

**Chinese  
Theological  
Review**

**1991**

## Preface

The theme of the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference (NCCC) held in Beijing from December 1991 to 6 January 1992 was "running the church well." In many ways, this theme runs through not only the documents from that meeting which are included in this issue of the *Review*, but indirectly through many of the other essays and sermons as well, for it is a theme concerned with defining and strengthening the church as an institution, without which the church could not continue to develop its links with the church universal nor reach out to its own society. The other, and equally important, half of the equation is "inner" formation, and this constitutes another important theme in this issue.

Though not a comprehensive collection, major documents and addresses from the Fifth National Christian Conference are presented here as a reference to the important issues raised in the meeting. These include the Work Report, the Trial Order, the new Constitutions for the China Christian Council (CCC) and the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches of China (TSPM), an introduction to the revisions in these documents, the conference resolution and Bishop K.H. Ting's closing remarks.

Younger people are well represented in the sermons section. Five of the eight sermons included are by young seminarians and recent graduates, three of whom are women. In addition to these sermons from the younger generation, there is a eulogy for the late Bishop Zheng Jianye, a sermon from an ordination service in Nanjing, the sermon preached at the large service of ordination held in Beijing during the NCCC, as well as one of the devotions from that meeting.

The essays in this *Review* continue to reflect a concern with the relationship between faith and culture. Chen Zemin's 1957 essay reflects the direction of his own theological quest at the time; it is brought up to date by a 1991 comment suggesting contrasts between the earlier piece and the present situation. T.C. Chao was one of the leading figures whose thinking helped to shape the Chinese church. In an essay which represents an important contribution to the study of T.C. Chao, Zi Zhu provides a new perspective on the influences of history and culture which shaped his thought. In delineating Chao's efforts to achieve a synthesis between Christian faith and Chinese culture, Zi Zhu's essay provides a timely complement to Kan Baoping's contribution on the importance of contextualization in contemporary theological terms.

The final essay in this section gives an assessment of the phenomenon of "culture Christians" - non-Christian intellectuals and scholars who pursue a philosophical interest in Christianity, yet who do not embrace Christian faith. As this essay shows, many non-Christian intellectuals take an increasingly positive view of Christianity and many younger Christian intellectuals are aware of the need for dialogue with this group. There continues to be an uncertain political climate for religion in China, and for Christianity, there has been a certain amount of tightening up over the last two years. Despite the ongoing difficulties which Christians face in many areas, however, the positive appreciation of Christianity on the part of intellectuals suggests that the cultural receptivity to Christianity in China today may be more favorable than it has ever been in the past.

It should be noted that the majority of authors represented here are or have been connected with Nanjing Theological Seminary. For Protestant Christians, Nanjing is the center of theological education, and it will have an important and guiding influence on theological discourse and direction throughout the nation as many graduates go on to teach in the regional theological colleges and Bible schools. As the only national seminary for China's Protestant

community, it remains the one place with the necessary resources to pursue in-depth theological scholarship.

Given the limitations in our own resources at the *Chinese Theological Review*, especially in terms of personnel, we believe it is most important to focus on Chinese theological developments which emerge in and around Nanjing. To this end we will continue to offer important essays and studies which come from that quarter, along with a selection of sermons and important church documents.

It is our object in translating texts to aim for the same high standard of language in which the original authors expressed themselves. The contents of this issue of the *Chinese Theological Review* are taken from the *Nanjing Theological Review*, journal of Nanjing Theological Seminary and *Tian Feng*, the Protestant monthly published by the TSPM and CCC in Shanghai. We have also been privileged to receive a number of contributions in manuscript form. *Pinyin* romanization of Chinese names and terms is used throughout, except where another form is widely used, or is known to be a personal preference. Biblical quotations follow the *New Revised Standard Version*.

I would like to thank the authors of the articles and sermons which appear in translation here for generously consenting to share their work. Thanks are due to the translators, Peter Barry, Gail Coulson, Craig Moran, Claudia Wahrish Oblau, Gotthard Oblau, Don Snow, Britt Towery and Philip L. Wickeri; to Eva Lai and to the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia.

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# DOCUMENTS OF THE FIFTH NATIONAL CHINESE CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE

## 1. God's Indescribable Grace (Work Report) - **Shen Derong (Mr.)**

This report was delivered to the conference by a vice chairperson of the TSPM.

Today we have come together from all quarters of our country to rejoice together in the love of the Lord. As we discuss together the achievements of the nationwide church, our hearts are filled with joy and gratitude, situated as we are in this new era in our country's history, in which we join together in serving God through the preaching of the gospel and the building up of the church.

We thank the Lord for the gracious blessing God has bestowed upon our nation during these past years. During the five years that have gone by since our last meeting as a national conference the various nationalities here in our country have, under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government, been united in their struggle, and, having successfully accomplished the seventh Five-Year Plan, are embarking on the eighth. There has been immense growth throughout the country in every way during the 1980s, and we are entering upon the 1990s with ever-increasing prosperity. Although we have encountered all kinds of problems, they are all such as would be met with in the course of progress, and they are constantly being overcome. During this past year the National People's Congress has passed the Ten Year Program and the eighth Five-Year Plan put forward by the Party Central Committee. Faced with such an immense target, we Christians, together with all Chinese, are profoundly heartened, and are determined to continue unceasingly to enhance our sense of patriotism, and to throw ourselves even more wholeheartedly into this magnificent socialist cause.

Despite the unstable international situation with which we are now faced, our country enjoys political stability, thanks to the sound leadership of the party and the government and our complete solidarity under the banners of patriotism and socialism. There is political and social stability and economic growth as the people live and work in peace and contentment. Even the severe and widespread floods of last summer have been successfully overcome. Within the extended family of our nation, the Church has all along been a force for promoting stability, and we shall in future be making an even greater contribution to the stability and unity of the country.

The development and the progress which our nation has been enjoying of late is entirely due to the lessons which have been learnt through the Chinese Communist Party in these past decades, and it is wholly dependent on their discovery of the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This path is centered upon economic development and upholding both the Four Cardinal Principles and openness and reform. The facts go to prove that such a path enables China to take its place among the nations, and leads ever onwards to prosperity and strength. We Chinese Christians wholeheartedly support the correct leadership provided by

the Chinese Communist Party, and we are determined to strive shoulder-to-shoulder with the whole of the Chinese people in the task of building up socialism with Chinese characteristics.

One aspect of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the thorough implementation of the policy of the freedom of religious belief. Towards the end of 1990 a national conference on work relating to religion was held, which was addressed by Secretary-General Jiang Zemin and the Premier of the State Council, Li Peng. At the beginning of this year, Secretary-General Jiang invited the leaders of the five main religions in this country to meet with him at Zhongnanhai, where cordial conversations took place. In their speeches and in these conversations, Secretary-General Jiang and Premier Li both emphasized the importance of work relating to religion, and the stability and permanence of the policy of freedom of religious belief. All this was a great inspiration to us as Christians, and increased our confidence in our own efforts to run the church well.

As we look back along the road upon which God has been leading the Chinese church since the establishment of new China, and especially during the five years since we last met in this way, we cannot but follow the example of Paul who recounted the abundance of the many spiritual gifts that God had graciously bestowed on all the churches, and express our gratitude from the bottom of our hearts, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15). As we recollect God's spiritual blessings, we must at the same time examine our own shortcomings, so in addition to the written reports submitted by the various committees of the two national Christian organizations, I have been commissioned by the Joint Standing Committee to provide the following summary.

### **Building Up the Church: Fresh Steps**

During the past five years, under the gracious leading of our heavenly Father, fresh steps have been taken in the building up of the church.

The number of churches that have been opened throughout the country has increased from more than 4,000 in 1986 to more than 7,000 at the present time. While these churches have been recovered or restored, and especially while new churches have been built, innumerable Christians throughout the country have been offering up their prayers and working unstintingly. The number of Christians has reached more than five million, many times more than at the time of Liberation, while in addition to the churches there are now more than 20,000 meeting-points.

The two Christian organizations, the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC) are the servants of Christ, and in our service to the church we consider supplying the Word of God to be our main duty. The number of copies of the Bible of various kinds that we have published has increased from more than two million in 1986 to six and a half million at the present time. These include whole Bibles, New Testaments, and New Testaments with Psalms in the traditional script, to which we have added Reference Bibles in that script, and the Bible and the New Testament with Psalms in the simplified script. In addition we have published scriptures in Korean, Miao, Jingpo, Lahu, Wa, Lisu and Yi for our brothers and sisters belonging to those minority groups.

During these past years we have also published more than three million copies of the *New Hymnbook*, which have been widely circulated throughout the country, as well as pocket editions and cassettes of that book. In addition, in order to serve the needs of Christians of various national groups, dialects and traditions in Liaoning, Yunnan, Fujian, Guangdong, Zhejiang and Jiangsu, various hymnbooks have been published for those areas. The various editions of the Bible and the hymnbook, so widely disseminated, have received a warm welcome from Christian people, and they have been the means through which the TSPM has brought about a greater degree of cohesion among the mass of Christians.

At the same time as it spreads the message of the TSPM, *Tian Feng* also includes devotional material and articles on running the church well. It has articles on the safeguarding of the legitimate rights of the church and on the implementation of the policy on religion, with the result that its readership has increased among Christians, and its circulation has grown from 32,000 in 1986 to more than 50,000 in 1991. The readership of the *Correspondence Course* published in Nanjing, which is aimed particularly at helping Christians to a clearer understanding of the Bible, and of the *Collected Sermons* published in Hangzhou as aids in sermon preparation, has been maintained at about 40,000. During the past five years we have published not less than thirty titles of devotional and Bible-study material, and last year we began to issue sermons on cassette. Twelve volumes have so far been published in the *Theological Education Library*, which not only provides teaching material for use in theological seminaries, but also offers reference material for many Christians who are eager for the truth. The two periodicals, *Nanjing Theological Review* and *Yanjing Journal* are mainly concerned with theological research. The former has a circulation approaching 10,000, and a number of its articles have been translated into English, Japanese and German.

As for leadership training, four seminaries in Anhui, Shaanxi, Shandong and Yunnan have been added to the nine theological seminaries we had in 1986, so that by now the number of students who have graduated throughout the country (excluding those who graduated this past summer), approaches 1,200. The great majority of these are engaged in full-time work in the churches. A minority are engaged in part-time work, or are pursuing further studies. The local Christian organizations at provincial, city or county level have been conducting short training courses for voluntary workers, and these have proliferated during the past five years. In several places there are longer courses for lay leaders, or Bible training courses, lasting between one and two years. Nanjing Theological Seminary is currently organizing an experimental Bible correspondence course. The great majority of those whom we have sent abroad for study have returned to this country at the conclusion of their courses, where their work in the churches has been very effective.

Owing to the zeal manifested by the majority of Christians in exercising their love for the Lord and for his Church, there has been marked success in promoting self-support throughout the country, and evidence for this is to be found in the number of new churches and meeting-points that have been built. In some places help has been provided to overcome local financial difficulties through the setting up of a pastoral fund, which offers assistance to colleagues whose stipends are inadequate. One consequence of the steady implementation of the policy of releasing property belonging to religious bodies has been the enhancement in many places of

the ability to engage in self-support. In some parts of the country churches have been occupied in business, in production, or in other forms of service, resulting on the one hand in a contribution to society, and on the other hand to the self-support of the church.

We are especially grateful for the endless stream of testimonies to their patriotism and love for the church on the part of so many Christians. They have made such a strenuous contribution to the cause of socialism that they have diffused, as is fitting for Christians, a sweet fragrance. During the past five years, in many of the provinces, cities and counties in which meetings have been held to exchange experiences relating to the Four Modernizations or for awarding commendations to those who have achieved prosperity through hard work, many Christians have received honorable mention as model or advanced workers. Among those who have made a contribution to socialist spiritual and material civilization, mention should be made of Ms Wang Juzhen, a Christian intellectual, who was the sole recipient in 1987 of the First Class National Award for inventors, but we must not forget the many rural Christians in village meeting-points who also played their part. City churches have been engaged in organizing or taking part in medical advice centers to assist the disabled, and in an ever-increasing number of projects for social welfare, such as homes for the aged and for the welfare of the young. During the past five years, the floods in the northeast, the earthquake in Yunnan, the forest fires in Heilongjiang, and especially the recent flooding which affected more than ten provinces, have deeply moved Christians throughout China. Countless Christians expressed their love through contributions to the national appeals for relief to the victims of these disasters. The two national Christian organizations contributed to the National Fund for the Welfare of the Disabled, to the Amity Foundation, to the Chinese Worldwide Ten Year Committee for Disaster Relief, to the Shanghai Municipal Orphanage, and to the area affected by the earthquake in Yunnan.

### **The Lord's Loving Guidance**

The progress that has taken place during the past five years in every aspect of the work of the church has been achieved under the loving guidance of our heavenly Father. Here are some evidences of it:

#### *Disseminating Three-Self and Training Christians*

If the Chinese church is to be well-governed, well-supported and well-propagated, we must vigorously proclaim and unceasingly engage in education in the principle of Three-Self Patriotism. We must ensure that all our colleagues and fellow Christians come to recognize that without the TSPM, the Chinese church would not be experiencing the continuous growth and development it is today. Love for one's country and love for the church are not mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing. It is only as the Chinese church proceeds along the Three-Self path that it can share the destiny of the masses of the Chinese people, and can share with them in their joys and their sorrows, as together we strive to build a strong and prosperous new China. It is only as the Chinese church upholds the Three-Self principle that it can enable the Church of Christ to strike deep roots in Chinese society, and proclaim the glorious light of the gospel in this new era of China's history. The two Christian organizations in all parts of the country have been busily engaged in their untiring efforts to propagate the Three-Self principle. We are informed by the two national Christian organizations that during these past years, in addition to *Tian Feng*, the mouthpiece of the



TSPM, we have published a number of books advocating Three-Self and commemorating Three Self pioneers. During this past year we have presented six different books on this subject to churches throughout the country, and the recipients have welcomed them with enthusiasm.

Last year was the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the TSPM. The two national Christian organizations held an impressive commemoration meeting, and local organizations and churches throughout the country also held meetings of various kinds to observe the anniversary. Everyone resolved to carry on the mission of patriotism and love for the church bequeathed by our predecessors in such a way as to develop the spirit of the TSPM, and to more fully build up the church through good government, good support and good propagation. With a view to celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the movement, there was an appeal for articles either on the theme, "The Three-Self Patriotic Movement and I" or "My Church and the Three Self Patriotic Movement." There were 434 entries from all over the country, of which forty were published in a commemorative volume. This clearly indicates the support and devotion of the great majority of Christians for the TSPM.

Hand-in-hand with the leading of our fellow Christians along the path of patriotism and love for the church, must go vigorous training, both in their spiritual life and in their belief. In 1987 the national Christian organizations organized an evangelistic team to take part in a preaching tour in the Nanyang and Pingdingshan regions of Henan province. They were given a warm welcome by the local Christians, whose links with Three-Self were thereby strengthened, as a result of which their experience was shared in other provinces. In the realm of literature we endeavored to meet the requirements of those who were young in the faith by publishing books such as *How to Become a Christian*, *The Way of Eternal Life*, *Sermons for Country Congregations*, and *A Simple Guide to Christianity*, hoping in this way to increase their understanding of biblical truth. Another attempt along the same lines is the forthcoming publication of six sets of cassettes with the theme "sermons for the training of those new to the faith in the Chinese church."

