road was the Him. It was only when the Lord broke bread for them that they recognized Him. Why was this? Because when Jesus stretched out His hands to break the bread, they immediately saw the wounds in His hands.

The Lord died for them, and the great love manifest in the Lord's death on the cross awakened in them their love for the Lord. They at last recognized Him. Later, John wrote: "for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love God does not know God; for God is love" (I Jn. 4:7-8). Those who love the Lord can then know the Lord, and recognize Him. The Risen Lord sought out the disciples, but at first the disciples did not clearly see that it was the Lord. When the disciple whom Jesus loved announced: "It is the Lord," the other disciples were delighted. Their cold hearts became warm, and their worries and uncertainties gradually disappeared. The darkness had passed and the sun rose in the east. On the shores of the Sea of Galilee, where they had lived and worked together in the past, the Lord and His disciples met again.

As soon as Peter heard that it was the Lord, he threw a cloak over himself and jumped into the sea to swim to shore to greet Him. We can imagine what was going through Peter's mind at that time. He had denied knowing the Lord three times, but now the Risen Lord was coming in search of him. After he denied the Lord three times, he went out and wept bitterly. From then until now, his sin had weighed heavily on his heart, and he had shed innumerable tears because of it. He had no hope and no light, and now he had labored the whole night through without success. However, the Lord did not dwell on his sins. Rather, when Peter was at his wits' end, the Lord himself came to seek him out. Now Peter was full of gratitude towards the Lord. When he saw the Lord, Peter was really beside himself with joy. His heart was full of unlimited light and hope. Therefore, without a second thought, Peter jumped into the sea and swam to where the Lord was standing.

There are probably some people among us here who have had an experience like Peter's. Early on, we have received the grace of salvation, but later, we deviate from the Lord's path and may even have denied Him. Just as on that day the Lord came to seek His disciples, likewise today, He comes in search of us. How should we welcome Him?

When the disciples came ashore, "they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish laying on it, and bread" (v. 9). The disciples had worked all night, so the Lord knew that they needed something to eat, and prepared breakfast for them on the shore. The Lord said to them: "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." This means that the Lord gives us our daily bread, but we must work hard ourselves, since God's grace and human efforts must go hand in hand.

"None of the disciples dared ask him 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord" (v. 12). Now they realized that the Lord had come in search of them. However, this time the Lord is a Risen Lord, a glorified Lord. This text shows that at this time the disciples' hearts were very confused. On the one hand, they were overcome with joy, on the other hand, they felt ashamed.

"Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish" (v. 13). That day, the disciples did not eat an ordinary breakfast. That day, they were receiving bread for their souls from the hands of the Risen Lord. The Risen Lord gave the disciples food to eat and they obtained the Lord's abundant life. The life-giving food that the Lord gave them became within them a certain power which turned their weakness into strength. Their hearts

were set afire and they were prepared to give glorious testimony to the Lord's resurrection. May the Lord at all times give His life-giving food to us. Jesus said: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn. 6:35). May the risen life of the Lord abide in us, and make us live like Him, showing forth His glory that we may bear a beautiful witness for Him.

After the disciples partook of this unusual breakfast, Jesus three times asked Peter: "Do you love me?" He asked this question three times because Peter had denied Him three times. The first time Jesus asked: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these do?" (v.15). More than what? More than these things, or more than these men? The best interpretation is: Do you love me more than these men? On the night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, He said to His disciples: "You will all fall down, because as the scripture says, 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.'" However, Peter replied: "Though everyone may fall, I will not." He meant that he loved the Lord more than the other disciples. But that same night, Peter's fall was more serious than that of the other disciples. In asking Peter these questions now, the Lord means: In the past you bragged that you loved me more than the others, but you denied me three times. Now I ask you, do you really love more than the others? Sometimes we are like Peter. We feel that we love the Lord more deeply than others, that we are more spiritual than others. We think: even though others may fall, we ourselves will not. But what is the result? If the Lord did not protect us and have compassion for us, would we be able to come before Him today like this to worship him? Let us hope that the Risen Lord will speak to each one of us today.

Peter denied the Lord three times, so the Lord asked him three times: "Do you love me?" Peter felt distressed and answered: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (v. 16). Although Peter had denied Him three times, the Risen Lord came in search of Peter. Let us ask ourselves: how many times have we fallen on the path of discipleship, how many times have we forgotten the grace the Lord has given us? Today the Risen Lord has come to seek us out. He wants to ask each one of us by name "Do you love me more than these?" If there are some things blocking our love for the Lord, ask Him to have compassion on us and help us cast aside those things which are blocking our love for Him. Thus, like Peter, we can say: "Lord, you must know that I love you."

Peter three times answered the Lord: "Lord, you know that I love you." Therefore, the Lord Jesus entrusted the work of shepherding the flock to him. The most important lesson to be learned here is that love of the Lord includes service. The motive for Christian service does not come from the mere observance of certain bloodless doctrines. Rather, we are moved by the love shown in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Thus the apostle Paul wrote: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And He died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

The Lord entrusted the work of shepherding the flock to Peter. Likewise, today the Lord gives the task of feeding and caring for the flock to us. Are there any around you in need of spiritual or material help? Has a brother or sister lost their way? Is there a soul which needs saving? Shall we be like those servants who, after receiving five thousand or two thousand

silver pieces, gave an abundant return to the Lord? Or, are we like the lazy servant who received a thousand silver pieces but came back to the Lord empty-handed?

Regarding Peter's future, Jesus said to him: "When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and take you where you do not wish to go" (v. 18). In speaking like this, Jesus was pointing out by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. (v. 19). When Peter was young, his life and activities were very free, but later he suffered martyrdom for the Lord in Rome. According to church tradition, Peter was crucified upside down because he said he was not worthy to be crucified like the Lord. The Lord's words here, "you will stretch out your hands," most likely signify that Peter's hands would be stretched out, right and left, on the cross. Others will gird you means that others will tie you up. When criminals were crucified in ancient Rome, their arms were sometimes tied to the cross-bar of the cross. So these words signify the manner in which Peter would die and give glory to God.

Each action of the disciples that day is a mirror for us. Just when they had forgotten the Lord's grace and each was going his own way, the Risen Lord came in search of them. When we are like sheep who have become lost by following our own road, God the Father takes us from the realm of sin and returns us to the body of the Lord Jesus. Today, the risen and victorious lord comes in search of us.

I also want to say a few words to those brothers and sisters who have not yet received God's grace and been saved. The Lord Jesus told us about the man who had a hundred sheep and lost one. He abandoned the ninety-nine and went in search of the one sheep which was lost. At last he found it, happily placed it upon his shoulders and returned home. Joyfully he told his neighbors and friends: "Look, I have found the sheep which was lost. Rejoice with me." The Lord concluded this story by saying: "I tell you there is more happiness in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just people who have no need of repentance." God is full of love and compassion. Although ninety-nine persons have already been saved, if there is one person who has not yet been saved, the Lord Jesus will come in search of him or her.

I'd like to tell a story to illustrate the meaning of what I have just said. Once upon a time, there was a child who lived in a city near the ocean. He used to like to go down to the ocean to watch the ships passing by. In his heart he thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if I myself had a little boat to put into the sea! So, he got hold of some wood and spent many days making a small boat. He was beside himself with joy when the boat was finished. One day, when the weather was nice, he brought his boat to the seashore and pushed it out to sea. The sea breezes gently blew against the boat's sails and it sailed steadily on the water. The child was so happy that he clapped his hands in glee. However, a big wind came up and blew the little boat far away! Finally, the little boat was swamped by a big wave. The child, standing on the shore, became so upset that he began to cry. Since it was gradually getting dark, there was nothing for the child to do but cry his way home. His mother comforted him saying: "Tomorrow I will buy you a better boat to play with." But the child cried even louder, "I do not want you to buy me one; I want the one I made myself." He kept thinking about his little boat, and that night he did not sleep a wink. The child got up very early the next morning and

ran to the seaside to see if the tide had washed his boat back onto shore. However, there was no trace of the boat. From that day on, the child went everyday to the seashore to look for his boat, but he returned home each day empty-handed. A few months passed, and by chance in a toy store he saw a little boat which was just like the one he had lost. Only now, it had a new coat of paint. The child said to the store keeper: "This is the boat I lost a few months ago on the seashore. Now I'd like to take it back home with me." The storekeeper replied: "I bought this little boat from someone who said he found it on the beach. If you give me \$20 I will let you have it." The child ran as fast as he could back home and asked his mother for \$20 to buy his boat back. He happily told everyone he met: "The first time I made this little boat with my own hands, and now, I have to buy it back again myself."