#### *Church Administration and Church Order*

If the ministry of the church is to be developed on sound lines, we must follow a path of governing the church and laying down rules and regulations. The government of the church must be in accordance with biblical principles and those of Christian tradition. At the same time, it must be in line with the principles of independence, self-government and democracy. Investigations in the light of local experience were undertaken throughout the country, the most suitable of which were summarized and circulated to determine how best to pool all our resources in administering, in a spirit of cooperation, a church which reflected Chinese characteristics, while at the same time being rooted in biblical teaching and Christian tradition.

If the church is to be well run, relations between the TSPM and the CCC, and between the TSPM and the local churches, must be properly ordered. During the past few years it became evident not only that there should be a clear division of function between the two organizations in accordance with their respective constitutions, but that they should make every effort to cooperate, to ensure that the Three-Self principle is applied to running the church well. In this way the prestige of the TSPM and of local three-self associations can best be enhanced, and the community of Christians united around the two organizations.

If the church is to be well run, the relationships between Christians of varying denominational backgrounds need to be put in order. During recent years, the further implementation of the policies of mutual respect and seeking common ground while reserving differences have both presupposed patriotism and the effective running of the church. The facts show that where points of doctrine are concerned, we must follow the principle that the majority cares for the minority and shows it consideration, rather than that the minority has to submit to the majority. Nevertheless, respect must not be one-sided. Those of our fellow Christians who find themselves in a minority must be willing to give full weight to the fellowship of the whole church, showing care and consideration for the doctrinal position of others. It is only by the display of mutual respect that we can be bound together in running the church well and in building up the Body of Christ in love.

If the church is to be well run, the Christian organizations at every level, the ministers, and the lay workers, must all serve as the Lord's Faithful stewards. We have learned from experience that in all we do we must reject every method that fails to conform with the true image of the church. We must instead act in conformity with the principles of patriotism and love for the church, of love, pastoral care, mutual respect, full and open discussion, and of providing members with greater opportunities for involvement in the church. In this way the church which we build up will win the affection of every Christian.

If the church is to be well run, we need to set up rules of order such that all our clergy, our church work and our whole ministry have a system of regulations to observe, rather than following the subjective judgment of any individual or of a minority. The two national Christian organizations set up a committee in 1987 to draw up a church order, and with its encouragement, the Christian organizations in the various provinces and municipalities have been framing their own rules. By now, two-thirds of the provinces and municipalities have provisional regulations. Meanwhile the committee has drafted a *Church Order for Trial Use in Chinese Churches* to serve as a model for those engaged in drafting rules and regulations. Meanwhile they will welcome written suggestions for improving the order in the light of experience.

### *Personnel Training*

The number of Chinese Christians is constantly on the increase, but the severe lack of pastors has become an acute problem. That a church with more than five million Christians should have only about a thousand ministers is a truly astonishing ratio. If the Chinese church is to function properly, the training of personnel, and the instructing of a fresh generation of patriotic and church-loving pastors and voluntary workers is a task that brooks no delay.

At present there are three levels of centers of theological training in this country, numbering thirteen in all. There is the national seminary, Nanjing Theological Seminary, and regional colleges for north China (Yanjing), for east China, for the northeast, for south-central China, and for the west (Sichuan). There are provincial seminaries for Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Anhui, Shandong, Shaanxi, and Yunnan. Graduates from every level of such seminaries have proved to be vigorous sources of fresh strength for churches in cities and in the countryside. Some of them have undertaken fairly heavy responsibilities in local Christian organizations, and some are junior lecturers at our seminaries, while some have been ordained as pastors and elders. In 1987, the two national Christian organizations appointed a theological education committee to deal

with such matters as working out guidelines for establishing colleges, exchanging experiences in administering colleges, building up libraries and producing teaching material. The committee has done its best to link the various seminaries together and to coordinate their activities.

Owing to a hiatus of many years' duration in theological education, there is an immense difference in age between those engaged in the church's work, so the training of voluntary workers in the prime of life so as to enable them to undertake work in the churches has been one of the centers of attention in the training of the church's personnel during the past five years. Such people have a faith and a spiritual life which are firmly founded. They have had experience both in the work of the church and in everyday life, so after training lasting a year or more, they will be entirely suitable to fill the age-gap in the church's personnel.

In 1987, the Chinese church began sending a small number of theological students for further studies in Europe and America. Events during the past few years have shown that this project has been successful. The students who have gone abroad for study have been able to broaden their horizons, and have become familiar with overseas churches and their theological thinking, enabling them to get to understand other people, to form contacts, and to prepare themselves to serve in the Chinese church.

#### *Government Policy and the Rights of the Church*

The steady growth in every aspect of the church's work cannot but be closely linked with the implementation by the government of its policy of freedom of religious belief. There have been instances where the restoration of church property or the preservation of the legitimate rights of the church have involved urgent appeals by the Christian organizations at one level or another, and where the public has shown its concern and support for us. Still more evident have been situations where the cadres concerned with religious affairs at all levels have exerted every effort to ensure the implementation of government policy. There have been some problems relating to church property which have been solved by the intervention of local party and government officials and court rulings.

During the last five years there have been a number of problems relating to the implementation of the policy on religion in which the national Christian organizations have had to issue as many as five hundred documents to the authorities in connection with oral or written complaints. As a result of the more important of these issues, special attention has been paid by the authorities. *Tian Feng* has disclosed cases of the contravention of the religious policy, and special attention was paid to this by the relevant authorities. The national Christian organizations sent representatives to enquire into these matters and expressed their views to the local authorities, and this ensured the implementation of the policy.

We are happy to report that in recent years the national media, including *The People's Daily*, *Guangming Ribao*, *The Shantou Daily*, and *Xinmin Wanbao* of Shanghai have carried reports of offenses against religious rights, and of the implementation of the policy on religion. All this goes to show that the party's policy on freedom of religious belief has come home to the public. It also makes it clear that the legitimate rights enjoyed by the independent self-governing Chinese church are part of the same rights and safeguards enjoyed by all citizens, since it is no longer a "foreign religion" relying on unequal treaties and extra-territorial rights.

### *Overseas Friendships and Interference*

In this period of openness, in which there has been such growth in the Chinese church, there has been a need for good foreign relations and the winning over of sympathy and support from fellow Christians abroad, together with the rejection of every type of foreign interference and sabotage.

During the past five years we have, on a basis of mutual respect and friendship on equal terms, continued to enjoy contacts with foreign churches and Christians in many parts of the world. This has led to mutual understanding, to a deepening of our fellowship in the Lord, and the developing of friendly relations with foreigners. During these years also, we have for the first time sent a delegation of women overseas, as well as the first party of theological students, and for the first time we have organized two groups of ordinary pastors to learn about churches overseas. We have also sent delegations to visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the churches in the Soviet Union. For the first time, too, we have been visited by church leaders from South Korea. Our relations with the churches in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan have continued to develop, and for the first time we have officially invited and welcomed a delegation from the church across the straits in Taiwan.

As far as overseas churches are concerned, we are very pleased to observe that the great majority are well-disposed towards us. This friendly attitude is displayed not only by the mainstream churches, but also by the evangelical churches, who have not hitherto been so favorable. The CCC has recently been officially made a member of the World Council of Churches. This is a very important event, and has been warmly welcomed by churches all over the world. It symbolizes the support of world Christian opinion for the Chinese policy of freedom of religious belief, for our observance of the Three-Self principle, for our entry upon a post-denominational era, and for our determination to exert every effort to run the church well. It is a sign that we shall be able to make a contribution to the Church throughout the world, and at the same time that we shall be able to draw beneficial nourishment from fellow Christians in the Church universal.

We are of course, aware that among overseas churches there certainly exist hostile elements, who are doing their best to use Christianity to carry out subversive activities against us. Their activities are aimed at using religion as a means of political disruption and sabotage. Their efforts to dominate once again the religious life of our country have nothing in common with normal relations between religious groups in different countries. For a good many years we have continued to expose subversive plots carried out under the guise of Christianity, and we have called on Christians throughout the country to be more alert. We must decisively resist these activities, for only so shall we be able to develop friendly relations in the Lord with overseas churches and fellow Christians. An important element in resisting these hostile activities is the building up of our own self-respect as we ensure that the work of the Chinese church is more effectively carried out.

### **Challenge and Mission**

As we recount the many blessings that God has bestowed upon the Chinese church during the past five years, and the many ways in which God has been guiding us, we are also aware that in this, our new era of socialism, we are faced with many challenges and a crucial mission as we seek to improve the administration, support and propagation of the Chinese church.

*1. The quality of faith and level of understanding of the average Christian must be enhanced.*

The Chinese church is faced at the present time with an immense problem. At a time when the number of Christians is constantly on the increase, there is a grave shortage of pastors, which deprives Christians of good leadership. Ordinary Christians' understanding of the Bible is very inadequate and they have only the vaguest of ideas about Three-Self Patriotism. At such a time the quality of the faith and understanding of many Christians is very low. As a result, they find it difficult to recognize heresies and errors, and it is not easy for them to resist the many varieties of illegal activities and divisive trends that appear under the guise of religion.

At the same time as we preach the gospel, we must provide Christians with the firm leadership that will raise the quality of their faith and their thinking. The number of Christians is not the sole criterion of a well-run church. This is especially so at the present time. We recognize our own inadequacy, for if quality decreases as quantity increases, the more scope will be provided for fallacies to raise their heads, and for evil people's misdeeds to fill the vacuum, to the detriment of both the church and the nation. As we proclaim the gospel during the days ahead, shepherd the flock, and publish literature, we must emphasize the importance of basic training in the fundamentals of the Christian faith for the great mass of Christians. We must strengthen their understanding of Three-Self, and of love for the country and for the church, helping them to raise their level of understanding, to distinguish truth from error, and to maintain a steady growth in their spiritual life and their knowledge of the Christian faith. As the Apostle Paul said long ago to the church in Philippi: "And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge, full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless" (Phil. I : 9-10).

*2. Training and promotion of church personnel must proceed apace.*

If we are to carry out our task as pastors and leaders of the Christian community effectively, we must train up and select a substantial body of qualified and patriotic, church-loving pastors and voluntary workers. This is the urgent task with which the Chinese church is faced at the present time. The training up of such a hard-core nucleus will determine the future course of the Chinese church.

We have already adopted a number of measures for the training of personnel, but neither in quantity nor in quality have we come anywhere near to satisfying the requirements of the Chinese church. In the training and appointment of our personnel, especially of our young people, there are many problems. First, there is the selection of promising candidates. When recommending candidates for a seminary, we need to be cautious and responsible. Next, the training provided by the theological seminaries must be directed in such a way as to emphasize the many aspects of spiritual, moral and intellectual qualities, as well as political awareness and physical well-being. Those who teach in those seminaries must combine the functions of teacher, student and pastor. They must be fully acquainted with the conditions in the Chinese church, and integrate that situation into their teaching. There must also be an emphasis on the placement, care and concern for those who have graduated, as well as their subsequent training. If we overlook any of these requirements, then the current fairly severe shortage of personnel will become even more severe.

During recent years, seminaries all over the country have been sending graduates back into the churches, and they are continuing to do so. But when it comes to the ordination of these

graduates, the situation is very grave. During the past six years, more than a thousand people have graduated from the seminaries, yet not more than a few dozen have been ordained, and this is a situation that needs looking into. It is well that strict demands should be made upon our young people, but it is an urgent requirement for the building up of today's Church that the young people who are qualified to meet those demands should be ordained as soon as possible.

Women form a considerable majority in our churches, and they have made a great contribution to the life of the church in every respect. Nevertheless, as a general rule, women have a low status in the Chinese church. Their opportunities for speaking are fewer than those of men; at every level of the two Christian organizations, and among those who are ordained to the pastorate, there are far fewer women than men. This state of affairs must be remedied. Our women colleagues must throw themselves with greater self-confidence into the effective government, support and propagation of the church. Meanwhile, men must give positive support to the assumption of greater responsibility by women. Where there are women who are qualified to be ordained, they should be granted that privilege, which would provide an important means for remedying the severe shortage of pastors in the Chinese church.

Moreover, in cities of any size there are some Christian intellectuals, including some retired people, many of them well-qualified to serve, and we should make use of their talents. From such resources we should replenish the church's strength. Such people as these are zealously patriotic and filled with a love for the church, and they present no problems concerning salary or the allocation of workers, so if we employ them, not only are we coping with the extremely urgent needs of the church, but what is still more important, we are restoring the traditional place of the lay person as the backbone of the church.

### *3. Efforts must be made to broaden unity.*

"Those who are served by the two Christian organizations are not to be confined to those churches or those Christians who are linked with those organizations, but must include all the Christians in the country. In all parts of the country there are churches and meeting points with whom we have very little contact, or even no contact at all, some of them for specific reasons, but even so, we must admit that there are deficiencies in our work.

We must analyze the causes for the inadequacy of our links with these churches, meeting-points and individuals. If they desire to have fellowship with us, but we have failed to make contact, we must show an interest in them as soon as possible, and forge links with them. If the reason is some failure on our part in the past, so that they do not wish to associate with us, we must rectify our failings, ask their forgiveness, and seek mutual reconciliation. If the reason lies in their having been influenced by some prejudice, or having been deceived by some erroneous propaganda, we must patiently undertake the task of explanation, with a view to gaining their understanding and confidence. If it is because they have been dominated by hostile elements who have poisoned their minds, we must do our utmost to help free them from the harmful influence of such hostile elements.

At present there is a small number of meeting-points and rural churches in which illegal activities are definitely taking place. These include superstitious activities which are detrimental to the public well-being, affecting health, both bodily and spiritual, as well as subversive activities engaged in by foreign organizations who make use of religion to attack mainland China. All such violations of our country's laws should be punished in accordance with the criminal code. At the same time we need to educate our fellow Christians to have

nothing to do with such law-breakers. But these transgressors of the law are, after all, only a small minority. The great majority of Christians in our country are law-abiding patriots, and even though there may be some who have been influenced or deceived by these law-breakers from abroad or from elsewhere in China, the Christian organizations in various parts of the country, and their own pastors should come to their help in a spirit of love. They should educate them, rectify them, and uplift them, but not discriminate against them or drive them away. It is up to us to unite as far as possible all Christians in this country on the basis of patriotism and love for the church, for it is only a church united through mutual love that can build itself up successfully, and when that happens law-breakers will be unable to gain a foothold in the Chinese church.

*4. All levels of the two Christian organizations, local churches and meeting-points must strengthen themselves organizationally.*

During the past ten years or so, the Chinese church has more or less recovered from the wounds of the Cultural Revolution, and the need to strengthen their respective organizations has become part of the agenda of the Christian organizations and of the local churches and meeting-points. If the church is to be strengthened organizationally, it is most important that a church order be drawn up, and that democratic forms of administration be employed.

By now the Christian organizations at every level have their own constitutions, and the majority of the main city churches have drafted regulations governing church affairs. But there are some provinces where the local regulations have not yet been drawn up, so that the local churches and meeting-points lack a written code. This means not only that there is a lack of norms for the ongoing life of the churches and their ministry, but also that anyone with an axe to grind can exploit the situation. There are places where there are rules and regulations which are not being observed. We must explain the constitutions of the Christian organizations and the order for church use to our colleagues and fellow Christians. Where such rules and regulations, or local Constitutions, do not yet exist, we must take positive steps to ensure that they are drawn up. It is especially incumbent upon us, as leaders of the Christian organizations, to take the lead in observing the rules so that we may serve as examples to those among whom we work. It is only as we exert every effort to correct situations in which the rules are disregarded that we can enable the Chinese church to advance without interruption in the direction of good government.