My dear brothers and sisters: each one of us is like that little boat. We were all made by our heavenly Father who loves us very much, just like the little child loved his boat. When we strayed very far from God, deviated from His path, and were dead in sin, Jesus Christ, the dearly beloved Son of God, came to earth in search of us. We must accept the Lord's salvation. The holy book given us by God tells us: "If with your lips you confess Jesus as the Lord and your hearts believe that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

When the disciples had completely failed by deviating from the Lord's path, the Risen Lord came in search of them. Today the risen and glorified Lord comes in search of us. He stretches out His wounded hands towards us, and His side still bears the wound of the lance. In a soft and compassionate voice He asks us: "Do you love me more than these?" Let us all respond together: "Yes Lord, you know that I love you."

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translated by Peter Barry, M.M.*

## 16. Matthew 13: 31-32 – K. H. Ting

The Bible has many ways to represent the relation between God and human beings. One metaphor is the relation between parent and child. Another is that between master and servant. Still another is that between potter and pot. A very common one is between shepherd and sheep.

Because of the pastoral background of the Israelites, references to the shepherd and the sheep are specially numerous. Psalm 23 is very typical. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul." Christ says, "I am a good shepherd; I know my sheep." "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." He told the story about the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep at home and goes to seek the one lost sheep. "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" has entered deeply into the worship and the devotional life of Christians of all traditions. At the end of the Cultural Revolution in China, when church leaders could meet openly again, the first message sent to Christians all over the country was one singing praises to God because, as Psalm 23 says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

Now, if we think of it, what is expected of the sheep in their relation with the shepherd is that they should be docile and tractable. Their lot is to follow. The shepherd is constantly uttering orders and sometimes scolding. When the sheep go astray, what is given them are the shepherd's rod and staff and whip to impose obedience on the sheep.

The Chinese have been for thousands of years an agricultural people. There is another way of describing the divine-human relation in the Bible which is more consonant with our Chinese culture. It is the relation between the planter and what is planted and grows, such as wheat, flowers, trees and vines. "A sower went out to sow." "Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?" "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." We have already read about a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field, and about the shrubs and the tree it becomes.

When we read these and similar passages, we do not think of the kind of relation between the shepherd and the sheep. We think of the seed, how it is buried underground and how buds begin to come out and grow. We think of the planter who uses no rod and staff and whip, and does not give out orders, but fertilizes the soil, cultivates it and lets the plant enjoy the sunshine and receive nourishment from rain and dew, and to grow and be strong against pests and finally to reach maturation.

Those undertaking agriculture have a different psychology. After doing all that needs to be done, they enter into a period of quiet waiting, a period for nature to take its course. I think this is closer to the Chinese culture and mentality. We have in Chinese an idiom to describe impatient and impulsive persons as fools who try to hasten the growth of a plant by pulling up its bud. There is a time when the planter can help best by not doing anything.

As you know, the Chinese have been greatly influenced by Lao Tse (Laozi) and Confucius. Lao Tse teaches us to learn not to do anything when doing nothing is called for. That teaching has its effect on China in very many ways both good and bad. It is not an admonition to laziness, passivity or resignation. It is only to tell us not to do those things whose time has not come. Confucius asks in the same vein: "Why does heaven need to say things, seeing that the four seasons are coming and going and all new things are being born? What does heaven need to say?"

I am quite struck by the French linguist and historian Andre Haudricourt who, in 1962, made a contrast between what he calls the Eastern garden and the Mediterranean stable. He thinks the garden-like treatment of human beings is characteristic of Chinese civilization, whereas the pastoral, shepherd-like treatment of human beings is Western and Judeo-Christian. Animals are tamed with a stick and much shouting at. With plants, flowers and trees, we patiently wait; the only thing to do is to aid nature and not disturb it. He prefers the botanical approach to the zoological. He would probably endorse the Chinese proverb, adopted by many educational institutions as their motto, to the effect that it takes ten years to grow a tree but one hundred years to grow a person.

God's relation to human beings is not a subject any one metaphor can exhaust, limited as we are by our human imagination and vocabulary. All metaphors are inadequate but many are helpful in their own ways. I present before you this morning the image of God who in his eternal love patiently tills, plants, looks after and waits for our growing into the fullness that is in Christ. God is like a planter or gardener. He works with love, patience and care, but he also waits. He is almighty but he does not always give commands, as he did in creating the world according to Genesis chapter 1. He prefers to hold his almightiness in abeyance because he does not like to impose his will on us. To make automatons of human beings is not in the nature of God. He cannot enjoy any fellowship with a machine. We have in China a tragic story of a young woman whose fiancé died but who was still compelled by feudal custom to be married into the fiancé's family. What she found in the bed as a substitute for her husband was a wooden log as long as a man. How could she have fellowship with a piece of wood? God chooses rather to work through his creation, redemption and education and to wait for our growth into a new humanity that can respond to his love voluntarily and creatively and become his co-workers whose fellowship means a lot to him. Christ's prayer: "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" is a prayer for such a day to dawn. It is God's very great faith in humanity. May many more people all around the world see God's faith and be moved by it to willing and joyous fellowship with him.



## 17. John 18: 22-24 – K. H. Ting

St. John's Gospel has recorded here an account of Jesus' trial before Annas. There was a big crowd in the big courtyard. Many were just onlookers. Many were carried away by emotions whipped up by Jesus' enemies, now ready to be manipulated by demagogues of all sorts. Many were dismayed at their lost dream of a triumphant king and now did not know what to think of Jesus. Political and religious leaders could not care less for the fate of Jesus. They each were trying to make the right moves so as to be one up on the others and reap benefits for themselves. Amid all the mindless fury of false accusation, swearing and shouting, there was a little exchange between an officer and Jesus. The officer struck Jesus for his remarks and said angrily: "Is this how you answer the high priest?" Jesus replied with dignity: "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

At that moment and in that noisy place, Jesus' protest was a very weak one indeed. None seemed to take his words seriously or even wanted to answer his challenge. The answer was to bind him up and send him to Caiaphas.

Now there is no doubt about the weakness of Jesus' voice right there in that setting. But it is a conscientizing voice. All through the ages the echoes of the question Jesus asked there and then have resounded in every land and in every people. Annas, Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate could work hand in glove to have Jesus suppressed, but all the Annases and Caiaphases and Pontius Pilates in history have failed to suppress the growing resonance of Christ's protest uttered soon before his passion.

That voice is not really weak because it is the voice of reason. "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" This is the voice of faith in humanity, even in such a poor representative of humanity as that officer. No one except a great believer in human beings' ability and inclination to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong can raise such a question as this one. This is also a voice that affirms the ultimate triumph of what is right over what is wrong. It believes that what is right belongs to the very constitution and texture of the universe made by a God who is Love and who upholds justice. It says that, after all, might is not right. A voice like that cannot but be captured by listening ears.

Please note there is nothing dogmatic on Jesus' part. He does not say that he, being the Son of God, cannot be wrong and must be right. The word "if" is used twice: "If I have spoken wrongly,," and "if I have spoken rightly." He is granting that he may be wrong and inviting people to make a judgment about him for themselves. Christ does not insist on prerogatives and demand obedience. He respects human investigation and judgments. He does not even want to assert that to strike is categorically wrong. He goes only as far as asking people not to strike in haste. The whole approach, as it comes out of Christ so naturally and spontaneously in that riotous situation, reminds us of what St. Paul describes as the mind of the incarnate Christ "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count

equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." So he can treat others as equals.

The power of words depends not on how loudly they are uttered, or on how many times they have been repeated, but on their correspondence to the ultimate principle by which the whole universe is governed. People like Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo were almost omnipotent in ways of spreading their views, but we know what insignificant figures they made themselves to be in the end.

Today, in China, we are not offering people benefits in order to draw them into the church. In a true sense we have no silver and gold to dispense. Our evangelism is just to invite people to examine the Christians' message and the Christians' deeds and to make up their mind as to whether the church has spoken rightly or wrongly.

The number of Christians in China has grown in the last thirty and more years twice as fast as the growth of the population. There are now four million non-Roman Catholic Christians. They give all sorts of reasons to explain why they want to come to the church. But no matter what reasons they give, the one over-ruling reason is that they have thought through for themselves that Christ has spoken rightly and not wrongly.

In John 6, Peter said to Christ, "Lord, you have the word of eternal life, to whom shall we go?" This is specially striking if we remember that, once, he had said, "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinner." The search for the word of eternal life is a universal phenomenon.

Human beings living in every age and within every social system are the same in their search for the word of eternal life. They are not satisfied with the one-dimensional and two-dimensional life talked about in ordinary newspapers. "God, you have put a restlessness in my heart, so that I can find no rest until I find it in you," is not a prayer of St. Augustine only. Restlessness is there in the hearts of people in all societies. More and more people are becoming conscious of its existence in their hearts. Hence their quest for the word of eternal life.

To win people's allegiance to Jesus Christ on the sole basis of their considered conviction in his truth and goodness is the way evangelism at its best has always occurred. When the church ceases to invite people to weigh for themselves the truth of its message, but tries to impress them with other powers and glories, or to take advantage of people in their poverty and weakness by enticing them with material goods, the content of the Gospel becomes ambiguous and the purpose of evangelism missed.