If the church is to strengthen itself, we must develop among our colleagues and fellow Christians a spirit of love for the Lord and love for the his church, so that we work together in the task of governing that church. Many of our colleagues in the ministry and voluntary workers have given of themselves unstintingly in the service of the Lord. There are, however, some places where democratic methods of administration are disregarded. The ideas of other colleagues and ordinary church members are treated with contempt. In extreme cases the two parties to a dispute give the impression that they agree while they are in fact utterly at variance, and this causes deep distress to the church members. If there is to be democratic management, there must not only be strict regard for church order, but those in leadership positions must have a working style both democratic and humble, must be willing to lend an ear to the views of others, ready to discuss things openly and to work with others as they take the lead in encouraging church members to oversee and take part in the work of the church. Chinese Christians are patriotic, church loving, and

reasonable. The greater emphasis on democracy, the greater will be the readiness of the average Christian to witness in a way that glorifies God and benefits humankind.

*5. There must be positive cooperation with the party and the government to promote the thorough implementation of the policy on religious freedom.*

Ever since the restoration of order following the Cultural Revolution, the party and government have been very successful in implementing the policy on freedom of religious belief. That much is obvious to everybody. And yet some problems remain, problems which all too often are long-standing and difficult of solution. They demand continued cooperation on our part with the party and government in bringing about a solution in line with the policy. There are a few places where a small number of the cadres still lack a clear understanding of the policy on religion and place obstacles in the way of its implementation. We must cooperate with the government in vigorously spreading information on the significance of the policy, and, by acting as those who love their country as well as the church. We can overcome the prejudices which some people hold about religion. There are individual instances where cadres still interfere in our freedom of belief, refusing to allow perfectly legitimate services to take place, and violating the freedom of individuals. We must insist that such matters be severely dealt with by the authorities, and the situation be remedied.

All levels of the two Christian organizations and churches throughout the country should, in accordance with the policy of the party and government, firmly and unflinchingly uphold the right to freedom of religious belief and the legitimate privileges of the church, acting on behalf of the mass of Christians. In this way, our fellow Christians' confidence in us will increase and the two Christian organizations will enjoy greater prestige and their power to draw Christians together will be enhanced. If, on the contrary, we dissociate ourselves from the mass of Christians, the two Christian organizations will no longer enjoy any prestige among them.

By upholding and safeguarding the right to religious freedom and the legitimate rights of the church, we are not unilaterally pursuing advantages for the church on its own, but we are supporting the party's religious policy, a policy laid down in accordance with the basic rights of the broad masses of the Chinese people. Implementation of the party's religious policy is beneficial in adjusting relations between religious believers and those with no religious beliefs. It enables believers to unite more closely around the party and the government and enhances social stability. Moreover, it can still more effectively mobilize the positive support of Christians in general for the task of socialist construction. Failure to implement the policy on religion *would* have a contrary effect and would be detrimental both to the nation and to the church.

We must therefore clear our minds of any doubts and misgivings, putting implicit trust in the directive of Secretary-General Jiang Zemin and Premier Li Peng, so ensuring the stability and continuity of the policy on religion. In the years to come, we must cooperate vigorously with the party and the government in carrying out the policy on religion even more effectively, eliminating opposition to it, solving any long-standing problems, and uniting more and more Christians around the party and the government as a contribution to the Four Modernizations.

*6. Friendly overseas relations must be maintained.*



During recent years we have effectively opened up friendly overseas relations, and have developed friendships with churches and Christians all over the world. This is a situation which we need to go on developing and strengthening. We are deeply aware that working with people overseas requires a firm foundation in our work in China. If we have experienced no success in building up the church in our own country, what kind of links can we form with overseas churches and Christians? Or again, through our contacts abroad we should be able to accelerate the effective running of the Chinese church. For all these reasons, forging links of friendship with overseas churches can be an important factor in building up the Chinese church.

In the years to come we must make further progress in opening up and broadening our foreign connections. We must more effectively sum up the varied experiences of the Chinese church, so as to maintain contact with people in churches all over the world and draw upon their good qualities. We need to train up still more people in our churches who will be able to establish overseas links. We must keep on improving hospitality on our side, so that thereby we can enhance our fellowship in the Lord with our foreign colleagues. In a word, we are looking forward to the development of yet another stage in establishing foreign contacts.

We are deeply concerned for our compatriots in the Lord in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, who are our own flesh and blood. As progress continues to be made in bringing about the unification of China, we must develop still closer links, enriching each other's spiritual experiences, and deepening fellowship in the Lord, with the churches in those three regions, in accordance with the principles of mutual respect, mutual non-interference, and mutual non-subordination.

But in the course of these contacts, we must constantly be on our guard against hostile elements making use of religion to carry out acts of subversion. Those who engage in such activities are definitely neither "above politics" nor "non-political". Their statements make it quite clear that their aim is political: to overthrow the Communist Party and socialism. The number of those who engage in these activities is not great, but we must not underestimate the threat they pose to our country. They will greatly harm the church's image in the minds of the people, so we must continue to expose and frustrate their plots, so as to safeguard legitimate overseas links, and to ensure smooth progress in building up the Chinese church.

These are just some important aspects of the future building up of our Church. With a view to a greater degree of democracy, a deeper level of discussion, and so that everybody's ideas may be pooled to the benefit of all, this meeting will be discussing special themes relating to our future work: the promotion of Three-Self, leadership training, the governing of the church, the church in the country side, exploration of self-support, theological development and overseas exchanges. We hope that by means of these discussions, we may be able to formulate more complete and more practical proposals for promoting the work that is to be done during the next five years.

If we are to build up the Chinese church well, the task is inseparable from the prosperity of our country, from social stability, from the peace and well-being of our people, and from a stable peace throughout the world. Every aspect of the development of our country is flourishing vigorously, the policy on religion continues to be implemented, and all this stimulates the sense of patriotism among Chinese Christians. The Lord Jesus and the apostles all deeply loved their country and their compatriots. The apostles teach us "To love of the brethren add love of others" (2 Pet. 1:7), and "Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Rom. 12:17). We

Christians have an inescapable responsibility for our country and for our compatriots. It is only a patriotic, church-loving Chinese church which glorifies God and benefits humankind that can bear a testimony to this present age and that can put down firm and permanent roots in the soil of China. And so, we earnestly appeal to our fellow Christians throughout the country never to cease raising their sense of patriotism, but under the leadership of the party, and in step with all the people of our land, to throw themselves wholeheartedly into the establishment of socialist material and spiritual civilization, to spread socialist democracy and the rule of law, to uphold social stability and national unity, and to contribute our strength to the unification of the nation and the vigorous development of China. We must also join with Christians and others throughout the world in striving to maintain a just international order and world peace.

As we look back along the path which has been taken by the Chinese church during the past five years, we can observe God's indescribable grace. As we look into the future, we can see the Lord leading us by his own hand. May God add grace upon grace in the next five years. The apostles used the words of the prophet when they proclaimed, "in the last days, it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ... Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). We especially beseech God to grant his grace to those leaders of our church from earlier generations, some of whom are here among us today, so that in old age they may remain vigorous, as they abound in spiritual gifts, serving as examples of patriotism and love for the church, and as pillars for the building of the church. Also we especially beseech God to grant his grace to the younger generation, some of whom are present here today, so that relying on the grace of the Lord they may learn with open minds, that they may serve him faithfully, that they may grow unceasingly, manifesting the truth of the saying that the blue of its dye puts the indigo plant to shame, and ensuring that the Chinese church will not lack successors to those who have gone before, as they go from strength to strength, giving glory to the Lord.

*Tian Feng*, March, 1992, p.6.

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## 2. Church Order for Trial Use in Chinese Churches

**Adopted by the Joint Standing Committee of the TSPM and CCC, 30 December, 1991.**

### **Preface**

Under the loving guidance of our heavenly Father, the vast majority of local churches in China have already embarked upon the path of church unity. In order to strengthen self-government so that "all things (may) be done decently and in order" in Christ's Church, Christian councils and Three-Self associations in more than twenty provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have, since 1984, drafted church orders of their own for trial use. In 1987, the joint Standing Committee of the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee (TSPM) passed the "Resolution on the Advancement of Self-Government through the Drafting of a Church Order," and established a Committee on Church Order to promote and assist local church affairs organizations in the drafting and perfecting of church orders, and to draft a model church order for use all over China as a standard for the reference of local churches. The basic content of this church order is drafted in accordance with the teachings of the Bible, the inheritance of church tradition and the life of the church ecumenical, and integrated with the actual context of the church in China today; it has its own Chinese characteristics. According to present needs, there are special sections on the Church, believers, the sacraments, ministry, churches and meeting points and administration. Because there are differences in the history, denominational background and pattern of development of churches in different parts of China, church affairs organizations in different provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities may draft or revise their own church orders according to this one, or implement their own rules and regulations. Because some churches and meeting points have significant differences in viewpoint and tradition with the church as a whole, they can develop according to their own traditions, providing that they do not violate the Three-Self principle. Where there is the need, the local church affairs organization should serve and resolve differences with these churches and meeting points.

### **The Church**

1. The Christian Church is called by God, a community of believers to serve Christ as Lord. Christ is the head of the Church, the Church is the Body of Christ, the Household of God, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The faith of the Church is founded upon the Bible and The Apostles Creed.

2. The Chinese church shares in the life of fellowship of the Church universal and enjoys relationships with churches in other places on the basis of equality and friendship; at the same time, the Chinese church is also an independent, sovereign and self-run church, neither subordinate in its relationship to churches overseas, nor subject to the control of any foreign church body.

3. Local churches in China all have two characteristics: they are both spiritual communities who worship Christ and who should build up the Body of Christ according to

the teachings of the Bible; and they are Chinese social organizations which should observe the Chinese constitution, laws, regulations and government policies, and support social progress, national construction and world peace.

4. Local churches (including meeting points, here and in what follows), according to the principles of self-government, self-support and self-propagation, under the guidance of church affairs organizations and with the support of Three-Self associations, should unite believers in the conscientious observance of church order, so that with one heart and mind, they can do all their work well.

5. All local churches should take into consideration the different spiritual experiences and needs of believers, and in matters of faith, tradition and liturgy there should be mutual respect and mutual acceptance, not attacks and forced unity. At the same time, efforts should be made to maintain a heart of unity according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

### **Believers**

1. All those who, in their thirst for salvation, attend church to listen to the Word of God and take part in worship gatherings are termed "seekers". After a seeker has been baptized, and enrolled in a church, she or he formally becomes a "believer" and member of the church.

2. Believers should observe the teachings of the Bible, abide by church regulations, support the work of the church and take part in the running of its affairs.

3. Believers should be good citizens who carry out their responsibility to their country and society.

### **The Sacraments**

1. There are two major sacraments of the church: baptism (by immersion or sprinkling) and Holy Communion (or the breaking of bread).

2. Seekers who have taken part in church services over a certain period of time, generally not less than one year, who are willing to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, who have clearly repented or have been born again, and whose behavior is upright and law-abiding, can apply to the church for enrollment in a catechism class in order to study the Bible, the catechism and the duty of believers. Those who pass an examination on faith and morals administered by a pastor or church worker may be received for baptism.

3. There are two forms of baptism which local churches may use at the request of those about to be baptized, baptism by sprinkling (where water is poured on the top of the head) or baptism by immersion (where the whole body is submerged).

4. All baptized Christians may receive Holy Communion.

5. Holy Communion should be administered in a spirit of piety and solemnity. The liturgy may be decided upon by the local church, and each church may follow one or more forms.

6. The sacraments should be openly administered in churches or meeting points with a member of the clergy officiating. Elderly and infirm church members may, with the consent of the church, receive the sacraments in their homes.

# Ministry

## 1. Ministerial Designations:

The ministry refers to ordained church workers who can administer the sacraments. Churches in China at present use the following ministerial designations, which follow the Bible and church tradition:

Bishop (two different Chinese terms are used, reflecting different church traditions) - where conditions permit and there is need, provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions may consecrate bishops. A bishop has a wider area of pastoral responsibility, but does not have special administrative authority.

Pastor (including specially ordained Elders whose function is similar to that of pastors, here and in what follows) - responsible for church work of all kinds, the management of churches and meeting points, the administration of sacraments, the nurture and teaching of believers.

Teacher (or Assistant Pastor) - assists the pastor in the nurture and teaching of believers, the management of churches and meeting points, and may also administer the sacraments.

Elder-assists pastors and teachers in the management of churches and meeting points, where his or her responsibility is limited to a specific church and related meeting points. If needed, elders may also take part in the nurture and teaching of believers, and the administration of the sacraments.

In addition, there may be church workers who have not yet been ordained, and who do not administer sacraments, but who have been appointed or elected by the church and approved by the church affairs organization, and are designated as follows:

Preacher (Missionary) - Preachers who have received theological education or special training may preach and nurture believers.

Deacon - a believer responsible for church affairs.

Clergy and preachers (missionaries) are commonly called pastoral workers. The foregoing designations may be adopted by churches according to their original traditions and actual conditions.

## 2. Qualifications for ministry:

2.1 The Bible requires that all male and female ministers should have: (1) a pure Christian faith and a rich spiritual life; (2) an excellent character, behavior and witness; (3) a will to serve Christ and experience in church service; (4) the love and esteem of the majority of believers.

2.2 Clergy should be patriotic and law abiding, with a good reputation in church and society.

2.3 Clergy should uphold the Three-Self principle in running the church well, uniting believers on the road of love country and love-church, glorifying God and serving humanity, and

should practice mutual respect regarding the special characteristics of different Christian beliefs.

These three qualifications also apply to preachers.

2.4 A bishop should have deeper theological achievement, should have been a pastor for at least ten years, have rich pastoral experience and be held in high esteem by believers.

2.5 Pastors should have had formal theological education, and about three years of experience in church work. Teachers should also have some formal theological education, and about two years of experience in church work.

Those who have studied the Bible and theology on their own should pass an examination to prove that they are up to standard.

2.6 Elders are not required to have theological education, but they should uphold orthodox teaching and have many years' experience of service to the church. Elders should have some training before they are eligible to preach.

### 3. Procedures for the Ordination of Ministry:

3.1 The consecration of bishops should be proposed by the provincial church affairs organization, after due consultation and discussion with the national church bodies.

3.2 Candidates qualified to be pastors or teachers should first apply in writing for ordination, and, following approval by their local church, should be recommended by their local church affairs organization or two pastors to the provincial church affairs organization. The provincial church affairs organization shall select three or more pastors to form an ordination committee and examine the candidate(s). If the candidate is qualified, the service of ordination will be held within a fixed period of time.

3.3 Candidates qualified to be elders should apply with the recommendation of their local church organization. The local or city church affairs organization shall select three or more pastors and elders to form an ordination committee and examine the candidate(s). If the candidate is qualified, the ordination will take place within a fixed period of time, and it will be reported to the provincial church affairs organization for the record.

### 4. The liturgy for the ordination of ministry:

4.1 At least three bishops, and other respected pastors of high standing, all of whom take part in the laying on of hands, are required for the consecration of a bishop.

4.2 At least three pastors are required for the laying on of hands in the ordination of a pastor.

4.3 At least three pastors and elders, one of whom must be a pastor, are required for the ordination of an elder.

4.4 The liturgy of ordination should be solemn and conducted openly within the church. Clergy should not receive or give private favors for ordination.