History has shown that the voice of reason, of truth, of justice may sound weak but is not really weak. It is backed up by the Risen and Ascended Christ and is full of power to set men and women thinking and dividing the right from the wrong. The faint voice uttered two thousand years ago by one condemned person waiting to be put to death on the cross has to this day led so many to be his disciples and inspired so many to take heart, to have hope, to stand for the right at any cost. The world's Annases and Caiaphases and Pontius Pilates can

hardly shut the people's ears to that voice. This to us is sufficient proof that Christ is not dead, but is risen, sitting at the right hand of God and upholding the universe by his word of power.

In St. Paul's words again: "The weakness of God is stronger than men." History is not made by proud men in rebellion to God. History is in the hand of God whose name is Love. Before this God all human fury is to subside and give way to humble adoration and willing obedience. To him be honor and glory forever.

## 18. Responsibility and Mission – Peng Cui'an

Text: I Cor.9:10, 17  
John 9:4

Seminary is like a big family. In this big family, teachers are like parents to us. Students are like brothers and sisters. Each time new members are added to the family, our teachers often talk candidly with us about our calling and about resolutely following the way.

Recently, the steady stream of news about old school mates leaving our family and going to work outside has caused me to give a lot of thought to the subject of mission and responsibility. Today, I want to take this opportunity to talk with you about these matters.

The question of mission and responsibility seems large, very serious and very abstract. Large, because mission itself is very great. It is part of God's saving work. Serious, because it demands our entire lives to implement and fulfill. It is a task which requires our utmost diligence to carry out.

Mission and responsibility seem abstract because the spirit we eagerly look forward to is both untouchable and invisible. But we can also say that mission and responsibility are very small, very ordinary and very concrete because they enable those around you to share the hopes of your heart. They enable people, through you, to know the Lord Jesus Christ, to receive New Life, and to follow the road to Eternal Life.

This matter of mission and responsibility is very valuable work, not for the sake of outward appearances, but for inner truth. The effects are not momentary, but eternal. How can we best fulfill this responsibility?

First of all, we should seize every opportunity to plant seeds of life. Not long ago I read a short devotional piece about a woman who went out one day wearing a pendant around her neck. A young person, who found the pendant quite unusual, asked her curiously, "What is that, a fish?" "Yes," she replied, "it was the symbol of the earliest Christians." The youth pressed her for more detail: "What is its significance?" "Just a symbol. Lots of Christians wear it."

Before leaving, the youth asked another question, "Why did you pass up this opportunity to share your innermost hope with someone?" Why did the youth ask such a question? Obviously, the youth was also a Christian, whose persistence belied the hope that the woman would speak of her faith. She could have explained that by combining the first letter of the three Greek phrases "Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Savior Lord," you get the Greek word for fish, which is why "fish" became a Christian sign and symbol. This is also why so many Christians like jewelry that has a fish design.

The woman was obviously a bit unhappy with the youth for asking a question to which he or she already knew the answer. In fact, the youth's words pricked her heart and reminded her

of another incident. Someone else had once noticed the woman's fish pendant and asked if she were studying ichthyology. She thought to herself, "Maybe I could have led that person to know Christ." Recalling this incident, she suddenly realized her mistake, and thought about her own mission and responsibility.

This short devotional piece brings to mind a whole range of related matters. I love to wear my school badge, because I know I can only wear it for the short time I am a student at the seminary. The badge not only indicates that I am a student here, it is also a declaration of faith. It depicts for others my relationship with God.

However, for some time I dared not wear my school badge in public. I was afraid people might not understand, or might even go so far as to ridicule me to my face. What is worse, I feared inviting endless questions. How many times have I been as ambiguous and as vague as the woman in that story, losing the opportunity to plant seeds of life as a result? How many times have I said with such little faith: "What good are these few words?" Unwilling to explain, I have missed opportunities to plant seeds of faith.

Now I understand clearly that it is God who permits the seeds to grow and to have life. Our responsibility is to plant seeds in the open fields of people's hearts. Ecclesiastes 11:6 tells us, "in the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good."

We do not wait to stand in the pulpit before we begin this work. Rather, in our everyday lives, at all times, in all things, and in all places we must seize the opportunity to plant seeds of life. Therefore, let us not forget, "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you . . ." (1 Peter 3:15).

Secondly, we must lead people to Christ. There are two Bible stories which are familiar to all of us. One takes place while Jesus is in Capernium. Many people gathered in the room where he was staying, and there was no space, even at the doorway. Four persons came carrying a paralytic to see Jesus, but the crowd was so large they couldn't get near him, so they made a hole in the roof and lowered the man down for Jesus to heal. The other story is about Zacchaeus the tax collector who, when Jesus entered Jericho, wanted to see what kind of person he was. Due to the large crowds and Zacchaeus' short stature, he was unable to see Jesus. So he ran on ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see him.

Why did the paralytic want to be lowered through the roof? Why did Zacchaeus climb the sycamore tree? Of course one reason was his height, but scripture says: "Because there were so many people, he could not get near, he was unable to see. . ."

How many times have we been like that crowd, crowding around Jesus, and instead of bringing people to Him, have blocked their view? How many times, instead of preaching Christ, have we hidden Him? Or instead of praising Him, dishonored His name? May God have mercy on us and enable us to be like those four who lowered the paralytic down to see Jesus. May we enable others to see the Mighty One, Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we need to have a sense of mission. Today the door is open to proclaim the gospel. People in China have a favorable impression of Christianity and want to understand it. Yet there are still many persons who have not yet received the gospel. Just look around us. Right here on our own campus there are those who do not yet believe in Christ. In the end, whose responsibility are they?

We cannot just blame others for callous unbelief. Rather, we need to critically examine ourselves. Many times in our own speech, we are at a loss for words. We hinder people from believing in the Lord. We become stumbling stones and cause people to fall.

Sometimes you have heard the strange question: "Is the Lord's Supper Chinese or Western food?" This really is a funny kind of question, but after the laughter dies down, it is a question which makes one very sad. The person who asks such a question does not know "God so loved the world," Christ as Lord and Savior, or the good news of the gospel.

Have we no responsibility in such a situation? You? Or I? We do not graduate first and assume responsibility second. We do not assume responsibility only after we are ordained. This responsibility is given to us when we become Christians. "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season... fulfill your ministry"(2Tim. 4:2-5).

We must do our work diligently, not stand around idly taking up space. I recall the hymn "Must I go and empty-handed?" written by a pastor named C.C. Luther. The story is told that one day Luther went to visit a church member who was about to die. He wanted to pray for and comfort him. He never expected the man to tell him so regretfully, "I'm not afraid to die, because Christ has already saved me. But I've not led one person to Christ. Must I go this empty-handed to see Christ?"

Hearing these words, Luther was deeply moved and greatly upset. After pondering them over and over, he wrote this hymn. The chorus was the words of that member of his church:

Must I go, and empty-handed? Must I meet my Savior so? Not one soul with which to greet Him: Must I empty handed go?

In life, that member of Luther's church never led anyone to Christ. But after his death, because of him and this hymn, countless persons have been moved to accept Christ and have been encouraged to work for Him.

Sisters and brothers, Christ will certainly come again. Whether during the day or at night, we do not know. If it were today, could we face Him confidently? During the years that we have followed Christ, have we been able to use our words and actions to plant seeds of life in the fields of people's hearts?

When Christ departed this world, He did not say, "Come follow me." He said, "Go into all the world and make disciples of all people." He does not want you just as an individual, but as one who shares the load with Him. He wants you to become fishers of people, to glorify

God and serve others, to enable them "to see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt.5:16).

Of course Christ's mission has not changed from the beginning, but the method and style of accomplishing that mission vary with each generation. To glorify God and serve others, three-self, indigenization - these are all ways to remove external obstacles and enable people to more easily receive the true word; to enable them to receive the Good News of the Gospel together with us.

Therefore: "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day" (Jn.9:4). We believe that if all Christians will carry out their own missional task, then we can realize the words, "Your Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven."

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translated by Ewing W. Carroll, Jr.*

## 19. Know Christ, Follow Christ – Xu Minghan

*When we come to stand before you on the day of judgment, We ask you to remember the fruit gathered on that spring day, that is the way we are to enter abundant life; And pardon them. This sin should not come to rest again on their shoulders.*

Men and women become Christians when they believe in the Lord, in fact we should say when they have come to know the Lord, and are followers of the Lord. But do all Christians really know the Lord? That would be hard to maintain. We see a good many Christians who start off by loving the Lord fiercely, but whose original fervor gradually subsides. Christians who do not really know the Lord cannot follow the Lord wholeheartedly, just as children cannot be expected to emulate someone they don't know well or someone who is a casual acquaintance. Children stay close to their parents, because they know their parents.

In Old Testament times, the prophets foretold the Messiah (which means "the Christ will come"). No one was sure at the time when this prophecy would be fulfilled, nor was anyone clear whom the prophecy intended. When the Lord Jesus was born, therefore, Heaven announced the news of great joy with the words "for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11-12). The shepherds went to see him and spread the news, but they left the baby's side. The sages from the East merely believed that this baby was a Jewish king, and after paying homage, they departed. The scribes and chief priests could answer with assurance that Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Mt. 2:5), but they certainly did not know that the baby born in the manger at Bethlehem was the Christ. Who was the baby anyway? In their minds, it was very difficult to conceive that this baby was the Messiah (Jesus) whose coming they so earnestly anticipated, so once they had heard and seen, that was that.

When the Lord Jesus was in the world preaching, there were many people who listened to his teaching, and witnessed his great power. Many of them believed Jesus was a master, a prophet, or someone with much greater wisdom than a healer; some even thought him to be John the Baptist. On hearing of the great things the Lord was doing, disciples were sent to ask of Jesus: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Mt. 11:2-3). They were indeed more abundantly blessed than the shepherds and the Eastern sages and so on, because they heard Jesus' teaching in person, and witnessed with their own eyes Jesus' great power. But still they did not recognize Jesus as the Christ. Peter was the only one who, when Jesus asked the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" replied: "You are the Christ, the son of the Living God" (Mt. 16:15-16). With what certainty and with what precision did he indicate "You are the Christ." At the time when many of Jesus' followers were turning away, the Lord Jesus asked the twelve: "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:67-68).

Truly knowing the Lord is extremely important for us as Christians. But there are different ways of knowing the Lord, different ways of following him. There are two ways of knowing the Lord. The first is knowledge of a human point of view. When Peter recognized



Jesus as the Christ, the Lord called Peter blessed, "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven" (Mt. 16:17).

Before his conversion, Paul was an extremely pious person, who said of himself (he was) "educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God" (Acts 22:3), but at the same time he repeatedly attacked and vilified the name of the person Jesus (Acts 26:9). Why? Because at that time Paul "regarded Christ from a human point of view" (2 Cor. 5:16).

When Jesus was in the world, there were some people who followed him for a time, but then, regrettably, turned away from him again. They did not understand what he meant when they heard him talking about eternal life, saying "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (Jn. 6:60). "After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him" (Jn. 6:66). As Jesus said, the reason for their doing so was "You (sought) me... because you ate your fill of the loaves" (Jn. 6:26). They followed Jesus for no other reason than that they wanted to be satisfied in the flesh.

Aren't there also all sorts of ways of knowing the Lord practiced among us today? For some people who come to church, Jesus is seen merely as one who can shield and save them from problems and hardship; when they are hit by adverse circumstances, they come to seek some comfort, and be relieved of their problems. Some people who come to church believe Jesus to be a great doctor, one who cures all manner of ills. Still others come to church believing that Jesus is simply a person of supreme moral excellence; a holy person of sacrificial spirit, and the Bible they see as fine literary work. All these people come to Jesus, but where do so many of them end up? Their enthusiasm gradually wanes, and they leave the church. Why should this be so? It is because they haven't really come to know the Lord. Their knowledge of the Lord is from a human point of view, and is according to externals. They have walked with the Lord in order to satisfy physical needs.

Another kind of knowledge is learned of the Spirit. In the past Paul regarded Christ from a human point of view, "we regard him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16); now Paul's knowledge is by means of the Spirit, and on that basis he devotes himself to spreading the good news of the Lord. Virtually half of one of the books of the New Testament is devoted to Paul's writings on abundant knowledge of Christ. Today this has become fundamental to the faith of the New Testament Church.

Perhaps in the past or because of some physical need at some time or other we came to believe in the Lord. Now our material knowledge of Christ has to become spiritual knowledge, our search for self-satisfaction, the pursuit of the words of eternal life. We believe that Jesus died on the cross to bear the burden of the sins of humanity. We believe in the Lord's resurrection and ascension and in his coming again, but have we attained deeper knowledge as a result of this belief?

Peter was able to recognize Jesus as the Christ before Jesus' saving grace had come completely to fruition. Today Jesus' saving grace is fulfilled, and we have been left a precious piece of scripture in the New Testament, transcribed according to the inspiration of

the Holy Spirit, "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints" (Col. 1:26). By means of the Scriptures we can come to a more thorough-going knowledge of Christ's abundance. Paul called them: "the unsearchable riches" (Eph. 3:8). The source and substance of "The Word" was revealed in the Gospel of John; this "Word" includes eternal life, life, truth, love, etc. One New Testament book calls the Christ the one by whom God has spoken to us (Heb. 1:2). Those who have come to know Christ through human knowledge or their own emotions have no way to ever understand this.

"For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10), so that coming to know Jesus is only possible through knowing by means of the Spirit, as is revealed in the Scriptures. Whatever is not in accord with scriptural teaching, is not knowledge of Christ learned by means of the Spirit. Similarly, making random guesses about the mysteries of the Scriptures is not knowing by means of the Spirit, because "no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of humankind, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

We need first to know the Lord if we are to follow the Lord; knowing and following the Lord from the human point of view means considering what can be gained materially from the Lord; knowing and following the Lord by means of the Spirit leads to wondering what we can do for the Lord. May the Lord's Spirit illumine us, and lead us on an ever deeper search, that we may come to a more profound knowledge of Christ, and follow the Lord all our lives.

*Collected Sermons, No. 14 (November 1987), p. 36.  
translated by Francesca Rhys*

## 20. Selah (I) – Sun Hanshu

Text: Psalm 3

When David wrote the third Psalm he was surrounded by enemies and beset with crises (2 Sam. 15-16). Even those who cared about him remarked: "There is no help for him in God." The deeply moving Psalm he wrote depicts with intense passion his unwavering faith and his calm, steady dependence on God. His use of the term *selah* is the most striking feature of the Psalm. Used three times with increasing intensity (following the second, fourth and eighth verses), it articulates his difficult straits, expounds his faith, and comes to rest in the affirmation that: "Deliverance belongs to the Lord; thy blessing be upon thy people!" What is revealed to us in these three *selah* may be richer and more profound than what we gain from the verses themselves.

The term *selah* is found in thirty-nine Psalms (including the third) a total of seventy-one times, and three times in the third chapter of Habakkuk. We know that the term was originally used in music notation to signify a rest. The musical scores of the Psalms have been lost; but retention of the term in the Psalm texts is evidence of a significance beyond the musical one: a deeper spiritual meaning. If the Holy Spirit were to clear and brighten the eyes of our souls, and reveal to us the mystical truth of *selah*, we would gain new light and inspiration.

In the "Song of the Lute Girl" by the Tang poet Bai Juyi (772-846), there is a marvelous line which may help us to fathom the meaning of *selah*:

... but then it became as hushed as water flowing under a frozen spring...  
suddenly it ceased altogether;  
her sorrow had brought my own sorrow to the surface;  
the silence was greater than the music. 1

The music of the lute, whose "heavier notes resounded like a storm, the lighter ones were nothing more than a whisper," links the inner emotions of the poet and the lute girl, both of whom have come down in the world. When "it ceased altogether," their communication grew even deeper: "my own sorrow (brought) to the surface." This is what it means to say that silence is greater than sound. Yes, in communicating truth and emotion, the capacity and magic of "silence" is immeasurably superior to that of audible melodies, beautiful phrases or strict logic. In the face of Absalom's treachery, King David could have called upon the bravery he had shown in his attack on Goliath, but did not, achieving final victory by obedience to God, reliance on God and faith in God. This is the spiritual meaning of the three *selah* in Psalm 3: sound overcome by silence.

What then is this principle, that "silence is greater than sound?" Is it the "Ah Q spirit"?<sup>2</sup> No. Is it an expression of negativity, of powerlessness? No. The Tang poet and philosopher Han Yu (768-824) expressed the mystery thus: "If that is not blocked, this will not flow; if that is not stopped, this will not move." This sentence is the key to the mystery, why "silence" is greater than "sound." Actually, this is a principle found throughout the Bible: no gain without loss; no

abundance without abasement; no wealth without poverty; no joy without sadness; no beauty without ugliness; no eternal life without death; and so on. The instances are too numerous to mention.

**"He will not cry or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street."**

Is. 42: 1-4

These words from the Bible give us a profound and vivid image of the life of Jesus as *selah*. Further, we find:

"For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not . . . He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" (*Is. 53:2-3;7*).

These are also indications of *selah* which Jesus has left for us. Let us consider some attitudes of the Pharisees by way of comparison:

"for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. . .And when you fast, do not look dismal ... for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. . .They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men" (*Mt. 6:5; 6:16; 23:5-7*).