## **The Organization and Management of Churches (and Meeting Points)**

### 1. Requirements for the establishment of a church or meeting point:

#### 1.1 A church should have:

- (1) A requisite number of believers;
- (2) A specially appointed place for worship gatherings;
- (3) A full time or voluntary ordained church worker responsible for the nurture of believers;
- (4) A church organization or preparatory organization.

#### 1.2 A meeting point should have:

- (1) A fixed number of believers;
- (2) A fixed meeting place;
- (3) A specified preacher (not necessarily ordained);
- (4) A church organization or preparatory organization.

1.3 City and county level church affairs organizations should conscientiously take into consideration the believers' worship needs, and should do their utmost to assist in the setting up of churches and meeting points in places which meet the above mentioned requirements.

### 2. Church and Meeting Point Organizations:

Church and Meeting Point organizations refer to the management structure of individual churches and meeting points.

A church establishes a church affairs organization (of at least seven persons), and a meeting point establishes a church affairs group (of at least three persons). Members of these organizations should be elected by the believers themselves or named through consultation, with fixed terms of no more than three years, and members eligible for re-election. Church workers should be members ex officio.

### 3. The Managerial Authority of Church and Meeting Point Organizations:

Church and meeting point organizations should broadly seek out the opinions of believers, and work co-operatively to administer the church with one heart and mind.

#### 3.1 The management of church activities:

- (1) All gatherings, worship services and liturgies should be appropriately arranged, and proceed in an orderly fashion, so that God is worshipped in spirit and in truth, and disorder is avoided.
- (2) Preaching should be done by a regular church worker, or one with a gift for preaching who has undergone church training and is an approved voluntary worker.

This will prevent people who disseminate heretical teaching that can split the church, or who carry out illegal activities which harm believers.

(3) Church affairs organizations should provide guidance and co-ordination to church workers.

### 3.2 The management of church properties and finances:

(1) Church and meeting point organizations should handle church finances, draft rules for all management procedures and clearly designate the responsibilities to an individual or small group.

(2) Church finances should be taken care of by a finance committee established by the church or meeting point organization, which should act in strict accordance with the system of financial administration, and establish procedures for such things as the opening of the offering box, book-keeping, the issuing of receipts and making cash deposits in the bank. In principle, pastoral workers should not be responsible for bookkeeping and accounting.

(3) Believers should be encouraged to give freely to the work of the church, but they should not be forced to contribute. Church and meeting point organizations should regularly report to the congregation on church finances, and when necessary, the church affairs organization has the authority to inspect the books.

(4) A strict system of financial examination and approval should be established. Major expenditures should be discussed by the church or meeting point organization.

### 3.3 Oversight of Believers and Church Workers:

(1) Believers who behave improperly (including those who commit criminal acts), and disobey church teachings should receive warning and instruction by a responsible person in the church. Repeated and serious offenders should be reported to the church or meeting point organization, after which they may be denied Holy Communion or removed from the church roll.

(2) Church workers whose behavior is seriously at fault, (including those who commit criminal acts), and disobey church teachings, or who disseminate heretical teachings against the faith, should be reported to the church affairs organization by believers. If, after investigation, the charges are found to be true, then the offender should be punished, pastors and teachers by the provincial church affairs organization; elders by the local or municipal church affairs organization; and preachers and deacons by the local church affairs organization. Punishment may include a warning, temporary suspension of responsibilities, removal from office, defrocking or even removal from the church roll.

(4) Self-government, self-support and self-propagation should be maintained in the church, and individuals or groups at home and abroad who interfere or try to undermine the Three-Self principle should be resisted.

This church order is issued for trial use, following discussion and approval by the joint Standing Committee of the China Christian Council and the Chinese Christian Three-Self



Patriotic Movement Committee, and may be revised by the same body. The right of interpretation of this document lies with the Committee on Church Order of the China Christian Council.

*Tian Feng*, March, 1992, p.33.  
Translated by Philip L. Wickeri.  
The Chinese text governs.

### 3. The Constitution of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China

Article I This Committee shall be known as the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM).

Article II The TSPM serves as the patriotic and church loving organization of Chinese Christians. Its aims and duties are as follows: Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government, to unite all Chinese Christians, to deeply love our socialist homeland, to observe the national constitution and the laws, regulations and policies of the land, to uphold self-government, self-support and self-propagation as the guiding principles for a sovereign and autonomous church, and to safeguard and develop the achievements of the TSPM, to assist the government in implementing the policy of freedom of religious belief and in safeguarding the legitimate rights of the church, and to do its part in safeguarding national stability, building socialist spiritual and material civilization, achieving national unification and developing friendly international relationships for the maintenance of world peace.

Article III The TSPM shall be accountable to the National Chinese Christian Conference. The relationship between the TSPM and the China Christian Council (CCC) is one of cooperation with differentiation of function, which involves joining with the CCC in convening the National Conference at prescribed intervals, and convening other joint meetings as the need arises.

Article IV The TSPM serves to strengthen ties with all provincial, autonomous region and municipality level Three-Self Associations, through setting up channels of communication, the exchange of experiences, study and work towards the resolution of common problems. It is the responsibility of Three-Self Associations at the provincial, autonomous region and municipality level to observe and carry out the resolutions of the TSPM.

Article V The TSPM Committee shall be elected at the National Christian Conference, and its members shall serve until the following meeting of that conference, with re-election leading to a further period of service.

Article VI The TSPM shall have a chairperson, several deputy-chairpersons and a secretary-general, together with a number of Standing Committee members, all of whom shall be elected by the plenum. As the need arises, an honorary chairperson may be elected to serve until the following National Christian Conference.

Article VII The Standing Committee of the TSPM shall consist of the chairperson, deputy-chairpersons, secretary-general and members of the Standing Committee who shall deal with business when the full committee is not in session. When necessary, names may be proposed for co-option or withdrawal, and consultants may be invited who will serve until the next National Christian Conference.

Article VIII The TSPM shall appoint several deputy secretaries-general following nomination by the secretary-general and approval by the Standing Committee.

Article IX The Standing Committee shall appoint working groups or other specialized committees as necessary, to serve during the term of the Standing Committee which appoints them.

Article X The National Chinese Christian Conference shall meet every five years, but when need arises, it maybe convened earlier or later. The nomination of delegates shall be decided by joint deliberation of the Standing Committee of the TSPM and that of the China Christian Council. The TSPM plenum shall meet every two years, but when necessary, it may be convened earlier or later. The Standing Committee shall meet annually, but when necessary, it may meet more or less frequently.

Article XI The chairperson of the TSPM, with the assistance of the deputy-chairpersons and the secretary-general, shall direct the work of the Standing Committee. The chairperson, deputy-chairpersons and secretary-general shall comprise the Executive Committee to deal with the daily business of the Standing Committee. It shall meet every six months. When necessary, the TSPM Executive Committee shall hold joint meetings with its counterpart in the CCC.

Article XII Funds for the TSPM shall be raised by the Standing Committee.

Article XIII The TSPM shall be based in Shanghai.

Article XIV The TSPM may not be dissolved except by decision of the National Chinese Christian Conference.

Article XV This constitution takes effect upon approval by the National Chinese Christian Conference and may be subject to revision by that Conference.

*Tian Feng*, March, 1992, p. 19.  
The Chinese text governs.

## 4. Constitution of the China Christian Council

Article I This Council shall be known as the China Christian Council (CCC).

Article II The CCC serves as the organization which deals with the affairs of the Chinese church on a national level. Its aim is to unite all Chinese Christians who believe in the heavenly Father and who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, to uphold the national constitution and the laws, regulations and policies of the land, and to effectively administer the sovereign and self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating Chinese church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Scriptures, with one heart and unity of purpose.

Article III The CCC exalts Jesus Christ and his cross and unites all churches throughout China with Christ as our Head, in developing together our role in building up the Body of Christ, so as to bear excellent witness to the Gospel of Christ, and offers its services to the churches in the performance of their ministry. It advocates mutual respect in matters of faith and worship, and the spirit of "bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" in relationships among the members.

Article IV The CCC promotes theological education and the publication of the Bible, hymnbooks and other literature for the Chinese church, the exchange of information among local churches in evangelism, pastoral work and administration, and promotes the formulation of church orders for local churches and the development of friendly relations with churches overseas.

Article V The CCC shall be accountable to the National Chinese Christian Conference. The relationship between the CCC and the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) is one of cooperation with differentiation of function, which involves joining with that Committee in convening the National Conference at prescribed intervals, and convening other joint meetings as the need arises.

Article VI The CCC serves to strengthen ties with all provincial, autonomous region and municipality level Christian Councils or Church Affairs Committees, through setting up channels of communication, the exchange of experiences, study and work towards the resolution of common problems. It is the responsibility of provincial, autonomous region and municipality level Christian Councils or Church Affairs Committees to observe and carry out the resolutions of the CCC.

Article VII The plenum of the CCC shall be elected at the National Christian Conference, and its members shall serve until the following meeting of that Conference, with re-election leading to a further period of service.

Article VIII The CCC shall have a president, several vice-presidents, and a general secretary, together with a number of Standing Committee members, all of whom shall be elected by the plenum. As the need arises, an honorary president may be elected to serve until the following National Christian Conference.

Article IX The Standing Committee of the CCC shall consist of the president, vice-presidents, general secretary and members of the Standing Committee, who shall deal with business when the full committee is not in session. When necessary, names may be proposed for co-option or withdrawal and consultants may be invited who will serve until the next National Christian Conference.

Article X The CCC shall appoint several deputy general secretaries, following nomination by the general secretary and approval by the Standing Committee.

Article XI As required, the Standing Committee shall appoint working groups or other specialized committees to serve during the term of the Standing Committee which appoints them.

Article XII The National Chinese Christian Conference shall meet every five years, but when need arises, it may be convened earlier or later. The nomination of delegates shall be decided by joint deliberation of the Standing Committee of the CCC and that of the TSPM. The CCC plenum shall meet every two years, but when necessary, it may be convened earlier or later. The Standing Committee shall meet annually, but when necessary, it may meet more or less frequently.

Article XIII The president of the CCC, with the assistance of the vice-presidents and the general secretary, shall direct the work of the Standing Committee. The president, vice-presidents and general secretary shall comprise the Executive Committee to deal with the daily business of the Standing Committee. It shall meet every six months. When necessary, the CCC Executive Committee shall hold joint meetings with its counterpart in the TSPM.

Article XIV Funds for the CCC shall be raised by the Standing Committee.

Article XV The CCC shall be based in Shanghai.

Article XVI The CCC may not be dissolved except by decision of the National Chinese Christian Conference.

Article XVII This constitution takes effect upon approval by the National Chinese Christian Conference and may be subject to revision by that Conference.

*Tian Feng*, March, 1992, p.20.  
The Chinese text governs.

## 5. The Revised Constitutions - Luo Guanzong

Luo Guanzong (Mr.) is a chairperson of the Shanghai Three-Self Association and secretary-general of the TSPM.

Since the Fourth National Christian Conference (NCC) in 1986, the work of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in the spirit of running the church well according to the Three-Self principle, has greatly developed and we can take pleasure in what has been achieved. The August, 1990 plenary session of the Standing Committees of the TSPM and CCC felt that changing circumstances and developments called for revisions to the constitutions of their respective organizations and set up a small group to undertake this task. Our first action was to solicit the views of all members of the plenum; with these findings as the basis we then drafted the proposed revisions and returned them to the members of the plenum. Those members residing in Shanghai gathered for a discussion of the proposed revisions, during which many valuable opinions and suggestions were put forward in an expression of their esteem and support for the TSPM and CCC. On 17 October 1991, the Executive Committee of the Conference considered the draft proposals for revision of the two constitutions and put forward their views and suggestions. On 30 December that year the draft proposals were considered and revised by the standing committee of the Fourth NCC. Now, on behalf of the small group for the revision of the two constitutions, I would like to briefly explain these two documents.

1. Official title of the TSPM. The regulations of the Civil Affairs Department governing the registration of social organizations require an English translation of registered titles, as well as an acronym. For our two national organizations, these are The National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC), respectively.

There was no opposition to the official title of the CCC. A suggestion to revise the title of the TSPM, as being too long and unwieldy, had been put forward by individual delegates at the Fourth NCC. It was suggested to delete the words "Patriotic" or "Movement" or "Committee" and the proposal caused a heated discussion within the Presidium. In the end, due to the press of time, everyone agreed to defer further discussion and a final decision to the next NCC. When the present small group on revision solicited views, there were still members of the plenum who felt the title was too long. After repeated study of the matter, and discussion by the Executive Committee, it was felt that it would not be possible to fully express either the duties or the mass nature of the Three-Self organization were any of these words to be deleted. Furthermore, over the past forty years, the TSPM had become familiar both to the masses of believers and to the society at large under its original title. Revision would puzzle Christians and hinder exchanges with those outside the church. Since the majority of the members of the plenum were not in favor of a revision, it was decided to keep the original title. There are in fact organizations in China which possess even longer names. Luckily our acronym, TSPM, has been widely accepted, so there is no further problem.

2. The constitution of the TSPM, article II: aims and duties.

(1) Many members of the plenum proposed changing "deeply love their homeland" to "deeply love their socialist homeland." This is a reflection of the feelings of the masses of Christians for their socialist nation and in these times, is of great practical significance.

(2) Other changes in wording in this article, from "to observe the national constitution," to "to observe the national constitution and the laws, regulations and policies of the land" and the addition of (to assist in) "building socialist spiritual and material civilization," have been carried out in order to give fuller and clearer expression to the duties of the TSPM.

(3) In stipulating "assisting the government in implementing the policy of freedom of religious belief," the main aim of the original is the protection of the legitimate rights of the church, prompt response to any circumstance which is at odds with or runs counter to the religious policy, to put forward opinions, suggestions and criticism and to request that the government supervise and speed up implementation of the policy by its departments, while at the same time putting a stop to the exploitation of Christianity for illegal purposes and the invasive activities of overseas anti-China groups. The addition of the words "safeguarding the legitimate rights of the church" is a culmination of our forty years' experience. Many of our colleagues and fellow Christians have been selected as delegates to the National People's Congress or as members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; they participate in the political life of the nation and in addition to representing Christian circles' participation in government and political discussions, they must safeguard the legitimate rights of the church.

Some colleagues suggested that article 11 be further revised by the addition of "to safeguard the legitimate rights of Christians." After studying the matter, it was felt that the legitimate rights of Christians are included in "assisting the government in the implementation of the policy of religious freedom and in safeguarding the legitimate rights of the church," as already stipulated in the constitutions. As citizens, individual Christians possess many other rights in addition to their right of freedom of religion which are clearly protected as stipulated in the national constitution and laws. The government protects its citizens under the law and this includes all legitimate rights of Christians. Thus, this need not be written into the TSPM constitution.

3. The addition of "to uphold the national constitution and the laws, regulations and policies of the land" in the CCC constitution, article 2. As a religious organization of the People's Republic of China and one of our country's social organizations, the CCC ought to observe the rights and duties stipulated by law.

4. Article 111, constitution of the CCC.

(1) "Mutual respect in matters of faith," has been changed to read "mutual respect in matters of faith and worship." The basic Christian faith is one; we have "one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God." Where doctrinal or liturgical views differ, we proceed in the spirit of seeking the common ground while reserving minor differences, and of mutual respect, doing our utmost to preserve that unity of heart which we have received from the Holy Spirit.

(2) In two places the phrase "all the churches" has been changed to read "churches in all localities." The main purpose of this change is to show consideration for the particular beliefs of some of our colleagues and fellow Christians. (Note: This change is not reflected literally in the English translation.)