All this "packaging" and "advertising" is extremely despicable. History has judged the Pharisees as "whitened sepulchres," as cups, cleansed on the outside but dirty within (Luke 11:39). The image they took pains to build up for themselves has been spurned by history and dictionaries define "Pharisee" as synonymous with "hypocrite." Though our Lord Jesus, "did not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street ... the coastlands wait for his law," (coastlands here indicates far-flung places). Truly, such "silence" of Jesus, when compared to the "sound" of the Pharisees, is precious and worthy of veneration beyond measure.

Why should this "silence" of Jesus most attract the "coastlands," those farthest of places, which all "wait for his law?" It may be helpful for us to clarify the relationship between sound and emotion. A performance in which there is sound but no emotion will not move people. This is because emotion is basic, it is the source, while "sound" follows or flows from this. Jesus is the basis of the cosmos, the source of all creation. He can call to us through all means of revelation, but if you or I want to receive his "silence," we must say with unrestrained emotion: "For the love of Christ controls us ... that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:14,15). "Draw me after you, let us make haste"(Song 1:4).

Jesus is waiting for us to be "silent" believers. "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, . . . When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Mt.6:6,3). Our Lord reserves special rewards and grace for those who silently, so silently even they seem unaware of it, evoke the response: "I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink." But he loathes those who "honor me with their lips (with sound), while their hearts are far from me" (Is. 29:13).

If we study Jesus' "silence" and do not "cry" or "lift up our voice," or "make it heard in the street," not only will we earn God's favor, but we will also be able to witness to the gospel more effectively to other people "that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Action is without sound, but it carries a most powerful witness. May God's grace be with us that we may "seek knowledge from those inferior to ourselves, from those whose knowledge is not as great as our own" (*The Analects of Confucius*). Let us do so in humility and in weakness, but also with honesty, loyalty and straightforwardness, firmly following in Jesus' "soundless" footsteps.

**"Not proclaiming ... in lofty words or wisdom."**

1 Cor. 2:1-5

In "proclaiming the mystery of God," Paul did not use, or stopped using, "lofty words or wisdom;" this is another expression of *selah*. We know that Paul was capable of "lofty words and wisdom" since he had a thorough education in Hebrew and Greek. There were also things about him which people thought of as a "stumbling block" and termed "foolish;" he had had experiences such as being "taken up to the third heaven ... hearing secrets" etc. It is clear that he felt it would be useless to proclaim the mystery of God with lofty words or wisdom and decided "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." "Not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

Why did Paul not "cry" his "lofty words or wisdom," not lift up his voice? His own answer is "that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." In our theological discourses, issues of faith vs. wisdom or life (eternal) vs. knowledge, have accompanied us along nearly the whole progress of church history and the debate continues. If we want to avoid arguing in absolutes and adopt an open and pious attitude, we can attempt to understand this teaching of Paul as follows: faith and rationality, life and knowledge, the might of God and human intellect, are not pairs of mutually exclusive opposites, not contradictions, but can be complementary. They are not, however, to be equated, and they are not interchangeable. Especially in proclaiming the knowledge of God, human intellect can never take the place of the power of God, cannot supplant "Jesus Christ and him crucified," cannot be substituted for "the demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

In addition to ruthless persecution by the Roman government, the early church came under attack from public opinion and from the Jewish and Greek intelligentsia, primarily in the form of insults such as "stumbling block" and "folly." In the face of such pressure, there were those in the early church, of whom Valentinus is an example, who lost courage (or

perhaps never had it) and who felt ashamed for Jesus Christ and him crucified, wracking their brains to invent all sorts of means to deck the Gospel in the appurtenances of Greek philosophy and Eastern religion. Such efforts at "lofty words and wisdom" to "proclaim the mystery of God," made up their infamous legacy of Gnosticism. What a poignant lesson of history this is! But we are very grateful and pleased to see that those who kept to Paul's path of proclaiming "not in lofty words or wisdom," included the early church fathers represented by Augustine, the medieval mystics, sixteenth century reformers such as Martin Luther, the pietists of the late seventeenth century and the wave upon wave of those who have held high the cross of salvation in movements since the eighteenth century. It is they who have brought the gospel and the "mystery of God," to the "ends of the earth."

Emphasis on forgoing lofty words or wisdom is not a promotion of obscurantism. It is a demand that we reserve some time for meditation in our explorations into speculative theology. In Psalm 9, v.16, *selah* is not simply a musical "rest" but, even more importantly, it is an indication that silent thought or meditation is called for. (In the English Bible, we find the words *Higgaion*, *Selah*. *Higgaion* means meditation.) Meditation is direct communication with God, of the sort that takes place in your room, in the wilderness, or in the third heaven; spiritual rest during which we may "hear hidden secrets." It is a precious experience which no servant of God, no faithful believer can do without. No one could call Martin Luther obscurantist and he has written more than one can finish in a lifetime, yet he said himself, "If I cannot give two hours or more to prayer each morning, then I will that day taste defeat at the hands of the devil." A Puritan of the seventeenth century, Thomas Manton, put it this way:

The end of study is information, and the end of meditation is practice, or a work upon the affections. Study is like a winter sun, that shines, but warms not: but meditation is like a blowing upon the fire, where we do not mind the blaze, but the heat. The end of study is to hoard up truth; but of meditation to lay it forth in conference or holy conversation.<sup>3</sup>

This makes a lot of sense. In sum, meditation can aid us to "know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified; not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

**"I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses."**

2 Cor. 12:9-10

2 Corinthians is more appealing and affecting than any other letter of Paul. In reading this book of the Bible, we feel the vast enthusiastic waves of Paul's words surging over us before God and humanity, lashing our very being. One of the most precious mysteries and deepest spiritual experiences the book contains is: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, . . . for when I am weak, then I am strong." Paul seems to have made a choice: whether to boast of weakness or of strength.

"But whatever anyone dares to boast of - I am speaking as a fool - I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they

descendents of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one - I am talking like a madman - with far greater labors, far more imprisonments..... (2 Cor. 11:21-30).

Certainly Paul had plenty of strength to boast of, but in the end his choice was "if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness." How should we rate strength vs. weakness? Paul's principle was that of the truth of the gospel, and like truth, always differed from the principles of the world. Is not Paul's "glad boasting of weakness" a following in the footsteps of Jesus? He did "not cry, not lift up his voice, or make it be heard in the street?" And is it not a beautiful application of the *selah* principle?

All his life Paul remembered his bitter experiences of strength: "breathing threats and murder ... men or women he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2). That was the height of his strength. Finally, "he fell to the ground," saw his error and understood that there was nothing in such strength to boast of. He was painfully remorseful. In the winter of 1077, Pope Gregory the Seventh punished the German Emperor Henry the Fourth by making him stand barefoot in the snow outside the gates of Canossa Castle for three days and three nights, begging forgiveness. This was an unprecedented show of "strength." Amusingly, this reversal was short-lived, and in 1084 the German forces took Rome, after which the Papacy was under the domination of the German Emperor for some time. The following truth is put forward in the Chapter 76 of *The Way of Laozi*:

When man is born, he is tender and weak.  
At death, he is stiff and hard.  
All things, the grass as well as trees, are tender and supple while alive.  
When dead, they are withered and dried.  
Therefore the stiff and the hard are companions of death.  
The tender and the weak are companions of life.  
Therefore if the army is strong, it will not win.  
If a tree is stiff, it will break.  
The strong and the great are inferior, while the tender and the weak are superior.<sup>4</sup>

Yes, the church of the second and third centuries, suffering a whole succession of persecutions, was certainly very weak, but it was composed of "living disciples." The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, and when the gospel spreads to the ends of the earth, the Decius' and Diocletians - the "strong men" persecutors of the church- will be the "dead disciples" swept aside by the forces of history.

Practitioners of Tai Chi \* know that its secret lies in "the non-application of force," and in "letting go." It sounds strange, but when this non-exercise of force and letting go is kept up for a long time, it can fight diseases, strengthen the body and give people incredible strength. What is the principle behind it? Many explanations have been offered, and it is difficult to be very clear, but the facts cannot be denied. Perhaps we can turn to a scientific experiment to

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\* *Traditional Chinese exercises.*

help us understand: changes in the blood pressure of a patient suffering from hypertension can be monitored with a specialized instrument. If the patient tries to control blood pressure through will power, it will have the opposite result. But if the patient is taught a certain Tai Chi exercise, the blood pressure will become noticeably lower. Is this "natural" exercise merely a matter of "nonuse of strength," of "letting go?" In human life we find the use of strength all around us; chaotic strength, blind strength and misused strength. How can we use that strength so that like the ruby laser it becomes capable of capturing a ray of light and directing it in a single direction? Perhaps exercises like *qigong*\* and Tai Chi may prove effective. But why love strength so, why desire it, why flaunt it, why use it to bully others? My dear friends! Let us stop all our stupid, distorted, deviant use of energy. Let us come to rest. Like Zheng Banqiao (1644-1911), let us promote the idea of "giving way, stepping back a bit," as a way of life. In this way we can recover our disordered capabilities, and return our hearts to a quiet state, allowing the "natural you" and the "natural me" to "naturally" give free reign to our power. It is still Paul who understood this principle most fully, because the Lord told him, "for my power is made perfect in weakness." Creator God, Savior God, the capabilities of this most high, most great, eternal, and infinite nature are always hidden by our human "strength." They are unable to show forth, at least not entirely; only in human weakness can they be fully manifest. Paul truly understood that "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." This is truly and willingly to allow the power of the Lord to be made perfect in our weakness. Only in this way will we humbly "boast of our weakness" with glad hearts.