5. The addition of article IV in the TSPM constitution and of article VI in the CCC constitution.

(1) Since renewal of church life following the Third Plenum of the Eleventh CCP, by the grace of God, the situation of the church has continued to improve and we have entered a period of construction in which the church is well run according to the Three-Self principle. For over ten years, throughout our provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, our two organizations have developed many activities. This is exciting and very moving. For example: education in the Three-Self principle; calling people together to share experiences in working for socialist material and spiritual civilization; starting all sorts of social welfare projects; offering all sorts of training programs in similar areas; organizing evangelization teams: in all these ways building up rich experience and bearing much fruit. We believe that from now on it is essential that the TSPM and CCC take appropriate measures and set up channels of communication with local churches in order to make known and share the good experiences and examples of churches throughout the country in the building up of the church and in Three-Self work. This will both inspire and give impetus to churches and Three-Self work all over the country as well as helping to summarize and increase awareness of common problems of the two organizations in provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions.

(2) The article stipulates that "it is the responsibility of provincial, autonomous region and municipality level Christian councils or church affairs committees to observe and carry out the resolutions of the CCC." The majority of the members whose opinions we sought were in agreement with this, though some individuals had reservations. We felt this addition was essential. It makes clear that as individuals we are part of the larger organization; we cannot go our own way. Only in this way can we give full play to the power of our love for our country and our church and be able with one heart and one mind to effectively carry out the work of our two organizations.

It was suggested that we further add the phrase "the resolutions of the two national organizations should be thoroughly implemented in ways that suit local conditions." We believe that local organizations have always so implemented the resolutions of the national bodies and that such a phrase need not be written into the constitutions.

6. TSPM constitution, article VI and CCC constitution article VIII add the proviso that as the need arises, an honorary chairperson or president may be elected. This was a stipulation of the constitutions adopted at the Third NCC (when Wu Yifang was elected honorary chairperson of the TSPM), but in the constitutions adopted at the Fourth NCC, this was changed to inviting consultants. The purpose of including this stipulation is to show our respect and esteem for those of our colleagues and fellow Christians who have many years of service to the Chinese church and the TSPM, by making it possible for them to serve in an honorary capacity upon retirement. At the same time, this provides stability, continuity and continued development for the work of the TSPM and CCC. The constitutions further stipulate that an honorary chairperson or president will be elected by the body itself and serve until the following NCC.

7. TSPM constitution, article VII and CCC constitution, article IX: The Standing Committee may invite a number of consultants. These positions were created for retired colleagues and fellow Christians who have made considerable contributions to the work of the church and Three-



Self. The constitutions already provided for consultants, but which body would invite such consultants was unclear, now the constitutions state that it is the Standing Committee which does so.

8. TSPM constitution, article IX and CCC constitution, article XI. The original text already provides for specialized committees, but who shall appoint these is unclear. The revised constitutions specify that they shall be appointed by the Standing Committee and further specifies that their term of appointment shall be until the next NCC, when it shall be necessary to reappoint them, if they are to continue serving. Since at present the TSPM and CCC have their respective as well as their joint tasks, these specialized committees may be jointly or individually appointed according to the nature of the work.

9. TSPM constitution, article XI and CCC constitution, article XIII (new articles).

The work of the Standing Committees of the present TSPM and CCC has been carried out by the chairperson and president with the assistance of the vice-chairperson, vice-president, secretary-general and general secretary. In reality, however, as dictated by the requirements of the work, the above officers have frequently met together as a joint Executive Committee. This group has now been provided for in the constitutions.

10. TSPM constitution, article XIV and CCC constitution, article XVI (new articles).

The Civil Affairs Department requires such an article relating to the possible dissolution of an organization in its regulations governing the registration of organizations.

11. As we solicited opinions, we found that a portion of the members suggested that the constitutions should contain a stipulation that the relationship between the TSPM and CCC be reordered. After study of this issue, it was felt that a resolution on reordering relationships had already been passed by the third Standing Committees of the two organizations which clearly stipulated that the Three-Self organization and the church body should fulfill their duties according to their respective constitutions, both individually and in cooperation. Thus there was no need for this to be written into the present constitutions.

*Tian Fen*, March 1992, p.17.  
Translated by Janice Wickeri.

## 6. Resolution of the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference

We, two hundred seventy-three delegates of (Protestant) Christian churches from twenty-nine provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities of China came together in the name of Jesus Christ for the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference (NCC) which was held in Beijing from 31 December 1991 to 6 January 1992. The theme of our conference was how to run the church well, and the spirit of wisdom and revelation bestowed upon us by our heavenly Father ensured that the meeting was conducted throughout in an atmosphere of faith, hope and love for one another. The success of the conference was also inseparable from the concern, prayers and support of our colleagues and fellow Christians throughout the nation. Congratulatory telegrams and letters were also received from several church organizations and individuals at home and abroad, for which we would like to express our heartfelt appreciation.

During the conference, the head of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council, Ren Wuzhi, came to offer his congratulations and a government official delivered a report on the situation at home and abroad. This was deeply encouraging and educational for the delegates. Even though the world situation is at present in flux, our nation, under the correct leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, is following the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, a path appropriate to the reality of China and consonant with the fundamental welfare of the broad masses of the people. Last year some areas of China experienced the worst flooding of this century, but under the leadership of the Party and government, not only were these difficulties surmounted, but the agricultural and industrial production for the nation as a whole achieved sustained increases and our markets flourished. This gives ample evidence of the superiority of China's socialist system. We are confident that by following the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the Chinese people, with one heart and one mind, united in the struggle, will be able to establish a strong and prosperous new China. Towards this aim, this conference solemnly calls upon all colleagues and fellow Christians throughout China, to rally closely round the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government, and, together with the broad masses of the people, to dedicate our strength to the establishment of socialist material and spiritual civilization in our motherland; to social unity and stability; and to the overall development and unification of the motherland. We should also join with Christians and all people the world over in the common struggle for international justice and world peace.

The conference heard the work report of the Standing Committee of the Fourth NCC which was entitled "God's Indescribable Grace," as well as an explanation of the revision of the constitutions of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC) by the small group entrusted with this task. Conscientious deliberation and enthusiastic discussion of both work report and the revised constitutions ensued, and valuable opinions were put forward. In order to explore more deeply how to run the Chinese church well today, small discussion groups on specific topics were held and their findings shared with the plenary session. The topics of these discussion groups were: advancing Three-Self; leadership training; church administration; the rural church; exploring self-support; theological construction; and overseas exchanges. After full deliberation, the conference elected new members to the Standing Committees of the TSPM and the CCC.

The conference was filled with joy and thanksgiving for the grace and guidance which God has shown for the Chinese church, as illustrated in the work report for the last five years presented by the previous standing committee. It is the opinion of the conference that the report's summing up of the achievements and experience of these past five years is a true and accurate reflection of the facts. It is also correct and essential to point out, as it did, the future tasks of the church, while the results of discussions of each particular topic gave meaningful direction for our efforts to run the church well. This conference calls upon all three-self associations, Christian councils and local churches throughout the country to undertake extensive and thoroughgoing transmission of the spirit and content of the conference to the broad masses of colleagues and fellow Christians. From this time forward, they should strive in every respect to implement the spirit and content of this conference according to the situation of their particular places, and to share widely all beneficial experience which results from their efforts. It is the hope of this conference that over the next five years, colleagues and fellow Christians throughout the nation, under the guidance of our heavenly Father, will strive with one heart to uphold the Three-Self principle, to make further strides in running well a Chinese church worthy of our socialist country, so that we will make new achievements and open up new opportunities.

The conference welcomed the Church Order for Trial Use in Chinese Churches, drafted after three years of work by the Committee on Church Order and passed by the previous standing committees of the TSPM and the CCC. This document, following the Chinese church's passage into the period of post-denominationalism, incorporates different traditions in a spirit of mutual respect and marks our church's entrance into a new era of doing things decently and in good order. It is a trial church order, designed as a model for the churches. It is the recommendation of this conference that three-self associations, Christian councils and local churches in China conscientiously publicize and practice this trial order, and make suggestions for additions and revisions, so that our Chinese church's order may be continually improved.

The conference is pleased to note that young and middle-aged delegates under the age of fifty at this conference account for upwards of one quarter of the total number. These delegates, full of vitality, youth and promise, represent the new generation of our church. We are particularly thankful for the fact that Christian councils and church affairs committees from fifteen provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have taken advantage of the occasion of the Fifth NCC to hold in Beijing's Chongwenmen Church a solemn and united service of ordination, and that forty-two of the forty-five ordinands are young colleagues. We are thankful for the grace of God in our theological education, which in recent years has begun to bear fruit in supplying heirs for the work of our church. It is our hope that our young colleagues will redouble their humility, prudence and selfless dedication. We ask all colleagues and fellow Christians for their continued prayers, that God may prepare for the Chinese church more clergy from the younger generation who love their country and their church, and who will take up the tasks which our heavenly Father has entrusted this day to the Chinese church.

At this conference we are profoundly moved to remember the many Christians of previous generations who initiated the Three-Self Patriotic Movement which has already achieved great things. Facts show that the TSPM is God's call to the Chinese church in the present age, the basic path which Chinese Christians should follow in socialist new

China. Without the TSPM, the Chinese church would not have seen a day such as this, a day in which it has been so blessed. It is the belief of the conference that the TSPM has developed today to the point where we have already entered upon a new era of running the church well according to the Three-Self principle: self-governing and well governed; self-supporting and well supported; self-propagating and well propagated. The Three-Self principle must be implemented in a thoroughgoing manner in each area of a well-run church's ministry. It must be handed on from generation to generation, extended and developed without interruption. Many of the older generation of the church have already gone to be with the Lord, and this great task has been laid upon us Christians of this generation. Let our prayer be that of Elisha when Elijah was taken up to heaven: "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit" (2Kings 2:9). Let us resolve to take up the unfinished ministry left to us by previous generations, so that with one heart and mind, relying on the Holy Spirit we may loyally serve the gospel of our Lord, that it may flourish during this new era in our nation.

*Tian Feng*, March, 1992, p.21.

Translated by Janice Wickeri.

The Chinese text governs.

## 7. Closing Address – K.H. Ting

K.H. Ting (Bishop) is president of the CCC, chairperson of the TSPM and principal of Nanjing Theological Seminary.

Fellow delegates, the time has gone too quickly, and the Fifth National Christian Conference is already drawing to a close.

During the past few days I have often wondered what people will think when they look back on this conference several years from now. What has been special about it? We can perhaps identify four salient features of this conference:

1) A profile of the delegates would reveal that a rejuvenation has taken place; the delegates are quite a bit younger now. In comparison with the last conference five years ago, their average age has gone down by seven years, rather than up by five years. This has exceeded my expectations. We are especially pleased not only by the presence of many young delegates, but by the atmosphere during meetings and in the dining hall, which has been very lively. Even more importantly, the younger delegates have not acted as if they are guests or observers here, but have been conscious of their great responsibility and have taken full part in the proceedings, speaking up in a lively manner and contributing in all sorts of ways. All this has been a source of great comfort to many older colleagues who have been carrying a heavy burden for many years. Younger colleagues would do well to learn from them. But now older colleagues' days of service to the church are drawing to a close and they realize that helping younger colleagues to take up their responsibilities is the contribution they must make today.

This national conference will be a compelling model and a stimulus to the rejuvenation of the ranks of our colleagues throughout the church. Yesterday's rather large-scale service of ordination jointly held by provincial, autonomous region and municipality church organizations had two urgent messages for the churches in the nation: 1) we welcome and encourage more promising young people to answer Christ's call and enter the ministry of the church, devoting themselves to the gospel; 2) we would like the gates of the ministry to be opened more widely in the local church, so that we might increase the numbers of qualified clergy within a short time. This is the hope of the mass of ordinary Christians. We saw how, yesterday following the ordination service, when the leader of the service invited the new ministers to face the congregation following the laying on of hands, prolonged applause broke out in a church where it is not customary to applaud. This was a clear indication of the congregation's feelings. At that time, I felt that this applause was actually Chinese Christians' prayer and thanksgiving expressed in another way.

There are as yet no statistics available on the number of women and lay delegates at this conference. I believe there has also been an increase in these categories, but not a large one.

2) Today, with all the momentous changes that are taking place in the world, we are constantly mulling over how we should think about certain important issues. We had the opportunity at this conference to hear important and helpful discussions which

strengthened our convictions about the indispensability and of our socialist society and made us realize that we are not mistaken in having patriotism as a major premise to be upheld and extended. In our country, Christians need to identify with the mass of the people, be actively involved in the work of reform, openness and modernization and in the work of building socialist material civilization and spiritual civilization, oppose peaceful evolution and infiltration by anti-China forces, and contribute to national peace, stability and prosperity.

3) This conference will be remembered for taking as its theme the building up of the church and making the church well run. From now on, making the church well run will not be a slogan which one may oppose or neglect to grasp firmly. It has become a requisite part of the meaning of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (TSPM). A Three-Self Patriotic Movement which is not enthusiastic about making the church well run, is indisputably not a good Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Whoever strives to make the church well run will be loved and supported by the believers. Whoever is not concerned about this, will have no place in their hearts. As a slogan, making the church well run functions like a glue to unite the mass of believers. We must make known to Christians at home and abroad the fact that the TSPM is in no sense a church-destroying movement, but rather a movement which seeks to create the conditions to make the church well run. At the same time, within China, there is no way we can cast aside the three-self principle and succeed in making the church well run.

In order to make the church well run, we must naturally strengthen pastoral work and fulfill the believers' spiritual needs, but making the church well run also means raising the quality of the believers' faith and their spiritual awareness. Some people are of the opinion that the church is fine as long as there are a lot of people in it, that nothing else is necessary. But this is not the principle behind our efforts to make the church well run today. There are unhealthy phenomena in the church today, which are the result of all sorts of factors. Making the church well run is the only basic, genuinely effective way to deal with these things, the only way to solve those problems that administrative methods cannot really address. Thus we can say that it is not only our church members who want us to make the church well run, but also our country.

The work report heard at this conference was a patriotic and church-loving report, the main topic of which was making the church well run. It has established a correct image for the TSPM. Let us take this report to the whole country. When the mass of our Christians see that this is a well-reasoned report which gives full play to biblical principles, when they hear that self-government means well governed, self-support means well supported and self-propagation means propagating well, they will be well satisfied, new hopes will spring up, and they will support the work of renewal of outdated concepts within the church, changing the church's image.

A leading cadre in the party's united front work once said to me that we should not do anything which the believers would not like. I am very grateful to him for that insight; let us keep it before us. Making the church well run is something the believers will like; let us tell this news to the whole church.

4) The Trial Order for our church's use passed by the Standing Committees of the two national Protestant bodies has been distributed at this conference. This is the fruit of several

years' work during which Rev. Peter Tsai and his colleagues sought a wide variety of opinions and undertook a number of revisions. I would venture to say that this is another significant document of our TSPM, the crystallization of its past forty years' experiences. When we look back some years from now, we may find this document rudimentary and incomplete. Today, however, it gives full expression to the principle of mutual respect in matters of faith and worship and, most particularly, in matters relating to ecclesiology. It reflects how far we have come over the past forty years and the heights we are still to attain on our path of unity in the Chinese Protestant churches. I believe that this document will be given due attention and studied by Christians elsewhere, because it is a creative document, distinctively and uniquely Chinese, which has ground-breaking significance. I believe all friendly Christians overseas can see how we Chinese Christians follow the New Testament cautiously and solemnly in exploring the path to running the church well, and they will be glad for us.