**"Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."**

2 Cor. 4:10

Death, especially "Jesus' death," the "death upon the cross" (Phil.2:8) is the final "rest," the most fundamental *selah*. This is the wonderful truth in which *selah* find its most profound expression. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). Here the principle of *selah* becomes even clearer.

We must understand not only "Jesus' death," but even more importantly, "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus," and how we may make the "life of Jesus" manifest in ourselves. First of all we must explain the truth of the words: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." To live and die with Christ is the most fundamental, the most familiar of Christian principles and there is no necessity to add much to it here. But I would like to further emphasize one point, and it is a point in which Christians differ greatly from other religions or ethical teachings, and that is that we believe that righteousness does not depend on works, but first of all on being "united with him in a death like his." Only then can we be "united with him in a resurrection like his." We must first be "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus," before "the life of Jesus" may also be manifested in our bodies. The "old self" must first die before the new can live, just as the obstruction must be removed from the pipe before water will flow from the faucet, the fines clear before the lamp will light, or the cause of the



disease cured before a person can be healthy. Looked at in this way, for a Christian (one who has died with Christ), good works are a matter of course, something as natural as the beating of one's heart, as breathing in and out, as the fact that flowers are fragrant, or that birds sing. Why speak of amassing credit for the next world, of "doing good deeds;" why commodify it? It is only when we see it in this way, when we begin to explore ethics in this way, that we may avoid affectation and hypocritical "moral cultivation," that we can cast off the fetters of onerous regulations and taboos and take up the light burden and easy yoke of Jesus, living so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies. The important thing is that we must remember always to "carry in the body the death of Jesus."

The second point here is that death must be at work in us, so that life may be at work in others. These lines speak of the rules for the ministry of Paul and those with those with him. To serve God, one cannot be without "death at work in us." We must have the experience of being "afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed . . ." Paul clearly saw "life at work in you," as when he said, "if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation" (2 Cor. 1:6). How Paul suffered! But how he was blessed as well. Death was at work in him with bitter severity, but how vigorously was life at work in so many others: in the churches of Galatia, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Colossus, Philippi, Corinth, Rome, and even our own. Certainly he was able to "see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (Is. 53:11).

"We are treated as ... dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:9-10). Here he fully reveals his mind to us, his own joy in the Lord in the midst of suffering, his "satisfaction." What he has left us here is another powerfully moving picture of *selah* in real life. St. Francis has given exquisite expression to this dialectical truth of spirituality: "For It is in forgiving that we are forgiven; in loving that we are loved; in giving that we receive; and in dying that we are born to eternal life." Would we refuse to enter into this truth?

In sum, the Christian life should be a most beautiful song, but the music may not always be exalting and uplifting. A song filled with *selah*, a song without sound, may be greater than music.

*Notes.*

1. Rewi Alley, tr., *Bai Juyi: 200 Selected Poems*. (Beijing: New World Press, 1983), p.233.
2. Submission and passivity. Characteristics of the main character in the famous "True Story of Ah Q," by Lu Xun.
3. Quoted in I.D.E. Thomas, ed., *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations* (Chicago: Moody Press), p.183.
4. Wing-Tsit Chan, tr., *The Way of Lao Tzu*. (New York & Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p.233.

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 6 & 7 (September, 1987), p. .32.*  
*translated by Janice Wickeri*

## 21. Selah (II) – Sun Hanshu

Text: ". . . let it be the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

We have been considering the riches of spiritual truth to be found in the term *selah*. These riches should become the compass of the Christian life. When we read in 1 Peter 3:1-6, "let it be the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit," we inevitably touch once more upon the feeling imparted by *selah*. We are drawn to take up our cross and follow Jesus, as we were when we read the verses: "does not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor make it heard in the streets, ... boasting of my weaknesses," and "carrying in the body the death of Jesus."

In 1 Peter 3:1-6 we find Peter's exhortation to the "wives" of his day, but the majority of Biblical scholars as well as ordinary Christians would agree that his words are directed at those who love the Lord in this or any other age. Male or female, husbands or wives, all should nourish "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit." In the Bible, feminine qualities are often used to reveal spiritual truths and teachings to the church and its members. This gentle and quiet spirit is equivalent to *selah*. It is the silence, greater than sound.

1 Peter was written about 64 AD for the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who were suffering various trials (1:5-9; 4:12-19). Peter exhorts them "to share in Christ's sufferings" (4:13), and further to "cause those who do not obey the word," including those who "test" them, to be "won over."

What sort of actions would move others so profoundly?

### (1)

When the Bible speaks of the "braiding of hair, decoration of gold and wearing of fine clothing," it is not speaking of ordinary dressing up but of extremes: elaborate hairdos with gold and silver ornaments braided into them for a rich display; similar ornaments worn about the neck or to decorate clothing. From this point of view, beautiful clothing must be seductive. This was the fashion in the Greece and Rome of the day and in reality, fashion had lost its claim to beauty and had degenerated into vulgarity and indecency. In the face of such customs, Christians naturally stood firm. Perhaps a Christian woman, persecuted by a non-believing husband, might attempt to follow the fashion, to be like everyone else, to "adorn herself to please," in order to gain her husband's favor, and lead him toward the true way, but this would be a useless self-deluding approach, like that in the old Chinese saying "to climb a tree to catch a fish." We Christians should bring a message to the age, be a witness to it, in ways which accord with the person, the time, the place, and the glory of God. We should "become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some"(1 Cor. 9:22). But we cannot make endless concessions, pandering to people to the point where we lose those basic attributes of sons and daughters of God. Custom in whatever age or society is a mixture of good and bad. Those who are strictly orthodox, particularly Christians, should follow good advice readily and hate evil.

(2)

"... let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit." Christians living for God also need to be adorned, or dressed up. One way is to braid the hair, and wear ornaments and fine clothes. Another is to cultivate "a quiet and gentle heart." Which is the more precious of the two? Peter has made the distinction clear by saying "let (it) not be . . . ," rather, "let it be . . . ."

In the Bible, the word gentle is often used in the same way as, or together with the words humble, poor, weak, and oppressed. It is rich in connotations. When we seek to understand this word, to use it to beautify ourselves, our help lies in following in Jesus' own footsteps:

"Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I **will** give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you **will** find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30).

If we close our eyes we can see Jesus' gentleness, his humility. He is so kindly and approachable, nothing like a priest, a scholar or a Pharisee, those who are so stern of voice and countenance, cold as ice, fearsome, the type of person people keep a respectful distance from. If by some misstep, one gets tangled up with them, the result is to be landed in a dilemma, to be "heavy laden!" Jesus, on the other hand, brings us only rest, peace of heart, ease and lightness.

"Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass"(Mt. 21:5; Is. 9:9).

Riding upon an ass, especially a colt, is quite different from riding a horse. This is a metaphor for our gentle Lord, indicating that he is not domineering, aggressive nor arrogant. It also has a more profound meaning: to show that Jesus is peaceable, that he is the lord of peace. The horse is a symbol of battle (Ex. 14:9; Is. 1:7-11); the ass its exact opposite, a symbol of peace. Genesis 49:11, "(Judah)Binding his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine," gives us a striking picture of peace and prosperity. As King David was nearing his end and preparing the succession of Solomon, he gave the following instructions:

"Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride on my own mule, and bring him back to Gihon; and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet and say, "Long live King Solomon!"(1 Kings 1:33-34).

It is not as impressive to come riding a mule to be anointed king as it is to ride a horse onto the battlefield. This is another song of peace, whose tune is very harmonious and gentle. Yes, why see the world as a battlefield, where we need battle horses and swords, where we must oppress others whenever possible, resorting to arms at every turn? It is better to come riding upon a mule, go wherever it takes you, "and shout hosanna to the Lord." There one can breathe freely, put one's heart at ease, be light, relaxed, at peace in

one's heart. It should be that when two people meet, they are like two drops of water coming together on a lotus leaf, merging into one. What kind of persons are capable of reacting in this way? Only the gentle can attempt it and succeed.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth (Is. 53:7).

This is another facet of the gentleness of Jesus. It is even more important, even more basic. If we have really seen this gentleness of Jesus, we would come to an extremely profound realization: that gentleness is a kind of endurance, an indomitable endurance without limits. Faced with the threat of the cross, Jesus did not seek help from the "Syrophonicians" to escape from Jerusalem; rather he said resolutely, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn. 12:20-26). When he had been nailed to the cross he said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And then he said calmly to his mother, "Mother, behold your son." And to the apostle, "Behold your mother." What amazing endurance and admirable gentleness.

The apostle Paul was highly successful in following in Jesus' footsteps.

Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want (Phil. 4:11-12).

How gentle a style marks this kind of Christian life, calm in the face of whatever befalls. Whatever the pressures (abundance, plenty, and riches are at times extremely oppressive), such a Christian can endure them all. In the Chinese tradition, we find the following description of such a life, which puts it quite well: "riches cannot corrupt, nor want cause him to abandon his integrity." If we ask how Paul "learned" these things, the answer is:

... Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one ... with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death .... And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches (2 Cor.11:16-30).

Truly, the Holy Spirit makes of our wanderings, our ups and downs, a classroom to train us in gentleness and endurance. Paul "learned" this way as did so many other saints. In his poem "To Lu Chen," the poet Liu Kun (270-317) is describing just such an experience when he says, "Why does one become so powerless after defeat? It is just like a hard, solid object, which, many times refined, becomes soft and pliable enough to ring one's finger." We Christians should have a greater understanding *of* and live out the truth embodied in this line.

### (3)

"Quiet." We know that the quiet spoken of here is not simply that of being taciturn, not simply the quiet of silence. "Quiet" here points to an inner state which is untroubled and imperturbable, a calm temperament marked by stability, tranquility and serenity.

Consider how many unquiet people there are. "But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked" (Is. 57:20-21). This is one sort. And in Romans 7:7-24, we find another, " . . . but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" And, "for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, that is driven and tossed by the wind . . . a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways . . ." (James 1:5-8). All these unquiet people - how wretched they are, how pitiable, and, of course, evil and hateful. From these negative examples, we see how precious, how desirable, this quiet is.

How can we enter the beautiful realm of quiet, or array ourselves with tranquility? Psalm 131 gives us excellent guidelines. "I have calmed and quieted my soul" describes what kind of experience quiet is, how it feels, how it differs from being "tossed upon the seas," from "wretchedness," and from "doubt." Its secret lies here: " . . . my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me." Understood plainly and simply, this sentence means that our hearts, eyes and feet should not reach beyond our grasp. By relying on the grace and power of God, our hearts are gathered in, our eyes corrected and our actions examined, even until " . . . whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7). This means that I take time to search for myself, to discover myself, to think about myself "with sober judgment" (Rom. 12:3). This is of the greatest importance to whether or not we can achieve quiet.

Another aspect of the experience of quiet is found in the verse: "like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul." This is the foundation of our quiet. The child does not seek its mother only for food; it seeks the mother's embrace precisely because she is the mother, because it wants the mother. In the mother's arms, lying in her embrace, it is content, comfortable, joyous, happy. Nothing else is needed, and the child is quiet. Have you ever felt fulfilled, with no further desires, in the Lord's embrace? Have you ever felt (like Sheba) that "there was no more spirit in her"(1 Kings 10:5)? Or "fell into a trance" (Acts 10:10; 22:17)? This happens only when we feel the eternity, the I am, the truth, the light, the love, and the holiness of God ... God draws us, as a mother her child, a child that has been lost. Only when we are being thus drawn along, urgently, relying on God, like a deer seeking, longing for the stream; only then can we experience what it means to feel "my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast," and we will be "calmed and quieted."

There really is no suitable way to express this feeling in language. Truly, it can be apprehended only in silence; we cannot put it into words. Or perhaps we can put it this way: that it leads us to find ourselves, poor and weak as we are, with nothing to rely upon, no recourse but to cast ourselves into God's embrace - the eternity, I am-ness, truth, light, love, and holiness which is God's embrace - as a drop of water falling into the sea loses itself, but

is born anew to an enriched, an eternal, self. We are touching here upon the true essence of life, a full sense of rootedness. "Calmed and quieted." "Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and for evermore." When we hope in the Lord for evermore, then Yahweh only is the foundation of our quietude.

(4)

It should be very helpful at this point to contrast "braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothing" to "gentle and quiet."

"Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair ... but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit." First, we find that one is external, one within. Each of us has an outer and an inner self. Do we take pains to adorn the outer person or the inner? Each of us has our ideals and strengths, but there is a great difference between inner nature and outer effect. It is a matter of common sense that the inner is the essence while the outer is the nonessential; the inner is the source, the outer its expression. Only a good tree bears good fruit. A bitter spring will not produce a sweet stream. But in real life we do find those who go against the current, who reverse the essential and the nonessential. They care only about outward appearances. They base their opinions on those of the crowd. In scholarly research, they concern themselves only with the superficial. In moral terms, they fool themselves and others. The result is that they drift through shallow and empty lives. Qu Yuan's heartfelt lament is worth pondering:

For goodness is not a thing to be got from outside us  
And fame not a thing we can fabricate from nothing.  
Who without works has ever been rewarded?  
Who without fruits ever reaped a harvest fair?\*

As humans we cannot depend upon "advertising," or "packaging;" the stupid ones - the "buyers and sellers" - are after all in the minority. We Christians should be vigilant and avoid worship of God which "holds the form of religion, but denies the power of it" (2 Tim.3:5), and the tendency to read the Bible relying on the "written code," but not the "Spirit"(2 Cor. 3:6). For "will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? ... and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:7-8). For a Christian, the "inner man" is the "new man"(2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), "strengthened with might ... the inner man" (Eph.3:16). To adorn the inner person, we have only the efficacy of the cross to depend on, "being in Jesus," relying on the fact "that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his spirit in the inner man." Gentleness and quiet are the best adornments for the inner person.

Christians ought to see this truth even more clearly. "One who would cultivate seeds must feed the root; one who would cultivate virtue must feed the heart." (Wang Shouren) The

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\* *David Hawkes, tr., The Songs of the South (Middlesex, U.K.: Penguin, 1985), p.168.*

inner person well adorned and revealed becomes the best adornment of the outer person. When the inner person is made new and strengthened, then externally "the fragrance of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:15) will be revealed. Such gentleness and quiet - isn't this more precious than braided hair, decorations of gold or fine clothes?

The second phrase says, "let it be the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet . . ." The use of imperishable here to describe gentle and quiet, points to the incorruptible nature of these qualities. They are eternal - not like braided hair, which may come undone, not like decorations of gold which may tarnish nor fine clothes which may rot. What is external is always transitory; flowers never last long in a vase. But gentleness and quiet are different. They are inner things, part of human nature, of one's disposition. They belong to the new person, the strengthened heart. Naturally like "mountains that cannot be moved, human nature is difficult to change." No matter if heaven and earth change places, if truth and falsehood are reversed, or if the boundary separating humans and monsters blurs, one's heart is not troubled or confused; one stands firm, gentle and quiet as before, an imperishable jewel of gentleness and quiet.

Thirdly, "in God's sight (this) is very precious ... some ... may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives." Gentleness and quiet are precious in God's sight because of their imperishability and incorruptibility. Their source is the eternity of God, Christ as the Alpha and Omega. They are of God, they are of heaven. Gentle and quiet people all have "laid up for (them) the crown of righteousness," and they shall hear the words, "good and loyal servants ... enter into the joy of your Lord." Braided hair, gold ornaments and fine clothing are nothing but dried grasses and withered flowers. At the same time, qualities such as gentleness and quiet are rich in the power to win other people over without a word. No matter how well adorned the outer person may be, it can only attract attention by causing people to gasp in envious admiration. This is because the outer person, no matter how vivaciously made up, always seems rather hypocritical and unapproachable. How can such qualities win people over? Inner adornments are of an entirely different nature. If we spend time on the inner person, the results will be evident in the outer. What comes from within, from nature, - every small action or word, every tone of voice or expression, seen from any angle, whether the person is present or not - is all revelatory of a gentle and quiet disposition. These are the things which have the most power to win people over. It is this which can "win over" "husbands ... who do not obey the word." There is another truth here which we often overlook; that is, that those "who do not obey the word" may be moved and won over. Though it is true that we mortals are all "dead through sin," we are after all made in the image and likeness of God, and though we have lost God's "moral image," we still have the "natural image," which is our conscience (Rom. 1:19). This conscience is the "inner man" (Rom.7:22), which understands most fully the truth, goodness and beauty or the falsity, evil and ugliness of the inner person. Conscience cannot be suppressed or cheated. Only one who is arrayed with "the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet heart" can open other people up, awaken them, win them over. Outer adornments such as the biblical braiding of hair, gold decorations and fine clothing are ineffective and vulgar.

Externals such as these are equivalent to "sound": they assault the ears and eyes. Gentleness and quiet make no sound, nor do they attract the eyes. Yet the Bible teaches us to

reject the former and embrace the latter. People who love God should seek what is internal and avoid what is external. For *selah* is precious. Silence is greater than sound.