This church order for trial use is of great practical significance. With regard to ordination, for example, the church has historically had regulations, as well as procedures and processes born of tradition, which were used to ensure the quality of its ministry. Today, in China, there are cases where methods contradictory to the nature of the church and its traditions in producing and ordaining ministers have been used. Such practices have been a source of great hurt and disappointment to Christians. Extremely rash actions such as these in which proper procedures are not followed and unsuitable persons blithely ordained, do tremendous damage to the image of the church and to that of the TSPM, deeply hurt ordinary Christians' feelings and create contradictions and divisions within the church. Now that we have this document from the two national Christian bodies, all can join in opposing such improper methods. If some people persist in going against these regulations and order, we can courteously point out that we cannot, indeed we have no right to, do anything which is at odds with these regulations. At the very least, local Christian groups can wait and entreat the Committee on Order of the two national bodies to give an opinion before making any decision. We welcome the passing on of such problems to us. If you did not act in this way, you would, in fact, very possibly be disrespectful of the church order document.

I hope that all delegates as well as our colleagues nationwide will earnestly study this order and make themselves familiar with it, protect its prestige and be examples of abiding by the document, in order to manage the church well, to protect its image and the prestige of the TSPM. This document can only be perfected by regular means, we cannot countenance anyone treating it lightly.

Many delegates have found the time too short during this meeting and have expressed the need for more time to discuss the issue of the implementation of religious policy. Many delegates have expressed their deep concern about the fact that at present home gatherings in some areas are being closed regardless of the distinctions among them. This issue has been a frequent topic of conversation as delegates gathered for meals during the meeting, but little time has been spent on it during the conference. What I can say is that comrades of the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council have for some time been drafting a set of regulations on the supervision of venues for religious activities and that views on the draft, including those of religious organizations, have been widely sought. The chairpersons and presidents of the TSPM and CCC have also spent a good deal of time discussing it and putting forward our views. Last evening I

received a visit from the head of the Political Department of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council who, together with two other officials, came to tell me that they had finished the work of drafting the regulations after incorporating a great many views, and now the draft will be sent to the State Council for examination. They told me it will be a fair and reasonable document which seeks truth from facts, and will not disregard the differences which may exist among home gatherings. It is our hope that once this set of regulations appears the excesses in some areas will be corrected.

During this meeting leading cadres from the Central Committee will receive us. Mr. Ren, head of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council came to offer his congratulations, experts gave reports on the situation at home and abroad, a number of comrades from the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council and the Central United Front Department spent a great deal of time listening to briefings on local situations, views and requests from delegates from all over the country. Everyone was very moved by and grateful for this. I would also like to thank the Religious Affairs Office of Beijing and colleagues in the church here who have been unstinting in their efforts to make all sorts of arrangements for our convenience and to ensure the smooth functioning of the conference. The ordination service we held was a complete success due to the enormous help received from the pastors, congregation, choir and choir director of the Chongwenmen Church. For weeks now, our colleagues in the two national church bodies have been working very hard on behalf of this Conference. Not only have they been very efficient, their attitude has been excellent. The General Secretary and three deputy General Secretaries of the conference were extremely systematic in their preparations for the conference, thinking in advance of every possible problem which might arise during the meeting and preparing to deal with them beforehand. All the comrades in the Jingfeng Hotel, from the dining room staff to the room attendants, from the first aid room to the shop, from the general manager to each and every member of staff, have performed all sorts of unsung tasks and on behalf of all the delegates, I would like to offer them all our sincerest thanks.

*Tian Feng*, March, 1992, p.23.  
Translated by Janice Wickeri.



## ESSAYS

### 8. Theological Construction in the Chinese Church - **Chen Zemin**

This essay was written in 1956 and originally appeared in the *Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 5 and 6, 1957.

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#### **The Church at Reflection**

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

The church has historically been subject to the economic, political, cultural and social influences of its era, people and nation, therefore, there are theologies of different eras and regions, of peoples and of countries, such as the theology of the Greek Church Fathers, of the ancient North African church, Reformation theology, Germanic theology, etc. All these were responses to the different needs and special experiences of their times. Even though these theologies were all based on the revelation of the Bible and Christian faith, and preserve to a certain extent the historical traditions of Christianity, they all reflect different Christian experiences and understandings as people sought to live out the gospel, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, in their own times. Because theology encompasses life experience, it is intrinsically alive and dynamic, and it grows and develops with the life of the church. It contains faith, but is not equivalent to faith; it contains the truth of the gospel, but is not the whole truth of the gospel. It is a commentary on the faith and

truth of the gospel, an expression of the life of the church; it is the church at reflection. The content of that reflection is the faith and experience of the church. Reflection without content is mere formalism ordered dogma-it is not theology. Unexamined experience is simply immature feeling; it is puerile and may well be misguided and misleading. So religious experience precedes theology, and is the foundation of theology. Any mature church must have its theology, just as a mature person must be capable of conscious, coherent thought.

The church of new China is growing, and with the development of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) it is now embarking on a new chapter in its life. In the five or six years since 1949, it has accumulated much precious and significant new spiritual experience. The process of growth and maturation which the church is undergoing demands that the church sort out and make sense of these experiences. In order that the church be better able to reflect, and become a self-aware and united church, it must have its own theology. This timely demand has been raised, and now a task lies before the church which has never and never could have arisen before. The young Chinese church stands now in the forefront of progress, and faces a new historical era unlike any in the two thousand year history of the Christian Church. If the church wishes to continue to exist in the midst of a new socialist society, it must recognize its duty and complete its mission. It is now bearing witness both to itself and to its lord Jesus Christ. It already has sufficient experience and material upon which to reflect, and can review the road along which it has come. The church must tell the many Christians who live beyond the environs of this social system how the church has chosen its path and how it has moved forward. It must use the language of theology, a language easily understood by Christians and theologians, and through faith and in the context of the history of Christianity, it must tell the story of its spiritual experience to prove that it has chosen the right path. The church should also make use of this same mode of thinking to determine and indicate its future direction. This task is unprecedented in the experience of the Chinese church.

### **The Theological Poverty of the pre-1949 Church**

It has already been one hundred years since Protestant Christianity entered China, and many Chinese have accepted the Christian faith and joined the church. But until the unfolding of the TSPM, a truly "Chinese" church had never been established. The word "Chinese" had been appended to the names of many churches, but this was not enough to show that these were really churches belonging to Chinese believers. This obviously applies to those churches with a western mission agency background. As for churches that called themselves 'self-established' such as the "Chinese Independent Church of Jesus" and the "True Jesus Church", though they had no economic or administrative links with western mission agencies, their thinking was dominated by western theology. The point is not that the Chinese churches must be completely different from western churches in administrative forms and theologies. Since we are Christians, we necessarily have many things in common with western Christianity, we cannot possibly cut ourselves off completely from the historical traditions of western Christianity, nor do we desire to do so. If that were to happen, we would cease being a Christian church. The main problem is this: Before 1949, the introduction of Christianity to China was closely bound

up with the process of colonialism, so it was impossible for the Chinese church to develop any independent theological thought that could be termed Chinese. Some western missionaries, intentionally or unintentionally, used their mission work as a method and means of aggression. For some, their original intent was not the spread of the gospel. As E.C. Bridgman intimated, their purpose in China was not so much religious as it was political. Of course, such people could not possibly help us gain true spiritual experience of the kind that could serve as the basis for a theology of the Chinese church. When such people did discuss theology in China, as happened when missionaries established seminaries here, they only bandied about worn-out theological clichés and could not do very much to cultivate real theological interest.

There were missionaries who may not have consciously and actively used religion as a means of aggression, or who really believed that their purpose in China was to spread the gospel. However, guided by the erroneous policies of western mission agencies, in an environment of cultural imperialism, and in a period in which China was not a truly independent nation, the spread of the gospel and the spread of western culture and lifestyles became inextricably intertwined to the point that speaking English and eating western food virtually became necessary conditions for discussing Christian theology. A Chinese person who accepted this kind of Christianity was to a certain extent also accepting the influence of western thought and lifestyles, and therefore to some extent abandoning the thought patterns and feelings of a true Chinese and becoming alienated from the masses of the Chinese people. In this way the Chinese Christian church actually became a parasitic "daughter church" of western mission agencies. Because it was not a true Chinese church, how could it theologize in a genuinely Chinese way?

In the past, western missionaries opened seminaries in China and taught "Christian theology." Western missionaries brought the Bible to China, and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit we found the gospel in God's word and revelation. We gained some knowledge of the Bible and the Christian religion from the west. We do not deny that such knowledge was of some help in our study of the Bible, in our search for truth, and in our acceptance of the gospel. But with regard to theology which must be based on the spiritual experience of believers, we must plainly state that we cannot simply copy the theology of the west. If we were to swallow western theology whole without critical examination, it would choke the Chinese church's own theology and still the newly-born spiritual experience of Chinese believers. Here we must make a distinction between the age-old Christian theological heritage and harmful modern western ideas. The Christian heritage is of value to us as long as we can accurately understand, absorb and use it, because it is the distillation of many generations of accumulated rich Christian spiritual experience and achievements in the search for truth. Harmful western ideas will only be an obstacle and a hindrance in our spiritual experience and search for truth. Yet it is frequently only through the latter that western theologians introduce and explain the former. This serves to explain the pathetic state of theology in the pre-1949 Chinese church.

It may be helpful to mention a few examples to illustrate this situation. In the first decade of this century, American theologians wrangled endlessly over the issue of

fundamentalism vs. modernism, and the fray was soon introduced into the Chinese church. Before most Chinese Christians had even figured out what fundamentalism and modernism were, and what these arguments represented in America, they had already fallen into blind, narrow denominational disputes, fighting vigorously and loyally for their western teachers, and causing divisions in the young Chinese church. After the First World War, when western nations sank into poverty, bitterness and despair, the western church turned from blind optimism to pessimism and bewilderment. The "theology of crisis" was immediately exported to China, and China's theologians took pride in quibbling over Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death," and the paradoxes of "dialectical theology." When Catholic theologians tried to disguise medieval obscurantism under the high-sounding name "New Scholasticism," Chinese theologians lost no time in discussing Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson. When western psychology and psychiatry began to make inroads into pastoral theology, many ministers tried to lecture on Freud and Jung's "depth psychology" from the pulpit, rather than preaching the gospel. Stanley Jones' *Victorious Living* became a bargain-basement gem in China and was passed around as best-selling spiritual nourishment. When western rostrums blared opposition to the Communist Party and the Soviet Union, many theologians in China abandoned the slogan of staying above politics and preached about the fundamental antagonism between Christ and Communism. Even the crudest distortions of the Bible (such as allusions to the red horse in Revelation and Rosh in Ezekiel) were all treated as reliable exegesis of prophecy. In reality, this so-called "latest western theology" reflected the spiritual deterioration of the western church, but because the Chinese church was the "daughter church" of the western church, such rubbish was introduced into China as if it was treasure.

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

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

## **The Awakening of Theology in a New Era**

Spiritual experience is the foundation of theology. In 1949, Chinese believers awoke to the clarion call of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. In the beginning, many people looked on the TSPM as primarily a patriotic political movement. Through this movement, they came to see the true face of imperialism and realize that Christianity had been used as a tool of imperialist aggression in China; they learned how to stand on the side of the people in making distinctions between friend and foe, and how to enthusiastically love

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

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

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

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

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

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

5) The church is living in the modern age, and is in the process of exploring new paths. It is situated in an environment in which new China's academic and intellectual circles are broadly investigating materialism and freely discussing issues in accordance with the policy of "letting a hundred schools of thought contend." This forces Christians to re-examine the basis of their faith. Accepting religious faith is no longer a natural or casual matter, and theologians and ministers must convince people of the significance of Christianity. People with questionable motives no longer surge into churches as they once did. Religion cannot be made use of for non-religious goals any longer. Judging from the demands of this situation, evangelism naturally seems somewhat more difficult than it once was, but this is now real evangelism. Difficulties only serve to purify the work of evangelism and clarify its goals and significance, thus making it more noble and precious. Because of this, theology is spurred on to further development.

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

7) For the reasons mentioned above, we now have a new historical vantage point from which to view some western "theologians" as they struggle in the adverse currents of their culture. In the long march of human history, we are moving ahead. When we look at western theology, we no longer admire it blindly as we once did; we can see that many in the west are groping their way into blind alleys, having strayed from the true gospel of

the church, and much that is precious in the historical tradition of the church has been lost. They are now gathering out-dated, useless things left behind by earlier generations of theologians and using obscure ancient terms to cover over their spiritual poverty and ignorance of the truth. No one with any common sense would be in the market for such things, so they are compelled to borrow dead Greek and Latin phrases praising the God of irrationality (*Deus irrationalis*), proclaiming the faith of absurdity (*Credo quia absurdum*) and extolling ignorance (*Ignoramus et ignorainibus*). They feel that the gospel can only be established on people's sense of hopelessness. they feel that if the church is to have a future, then the human race must have none. Observing some of the developments in western theology from our vantage point, we see that they are regressing in a direction exactly opposite of our progress ahead of us, in contrast, there is endless light. Even though at present we have only limited material for theological construction, and some precious experience, we can confidently advance in the direction we have chosen. We know that we have the heavy responsibility and mission to lead people to God and to seek truth. We can proudly ---but not arrogantly - carry out our theological task. As we realize the nature of the mission that faces us today and accept this heavy responsibility, we do not feel arrogant, nor are we unwilling to humbly assimilate the precious historical heritage of Christianity from tile west. We are fully aware that in the past our theological foundation was relatively weak, and that in many areas we must painstakingly research and humbly learn. But God has already called us and placed us in this important position in history, so we cannot refuse this grace or responsibility.

Looking back at the history of Christianity, we see that Christian theology has advanced with the times and has already undergone many adaptations and transformations. The Church Fathers of ancient Greece expounded the Christian gospel to the believers of that day through Greek patterns of thought and language. The theological doctors of the Middle Ages attempted to use scholasticism in the interpretation of the gospel. The reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries found that the gospel could help them throw off the shackles of feudalism, resulting in great developments in theology during the Reformation. Following the new view of the universe ushered in by the development of the natural sciences, theologians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expanded and deepened our faith in and understanding of the gospel. If the past two thousand years of theological work has indeed enriched our theological knowledge and expanded the domain of theology, it is only because theologians did not fail to promptly sum up those spiritual experiences characteristic of and significant for their times, organize them and elevate them to the level of theory, and add their achievements to the river of' theological knowledge. Today we stand at an extremely important point in the history of human society, and the church is thus also brought to this critical stage in history. The church must bravely face this era, and explain the changes which it has brought from a spiritual viewpoint. This is the theological task of our church today.

### **Loci and Foci**

Although minute, fragmentary and incomplete, our experience, understanding and knowledge are not haphazard, chaotic and unrelated to each other. In this age of change, in this society brimming with creative energy, in this exceptional era in history, many things are advancing by leaps and bounds. Because of the dullness of our faith and our

clouded spiritual eyes, our views and understanding often lag behind events. God's revelation appears in the earthquake and fire, yet our weakness causes us to cover our ears and eyes, afraid to face it. But we must never flee from the surging current of progress. Our faith is sluggish but not dead; our eyes are clouded but not totally blind. In the flood of history, we are still washed forward by an overpowering force. From amidst the scattered small whirlpools and the spray of the waves, we can still make out the main current. If we carefully pick up the crumbs scattered on the ground, when we have collected twelve full baskets, we will see the goodness of the one who gives us the bread of life. Spiritual hunger compels us to grope our way forward. The road which we have traveled has been marked for us by God.

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

Let us continue to use this geometric concept for a moment. We find that the locus we explore shows a certain pattern; an unlimited wisdom and unfathomable love are guiding us. His will is the pattern of the locus, and this locus appears to be an ellipse. The moving point endlessly orbits around two foci - God and humanity - the focal points of theological thought over thousands of years. As history progresses, the moving point of the ellipse sometimes moves closer to God, taking him as the center, and is relatively distant from humanity; but sometimes it moves closer to humanity and further from God. Between God and humanity, a certain relation or connection is always preserved, but there is also distance between them. If the distance between these two foci were to be reduced to nil, God and humankind would become one. God might be absorbed by humankind, and the resulting extreme humanism would end in a denial of creation, the atonement and the gospel; the ellipse would vanish and become a circle. But if the distance between these foci were to increase infinitely, there would be absolute distance and opposition between God and humankind. The two end points would be pulling in opposite directions, resulting in the perishing of religious life. But history and experience tell us that the relationship between God and humanity involves both repulsion and attraction. God's love of the world and human dependence on God draw the two foci toward each other, but God's holiness and human sin prevent them from uniting and becoming one. This causes religion to become a necessary part of real life, and makes theology possible.

However, this ellipse is not stationary. As the moving point orbits around the two foci, history progresses and the relationship between God and humanity also progresses in time. Our elementary geometric metaphor fails at this point. This locus actually becomes an oscillating line formed by the moving point as it moves along the circumference of an ellipse which is advancing in a certain direction; this is a very complicated and advanced oscillating line. At this point, this geometric maze no longer benefits our theological thought, and instead becomes a hindrance. Here we have to give up this Cartesian theological approach. Before putting aside this advanced locus model,



we must also point out that the ellipse analogy contains another serious flaw: these two foci are not equal and symmetrical. God is always active, and humankind is always passive, though only relatively so.\*

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

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

Let us consider a few more examples to explain the relationship between the ellipse and its foci. A basic problem in Christian theology is the relationship between revelation and human reason. Are God's revelation and natural human reason in opposition to each other, or are they complementary? Is revelation opposed to reason, above reason or completely within the bounds of reason? Does so-called natural revelation really exist? Outside the special revelation of the Bible, can we see the movement of the will of God in the progress of history'.? Circling the two foci of a God who has revealed himself and a human race which has responded to God's revelation, there are different experiences and theories. There are extreme supernaturalists who totally reject natural revelation and repudiate the use of reason; there are also extreme rationalists and naturalists who take reason as the absolute criterion for judging revelation, who consider natural revelation to be the only kind of revelation, and who reject any supernatural revelation. Between these two extremes there are a variety of compromising and conciliatory viewpoints which form a curve.

Let us also look at the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology. Historically, theologians have wavered in their emphasis between Christ's divine and human natures. Though orthodox doctrine holds that Christ was fully divine and fully human, it is not easy to maintain this delicate balance perpetually. So, in ancient times there was Modalistic Monarchianism, which emphasized Christ's divine nature while neglecting his humanity, and Dynamic Monarchianism and Arianism, which stressed Christ's subordinate status. In the Reformation period, many of the theological disputes between Luther and Calvin revolved around this question of Christ's

dual nature. With regard to theories of the atonement there are extreme "objective" theories which place God at the center (like Anselm's substitution satisfaction theory), and there are also extreme "subjective" theories, which place humanity at the center (Abelard), and a variety of schools of ethics. Other issues closely related to this problem have to do with theories of human nature and of sin. Advocates of "objective" atonement without exception stress original sin, total depravity and the absence of freedom. Those who hold to "subjective" atonement tend toward a variety of humanistic Socinian and Arminian positions. In between these extremes there are many compromise theories. Another example is the problem of the attitude of Christians toward the world, and of their relationship to the world. There are "other-worldly" and "apocalyptic" schools which totally reject this world and place their hope in the life to come; there are also the "social gossellers" who stress the present life and take the afterlife only as a theoretical possibility or a symbol.

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

### **Continuity or Discontinuity**

Before we examine the ways in which theology can sum up the religious experiences of the Chinese church, we must raise a question which has faced theologians for centuries. Actually, it is the question of the relationship between the two foci mentioned above, but stated as a question of principles. We must decide: between God and humankind, between revelation and natural reason, between the gospel and ordinary ethics or cultural values, between Christianity and other religions, between faith and the absence of faith, between the church and society, between the kingdom of God and that of the world, between eternity and history - is there continuity or discontinuity? Over the ages, and with regard to many important theological questions, theologians have chosen their viewpoints and the foundation or standard of their faith from between these two contrasting principles. For example, with regard to the question of the relationship between God and humankind, those who hold to a discontinuity position naturally emphasize God's transcendence and distance from humankind. "Those who hold to continuity stress God's immanence and closeness to humanity. The former treat God as "wholly other," unreachably high, inaccessible to reason, and infinitely exalted; because of this, humankind's finitude and limitations are also seen as absolute, and humans are viewed as totally depraved, hopeless, and evil - as mere objects of God's wrath. The latter emphasize a God who lives among us, an affectionate, loving, forgiving father. Though humanity is fallen and evil, it is not to the point of hopelessness and death. Humanity is created in the image of God, we have freedom and moral obligations, we are objects of God's love and grace of salvation. The former stress God's act of salvation as the purpose of creation; the latter stress God's work of creation, with salvation as its fulfillment and

completion. The former believe that God's revelation is absolute and special, they do not acknowledge natural revelation or natural theology, and they see human reason and knowledge as standing in opposition to God's revelation. While the latter admit that God's revelation is absolute and special, they do not deny that revelation can also be found in nature and history, and they see reason as the basis for accepting God's revelation. The former emphasize an absolute "quantitative difference" between eternity and time, so they view all movements in history through the eyes of eschatology and deny the possibility of any real progress within the realm of history. The latter see eternity as an endless extension of history, affirming that God's kingdom is both eternal and historical, and affirm that progress in history is under God's guidance and control. The former set the gospel and religion in opposition, seeing morality and salvation as in opposition, and feel that anything which is human - be it religion, morality, culture or arts - is of no value in God's eyes; it may even be evil, of the devil. The latter feel that all good things come from God, though human morality and culture are not sufficient for salvation. The former consider human pride and self-satisfaction the greatest of sins; the latter have hope for and confidence in humankind. The former criticize the latter for being naive, shallow and presumptuous; the latter see the former as being too one-sided, arbitrary and negative.

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

We must also point out that although in theory the discontinuity and continuity viewpoints appear to be diametrically opposed, isolated systems which cannot be reconciled, in reality a theologian may belong to both camps to differing degrees with regard to different questions. That is to say, with regard to one question he may hold to some kind of discontinuity position, while on another issue he may take some kind of continuity position. It is not only a few individuals or a minority of theologians who hold such dual positions. On the contrary, it is those who hold absolute continuity or discontinuity

positions who are extreme cases. Our locus thus becomes an ellipse which is smaller at the two ends and broad in the middle. The real world is complex and changing, and pure theory easily leads people to forget reality.

Analysis of this kind of comparison may be helpful to our inquiry. It helps us to see more clearly the paths we had chosen and how theological studies developed in the past. It shows us that the church had often used the discontinuity view as the criterion of "orthodoxy," and it shows us the courageous spirit of the reformers who advocated the continuity view. It is only through the complementarity of these two views together that theology can progress with the times. They represent two kinds of attitudes, two tendencies, and over the ages theologians representing a diversity of leanings have appeared. If Irenaeus is a "father of orthodox theology" who was relatively close to the discontinuity view, then Justin Martyr clearly represents the continuity view (although he has never been criticized as heretic). In the disputes after the fourth century, many extremely far-sighted and wise theologians balanced orthodox doctrine between two contradictory principles. In the debate over human nature and atonement, Augustine gradually moved toward a discontinuity position, even to the point that he eventually became the predecessor and symbol for all those in later generations who held discontinuity views. The unfortunate Pelagius and the semi-Pelagians became scapegoats for the continuity position, but within that position there existed a certain inextinguishable truth and power, which even Augustine could not kill, and in succeeding ages many spokesmen for that position continued to appear.

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

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was the high tide for the continuity position, creating a serious crisis for traditional theology. The nineteenth century was an extremely chaotic period in theology. Western theologians tried to build theologically on the ruins left by the "New Thought" of the eighteenth century, but we do not see that they established anything stable. They soon encountered a series of unavoidable crises. Even in the nineteenth century, while most western theologians still naively indulged in complacent dreams, the sensitive Danish theologian Kierkegaard was already sending out a discontinuity position alarm. He said that the basic principle of religion and human life was not "both/and" but "either/or." He stressed that God was "wholly other," that eternity was outside the realm of time, and that humanity was "sick unto death." He foresaw the collapse of western culture, but his melancholic prophecy was too much ahead of its time. It was only when Europe was awakened by warfare in the twentieth century that his pessimistic views found an audience. Today's west has rapidly and broadly accepted the

principles of the discontinuity view because from within their own "lost-ness" they could not see hope for the human race; they were hostile to all progress and insisted on taking historical progress as an illusion, as a plot of the devil. They cheerfully hailed the bankruptcy of nineteenth century liberal theology, the abandonment of the continuity position, and the trampling of the banner of freedom and democracy. They lauded the final victory which the discontinuity view has achieved. But in the midst of this tragic victory they united to sing the swan song of humanity. Like many theologians before them, they raised the banner of orthodoxy - "Neo-Orthodoxy."

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

## **Our Problem and Path**

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

Here, let us simply list the problems we have encountered. All theological problems are very practical. First we encounter the two problems of understanding our environment and understanding ourselves. These two problems are mutually related because it is only when we understand our environment that we can really understand ourselves, and it is

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thus, we must rely on our own exploration and experience to solve some other problems which lie before us. We must ask: What is our view of the problem of sin? Is it possible that with a general improvement in "social moral order" sin will automatically "decrease" in society or in the individual? On the one hand, we must profoundly and frankly consider the problem of sin. We cannot take the approach of evading the problem or burying our heads in the sand like an ostrich. On the other hand, we should not exaggerate the problem or absolutize it, thereby frightening or benumbing ourselves. Admittedly, the origin of sin includes social factors, but spiritually sin also represents humanity's imperfection and pride before God. Therefore, spiritual problems will not be solved just by changes in the social system, and sin will not vanish with the advance of social moral consciousness. Sin represents the ugly face of human nature, and it forces humanity to eternally look to God and seek salvation.

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

How then should the gospel be preached? When everyone is yearning for socialist construction, when everyone feels that the world can be transformed for the better, does not the gospel become foolishness? This is the most important question now facing us, and it forces us to go a step further and ask: What is the gospel after all? Do the answers found in history satisfy us? We must return to the Bible, and in the experience of the believers of the early church find the causes which led them to seek the good news. We must also look for the answer to this question in our own religious experience. Finally, we must admit that although this question has been raised, we still do not have a wealth of experience and understanding to help us answer it. Now this is a key issue in our theological construction.

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

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

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

#### *Author's Comments, 1991*

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



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

Thirty years ago China was in a state of isolation imposed from both the outside and from within. Hoisting the Three-Self banner, stressing an independent self-governing church, and casting off the control and restraints of foreign mission agencies were basic conditions for changing the countenance of the Chinese church and establishing a sense of self-identity. Theological thought necessarily reflected this spirit. But this does not imply that we would always be isolated from the world church. The independent, self-governing Chinese church has already won the approval and respect of world Christianity. Our witness has had a positive impact all over the world. In order to enrich ourselves, we should draw beneficial experience from world Christianity. Among the most important changes in world Christianity over the last thirty years are the awakening of the Third World churches and the consequent indigenization and contextualization movements, the secularism and pluralism of the "old Christian nations" after the "turbulent sixties," the major reforms in Catholicism after Vatican 11, and the development of the ecumenical movement over the last two decades. Under the open door and reform policies, the Chinese church has taken on a new stature as a part of the church universal, and as an active member of the world Christian family. "This does not weaken our Three-Self consciousness, for it can even deepen and develop our Three-Self spirit. We should try to enrich ourselves by selectively absorbing some of the factors of the various theological currents and views which have emerged around the world over the last few decades, so that these may be reflected in our own theological construction.

In China, we have undergone both positive and negative experiences, and have discovered much new light on the path of the church's progress. A question especially worthy of mention is that of how to sift through China's rich historical and cultural heritage, appropriating that which is beneficial and incorporating it into Christian doctrine in order to give our propagation work more distinctively Chinese cultural characteristics and make the gospel message easier for the Chinese masses to understand and accept. In every area there are many tasks awaiting our diligent and careful effort. I believe we will certainly reap a rich harvest.

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

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Translated by Don Snow.

## 9. The Transformation of a Chinese Theologian: T.C. Chao\*'s Journey from Humanism to Theocentrism - Zi Zhu

With the arrival of western civilization and culture in the nineteenth century, the proud and self-contained Empire of China was jolted from its pleasant dream and began a process of reflection, exploration and self-strengthening. Social movements from the movement to introduce western technology and knowledge in the mid-nineteenth century, with its proposal to "learn barbarian skills," to the Hundred Days Reform (1898) and on to the cultural renaissance of May Fourth (1919), all clearly reveal their participants' thinking. The thoughts of every red-blooded Chinese in the early part of this century revolved around the reinvigoration of their people and national salvation. T.C. Chao, who grew up in these times, was no different.

Western philosophy of the early twentieth century was also much concerned with the questions of life: Henri Bergeson's creation theory, Darwin's theory of evolution and John Dewey's pragmatism all grew out of research into life experience. These views directly or indirectly influenced Chinese Christian students studying overseas in Europe and America, T.C. Chao among them. These students held an extremely optimistic view of Christianity. They believed that it was without question useful to human life, and could aid in social reformation and in the construction of a new China.

The scientific theory of knowledge held sway during the May Fourth Movement. Deeply influenced by liberal theology and finding himself in an atmosphere of burgeoning rationalism, Chao naturally took up the scythes of reason and science with which to reap his theological harvest. He wrote in a 1926 essay, "The future path of Christianity in China depends on the methods of those who will cut it out and stitch it together." ("Christianity and the Future of China," in *Truth and Life*, vol. 1, no. 10) His attitude was very much that of his contemporary Chen Duxiu, one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, who liked the personality of Jesus, but disliked Christian doctrines such as the creation and the trinity. In the same way, whatever Christian doctrine did not accord with his rational principles, T.C. Chao simply cut away: the "so-called virgin birth, miracles, the resurrection of the body, judgment ... in terms of science, philosophy, religious experience or Chinese thought, none of these has a leg to stand on." ("Open Letter to Chinese Christians," in *Truth and Life*, vol.2, no.4 1927) During the May Fourth period, scientific consciousness permeated much of Christian thinking. Faced with the challenge of the times and the decline of the nation, many Christians had to come to a new understanding of Christian faith based on the "scientific attitude and spirit." T.C. Chao clearly recognized that he "could not avoid rationalizing his religious experience." ("My Religious Experience," in *Life*, vol.4, no.3, 1923) Anyone seeking an exposition of the transcendent doctrines would have been hard pressed to find it

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\* T.C. Chao [Zhao Zichen] (1885-1979) was one of the most important Christian thinkers of modern China, as well as a respected interpreter of Chinese culture. He served as Dean of the School of Religion at Yenching University and was elected a vice-chairman of the WCC in 1948, a post he resigned in 1950 over the WCC statement on the Korean War. Zi Zhu (Mr.) is a graduate student at Nanjing Theological Seminary.

in Chao's contemporary works, for he was trying to escape the whirlpool of the religion vs. science debate. In his early thinking, there was only reason and no revelation, let alone any inkling of the issue of the relationship between the two.