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 8 (April, 1988), p. 61.*  
*translated by Janice Wickeri*



## 22. The Lord Has Need of It – Can Huixiang

Text: Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19:28-40

My dear brothers and sisters, you knew immediately when you saw my sermon title what I want to share with you today. Yes, the colt that carried the Lord is known to all, and has even moved many, many people to renounce everything else and follow the Lord, dedicating themselves heart and soul to the Lord's service. Today, let us "lead" this colt, and depending upon God's grace, let us "untie" this colt afresh. I hope we may be able to see something of value in this text and be helped by it.

### The Colt

First, let us see that the Lord Jesus sent the disciples to the village for a colt, not a horse. A colt is young and tender, an ordinary animal, not strong, yet it is a symbol of peace (See Zech. 9:9-10). When a prince goes out to war, he rides a battle steed. But when he wants to convey a peaceful attitude, he will ride a colt. The Lord Jesus is the Prince of Peace, He came into the world in a humble fashion, his image one of peace, of bringing the gospel of peace. Thus, the vessels the Lord would use should be capable of representing his humble and peaceful nature. This calls for each of us co-workers to present an image of humility and peace among our brothers and sisters just as God's faithful servant Moses did. Otherwise, the news of reconciliation we preach will be hindered and the image of the Lord Jesus Christ will be degraded.

A vessel must be called by the Lord, for if we serve simply because we feel compelled to do so by objective circumstances, that is far from enough. Look at this colt. It was not brought by others, it did not come of his own accord, but the Lord sent the disciples to lead it. This word, *qian* in Chinese, means "to lead as with reins," and also "called," and "to lead or guide." I think there must have been many other colts in that village; however, they did not have the opportunity to be "called and led" to the Master. Just as in Judea there were thousands of young girls, but only Mary was chosen as the vessel when "the Word became flesh." Thus a clear call and explicit commitment are the very minimum required of a servant of God, are fundamental and relate to all you do.

A brother studying in a seminary testified that when he saw the church's needs he decided to apply to the seminary and dedicate himself to this work. He was careful in all he did, because he did not clearly understand God's call, therefore he waited. One day God truly called him and he was moved in his spirit when he saw the words, "The Lord has need of it." At that time God's love moved the student to tears . . . . Soon God provided verification of the call: he was able to enter the seminary. Every time he faced a difficulty on his chosen path of service he remembered those words and they gave him courage, faith and strength. They made his steps more certain. Therefore for those who would serve Jesus, a clear call is an impetus which will carry them along the road of service. Paul's experience also illustrates this point. When he faced dangers and difficulties, he said, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts

26:19). This vision encouraged Paul to keep moving forward with determination on his road of service.

The last time the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem was a great and glorious event. And he chose an ordinary country colt for that occasion. For the Lord knew that a faithful vessel with a natural disposition to service would be better able to meet the tests of life and better able to be taught and trained. The prophet Jeremiah was sentimental by nature and timid, yet God chose him, a weak vessel, to take up the rigorous mission as prophet to those times. "Preach the gospel to every creature," is a great spiritual work. But the Lord chose many "uneducated folk," "uncomely" common people, as some people saw them, to have a part in this great work. We cannot but thank God for his wonderful grace and great love, that today he still calls us ordinary, weak people to get up and follow him in service. Therefore we should do our very best to serve the Lord's church well, that we may not be found unworthy of the hopes the Lord has placed in us.

We also learn from Matthew that this colt was still living with its mother (Mt. 21:2). Since the colt was always near the mother, it got from her the warmth of a mother's love, and received her instruction so that when it grew up, the colt could become "a valuable vessel." Good home training and the growth of children into useful young adults cannot be separated. For that reason today many parents are particularly careful and concerned for their children. They hope that when they grow up they will be useful to society. In the same way, "family education" in a Christian home cannot ignore this aspect of growing up. If parents see to it that their children are properly led and trained, they will grow up to have sound values and make a contribution to society and this will benefit them as individuals as well. Then, if one day, God should call our young people, they will be ready to respond and, like the colt of the story, become God's holy vessel. The Bible cites many instances like this. We cannot separate Samuel's dedication from the upbringing Elkanah and Hannah gave him. My own walk with the Lord in his service cannot be separated from my upbringing and the more than three years my mother prayed for me.

### **The Lord Has Need of It**

All the gospels record that the colt was one "on which no one had ever sat." Up to now no one had been willing to use this colt. Perhaps they thought it was too small, too young, or lacking in strength. The Lord knew no one had ever ridden this colt, but he wanted to use it. Some of our seminary students have been "thwarted" in seeking the best way to dedicate themselves: they do not pass the university entrance exam; they cannot find work; they are not accepted for military service; and on and on we could go. It is as if God himself thwarts them at every turn until they prostrate themselves before God, obey God's call, and begin to walk the road of service. This is the course the little colt "on which no one had ever sat" followed to "the Lord has need of it." In order for the colt to be used by the Lord, it must leave its native place, its own kind, and its family. Such a young and delicate colt, how could it leave its loving family? Much less to "become a stranger" in Jerusalem? Who knew what it would meet there? (See Acts 20:21-22.)

I think that we who have given ourselves to this service have all gone through various degrees of indecision, we have pondered our course. Yet this colt had no such thoughts or times of indecision. Thank the Lord, it "immediately" let the disciples lead it. It obeyed the Lord's kind pull on the "cords of compassion" (Hos.11:4). In fact, this is the only way the Lord could have used the colt!

### **Untie It and Bring It**

The Lord wants to use the colt. It must then be untied and led to him. Today the Lord wants to use us, furthermore he has an important use for us, so we must be "untied." What does this "becoming untied" mean? First, we must be freed from coveting the things of the world. The Bible has an interesting word on this: "And as they were untying the colt, its owners (masters) said to them, `Why are you untying the colt?' And they said, `The Lord (master) has need of it." Here we have the word "Lord" or "master" used twice. How can it serve two masters? Unless it leaves the first master, the second master cannot use it. In the same way, do we not have a master? If our first master keeps us tied, how can we leave? The Lord Jesus said to the resurrected Lazarus, "Untie him, let him go!" (Jn. 11:44) If we ourselves cannot leave the first master, how can we lead others to the Lord? There is no need to speak of your being used of the Lord! Paul said to Timothy, "If a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). This is the meaning of "untie," to cleanse oneself and leave the bad behind.

Once we are "untied" we still need "to be led!" Led where? To Jesus (See Luke 19:35). For what purpose are we led to Jesus? Listen to Psalm 36:9, "For with thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light do we see light." Preachers must preach, they must let the water of life flow, they must find the source of the living water, they must see the light of the ages. Only by finding the light and touching the source, can we run and not get tired, walk and not become weary.

Therefore the Book of Hebrews requires that we constantly draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive and find grace to help in time of need. (See Heb. 4:16). How many times have we felt that our strength is not enough? This is because we are not willing to be "untied," we are not willing to be "led to the Lord."

### **He Sat upon It**

When the colt was led to Jesus, Jesus used it. The people put their coats on the colt and helped Jesus onto its back. We can imagine that the colt, with Jesus astride, was not all that comfortable or happy about the situation. The colt could but do its best to carry its burden forward with patient restraint, in order not to fail in this important task.

The church is the body of Christ and each of us who serves the Lord must carry the weight of China's church on our shoulders. Therefore, we must be like the colt, obedient, willingly bearing the burden of our calling, in order not to fail our Lord in his expectations of us.

The Lord's road is the small colt's road, and it is also our road. We cannot "love the world," or go to "Thessalonica" (see 2 Tim. 4:10); and we cannot happily go to "Jericho" because of our sins (See Luke 10:33); and we cannot lose heart or go to "Emmaus" (See Luke 24:13). What is our purpose? It is Jerusalem, the goal to which our Lord pointed. We do not know what will happen on the road ahead. But we do not worry because the Lord goes with us. To finish the course laid out for him, Saint Paul met with tremendous hardship, went through fire and water, yet he completed his task. He said, "But I do not account my life of any value nor precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21-23). So brothers and sisters, the colt walks the road that it is to walk, "the course laid out" for it. Do we not also have a road we should walk today? Then we should "run with vigor." The church of China has proposed we should "govern," "propagate," and "support ourselves well." Are we in fact doing so? Are we running the good race or not?

Besides our purpose being right, in order to run well, we must see that Jesus is above and in control! If the colt had proudly raised its head to hear the people praise it, then it would have taken away from the glory due the Lord.

We are servants of the Lord, how can we detract from his glory? Truly, a whole-hearted servant of the Lord will receive respect and love from others. But such respect and love are not sought by the believer, but given by God. Look at this colt. It quietly carried the Lord into Jerusalem. And the Lord will not forget it. All four gospels record the colt's story. We still think of it today.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, what do you see in this colt's story? I hope you see help along the road.

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