Reason and science are part of the substructure, the phenomenal world, while religion and revelation touch upon the noumenal or "thing in itself." In his view of such matters, during this early period, T.C. Chao stressed reason and science at the expense of religion and revelation. This in itself is a diffraction of elements of traditional culture in his thinking. Chao believed that in order to be saved, China must be Christianized and that the method to achieve this was the sinification of Christianity. At the same time, Christianity must also be rationalized. In his early thinking, the so-called sinification of Christianity was in line with the trend toward indigenization, but for Chao the standard of indigenization was traditional culture. Any Christian doctrine that did not conform with Chinese thought he simply cut away. In his thinking, "the heritage of the Chinese spirit was one and the same as the religious life of Jesus, but there were differences in degree and method." (*Prison Memoirs*) In spite of the fact that traditional Chinese culture was non-rational in terms of moral structure; in terms of religious faith, it was genuinely humanistic or rationalistic. There was no stress upon the other world as there was in Christianity; its *raison d'etre* was entirely focused on the phenomenal world. There was no stress on revelation either, and this lack led to moral disorientation; in a word, to spiritual lostness. This was a corruption of traditional culture, but in his early period, Chao had not yet realized this.

As a Christian, T. C. Chao was deeply influenced by the western philosophy and theology of the day; he also had a profound and unique understanding of his faith. He was a Christian filled with both Christian spirit and national consciousness, a Christian used to reflection and bold exploration. But at the end of the day, Chao was a *Chinese* Christian. Though he was erudite in western culture, his roots were in China, Chinese blood ran in his veins and the genes of traditional Chinese culture were contained in the deepest levels of his thought. In his own words, he was a disciple of Christ, but also of Confucius and Mencius. Thus Christianity and China constituted both the model and foci of his thought. T.C. Chao firmly believed that Christianity would save China and become the basis of China's reconstruction; yet to do this Christianity must be abundantly nourished by traditional Chinese culture. Without a sinified Christianity, there would be no Christianized China and there would be no hope for China.

T.C. Chao's theological thinking could not take shape apart from the times in which he lived, nor apart from the soil of the culture from which it sprang. By his own admission, before the 1930s, Chao was a humanist, a philosopher of personality, the essence of which was certainly not religious, but philosophical or moral. In the 1940s and after, in line with world theological trends and the increased suffering of his own people, Chao's theological thinking began to move toward a Christo-centric theology of revelation (neo-orthodoxy). Yet it should be noted that Chao had a deep sentimental attachment to his own cultural tradition and did not simply keep in step with global theological trends in his own transformation. His transformation was part and parcel of his own faith experience and that of his beleaguered native land. In what follows I will attempt to analyze the changes in Chao's theological thinking before 1950 as he moved from a human based to a theist-based theology, tracing the inner journey of a Chinese theologian who, while firmly rooted in his own place, cast his vision outward to the world.

## Christianity and the Regeneration of Personality

The prosperity of a people does not rest solely in material abundance, nor in the reformation of its political system, but much more in sustaining the national spirit and psyche. During the period which encompassed the movement to introduce western technology and knowledge, the Reform Movement of 1898 and the 1911 Revolution, there gradually appeared in China those who realized that the strength and prosperity of the Chinese people could not be limited to "learning barbarian skills," or to political reformation; it was necessary to create a new kind of culture and a new kind of citizen. The native culture must have a blood transfusion which would transform the personality and the mind of its citizens.

T.C. Chao said, "China's weakness ... lies in the dejection of the Chinese personality." (Jesus' *Philosophy of Life*, 3rd.ed., 1926) Many knowledgeable people had already come to realize this point; Lu Xun, considered by many the greatest Chinese author of the twentieth century, pointed out that the path of national salvation for the Chinese people lay in "first establishing the people and everything else will follow." Chen Duxiu was clear that "We should throw away our old faith and seek a new one. What is this new faith? It is the sublime, great personality of Jesus and his warm, deep feeling." Zhou Zuoren, the brother of Lu Vin and a well-respected author in his own right, held that the Chinese people needed a new kind of soul, and that fortuitously, Christianity could aid the Chinese in nurturing this new soul. People within the Christian church such as Yu Rizhang and Jian Youwen and like Sun Yat-sen outside it, all joined in the call: "personality can save the nation." The call for national salvation overshadowed the dawn of the new century. Yet in the midst of burgeoning nationalism, T.C. Chao kept a clear head, recognizing that the basis of national salvation lay in personality generation and in spiritual reconstruction. For this reason he wrote, "New China will be created by new Chinese themselves, if there is no one who can be depended upon, then no reliable new country will be created." The establishment of the nation is actually "the establishment of personality, ... when the personality is established, everything will go well If people's hearts are bad, nothing will be easily accomplished." (Jesus' *Philosophy of Life*)

In the early years of the twentieth century, the May Fourth Movement, the Anti-Christian Movement (1922), the Anti-Religion League, and national salvation movements of every stripe swelled the national salvation tide and nationalism swept the entire country like a river in flood. However, Liang Shuming criticized the new thought movements because they "destroyed much, but built little." Likewise, T.C. Chao also felt that certain "national salvationists were foolish, sordid, and excessively destructive while building nothing at all, like insects eating away at the trunk and withering the leaves." Chao felt that the China of the day, a shattered place where "the empty blossoms of our compatriots' blood and tears are scattered over the land and their tragic calls for succor fill the wilderness," needed building up, not destroying. But the basis for that building up lay in establishing the hearts of the people. From the slogans bandied about during the May Fourth Movement, we can see that Chinese people then pinned all their hopes for the salvation of China on western science, technology and the democratic system, ignoring the more profound spiritual component of forging a nation. Thus, T.C. Chao wrote:

"If the people do not change from the inside out, neither will the nation be able to achieve political unity and social stability. Today China must cure both the symptoms and the causes of the disease at once and the root cause is the most important.... The establishment of the nation requires a personality that can serve as the basis upon which to unite the whole; this requires a personality which is able to be self-sacrificing and love others with all its might ... such a personality can only be produced and maintained by a fervent religious faith." (*The Nation's Foundation ... God is the Eternal Cornerstone*)

Chao's call is clearly the same as that of the early Chen Duxiu: "the sublime, self-sacrificing spirit ... the great spirit of tolerance ... the spirit of equality and universal love" of Jesus Christ would be the foundation for the reconstruction of our national spirit. Christianity and China were already the definitive influences on his thinking. He could not leave China out of his theology; similarly, neither could he leave out Christianity. He was most concerned, not with the after-life, but with real society and all of humanity. This disposition to involvement in the world illustrates the influence of liberal theology on his early thinking. But neither is T.C. Chao lacking in that tendency peculiar to Chinese intellectuals, of situating the purpose of life in "all under heaven" (the physical world). Thus, a Chinese intellectual shaped by traditional Chinese culture would naturally not adopt a Christian gospel of personal goodness, but would seek a synthesis of the personal gospel with the social gospel.

Chao's thinking on the regeneration of the personality was by no means influenced solely by the then current liberal theology; rather his views were the result of the clash of two cultures, eastern and western - clashing, blending and interweaving - within Chao himself. What sort of Christianity was it, then, which could save China? Facing the flood of "science-ism" of the day, Chao first, especially during his early period, placed Christianity under the judgment of culture, and dealt with it by means of "sinification" and "rationalization." "Rationalization" meant doing away with any doctrine which did not square with reason, and "sinification" meant doing away with any doctrine at odds with traditional Chinese thinking. For Chao, Christianity became a religious humanism. He writes in a 1920s essay: "Christianity is Christ. Christ has a two-fold significance, one is that the title Jesus of Nazareth is limited to Jesus; the other is that Jesus' personality and spirit, including his abundant inner virtues such as universal love, piety, sacrifice, and purity, spill over into the hearts of those who are with him."

Clearly, for Chao in these early years Christianity is a type of personality and spirit found in liberal theology. He emphasizes Jesus Christ's human nature over his divine nature and the historical Jesus over the Son of God. He held that Christ was truly and completely human. The difference between Jesus and humankind in moral and spiritual terms was only one of degree, there was no difference in kind. "Anyone, no matter who, is a soul which has not yet matured ... there is always the possibility of rising or falling, of good or evil ...." (*Central Beliefs of Christianity; 1934*) In other words, a person is half-formed and there is the possibility that one will fall, but there is no inevitability of "original sin." Sin is only an intellectual error, a betrayal of the God-given personality or of the person's inner "God consciousness". The consequence of sin is the falling away of our personality from the greater God-personality. The existence of one who has lost this personality is meaningless.

In seeing divinity as an extension of humanity, Chao reduced the distance between the divine and the human. If a human being can partake of divinity through moral or spiritual cultivation, then God is no longer the wholly other, but is rather the wholly inner. In Chao's

conception, this was the moral impetus to his proposed regeneration of personality. This moral impetus became the foundation of personality and it is interwoven with the "positivistic" concept in traditional Chinese culture that human nature is originally good and anyone can become a sage king. How, when faced with the contemporary disintegration of personality, was personality to be regenerated, and then go on to create a new humanity and even a new world? Chao says: "What is the new humanity Jesus wants to create? Nothing other than that Jesus wants us to completely change our philosophy of life, our attitudes and behavior. If people can do this and model themselves on Jesus' example, then they will be part of the new humanity." (Jesus' *Philosophy of Life*)

To follow the example of Jesus, to model oneself on Jesus, became for Chao the first step in the regeneration of the personality and in the creation of the "new man." "What Chinese society needs is an example, a model, for when the family is regulated, the nation will be ruled and there will be peace in all under heaven." (*Some Opinions on Construction and the Problems of the Church Today*) Such concepts made it even easier for the Jesus-as-model idea of liberal theology to find a sufficient psychological basis in China. The highest realm of personality formation was to "integrate with Christ." Surely this is an over-assessment of human nature. Yet Chao comments:

"... people must become pure, honest, humble, joyful; they must forget self, cast off all fear and boldly serve humanity and society. This is the kind of people China stands in need of. Only such people can cooperate, unite, and transform society. They do not fear strong authority, they are unyielding, indomitable and undaunted by setbacks, because their lives exist in the eternal truth of the universe." ("The Theory and Practice of Modern Faith," in *Truth and Life*, vol.9, no.2, 1934)

Chao believed that Jesus possessed both the spirit of revolution and "the spirit of history." The so-called spirit of revolution was aimed at the hypocritical ritualism of the priests, at putting a stop to the old ways and to the idea that people were less important than forms. Jesus denounced and destroyed these attitudes. The spirit of history meant the moral life of the prophets, which held that all that was required for the life of the individual and that of the nation was to honor the good and righteous will of God. In this way, the moral integrity of the individual would be established and the nation strengthened. Jesus was the path breaker.

In his treatment of both Christian faith and traditional Chinese culture, T.C. Chao modeled himself on these two aspects of the spirit of Jesus. In matters of faith, he could neither subscribe to Wu Leichuan's subjective, atheistic, humanist faith in a political Jesus, nor to the superstitions of some small sects, nor to the views of some western theologians, such as the radical separation between God and humanity of Karl Barth. In his treatment of traditional culture, he was neither a preservationist nor a total westernizer. He had both "revolutionary spirit" and "historical spirit," critiquing and preserving at the same time. Personality is the sum total of the powers of intellect, morality and will. As defined by traditional Chinese culture, the ideal personality was a superficially moral one. Morality was the standard by which everything was measured, judged and defined. However, in a society in urgent need of transformation, strength of intellect and will were of particular importance. They were absolutely essential to a creative and exploring type of personality and essential factors in achieving and maintaining a healthy personality. For this reason, Chao felt that it was not traditional morality which should stand at the center of personality, but will.

"The entire meaning of personality lies in self-consciousness, self-determination, self-revelation, self-control, autonomy, freedom, self-creation and self-determination of the direction of one's own life ...Personality is a renewal of the organic life by the individual through love. Personality is love, the will to good; personality is the constant effort forward of the will to good ... Personality must be established through action, action must be determined by will. Thus will is the motive force of personality. Without the will to good, there would be no good personality." (*Jesus' Philosophy of Life*)

The qualities of the will are independence, resolution, perseverance, and self-restraint. Of these, independence and resolution are mainly expressed in the process of decision-making. Perseverance and self-restraint are mainly expressed in carrying out decisions. The qualities of will stressed by traditional Confucian culture are willpower and maintenance of the status quo. The main stress falls on perseverance and self-restraint, while the independence and the resolution necessary to resist authority and oppose tradition are lacking. Here, T.C. Chao seems to have found his point of correspondence with the times. The personality described by Chao, one centered on the improvement of the will, was precisely the component needed by our national character. Little wonder then that in the tide of criticism of traditional culture, Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Mao Dun and other progressive cultural warriors all came by their separate ways to the translation and appreciation of Nietzsche.

However, this model of personality centered upon the perfection of the will could not be accomplished by a simple wave of the hand. As Chao understood it, an effort at moral cultivation was required. "The creation of strength of character, deportment, style and moral character cannot be accomplished without so-called spiritual cultivation and spiritual cultivation cannot be accomplished without facing God, emulating Jesus, nor without concentrating mind, body and soul in supplication to heaven-one cannot do without prayer..." (*Another View of the Problems of the Christian Student Movement*) "The aim of spiritual cultivation is the establishment of one's personality, it is a tempering of the self before God." "Spiritual cultivation is cautious independence, the proper motive ... Personality training must begin with the regulation of the heart ... piety is the starting point of spiritual cultivation." (*Jesus' Philosophy of Life*)

Here we can see that Chao's model personality which starts with spiritual cultivation, basically coincides with the course followed by the ideal personality in traditional Chinese culture: from moral cultivation to regulation of the family to governing of the nation and peace in all under heaven. In the end, however, the two cannot be completely equated. In traditional Chinese culture, self-cultivation is an individual or egotistical "regulation of the heart," the superficial actions of the will of "enlarging goodness" and "denial of human desire." Christian cultivation requires "facing God," "emulating Jesus," entreating heaven through prayer. Traditional cultivation is an "inner transcendence" of the ego, while Christian spiritual cultivation must face the person of God. Thus T.C. Chao says:

"Spiritual cultivation is not calm but movement,... coming out of' and returning to the group, doing all one can in labor, facing God alone ... seeing both Providence and one's own true face."

As Chao understood it in this early period, cultivation lay not in the revelation of God, the presence of Christ and the call, training and molding of the Holy Spirit, but in purification and self-transcendence of the individual in God's presence. Moving from spiritual cultivation before God to emulating Jesus, people can reach their goal of personality generation because all partake of the "personality" of God or "God-consciousness." Humans are not utterly depraved. Because Chao in his early years over-idealized humankind, he gave short shrift to the Christian doctrine of salvation. Actually, what Chao called the "personality" in which everyone shared, can more or less be understood as the traditional Confucian "basic goodness" or "knowledge of the good." Personality development can also be more or less understood in the traditional terms of "extending goodness" or "extending knowledge of the good." The essence of Chao's idea of personality was a blending of Chinese and western culture.

In sum, in T.C. Chao's plan for national salvation, the regeneration of personality is the bottom line, and the model for personality is Jesus: Jesus' universal love, service and self-sacrifice. But "without faith in Jesus, there cannot be the spirit of Jesus." (*Learning Kindness*, 1936) Chao held that if everyone believed in Jesus, there would be hope for China. However, after the terrible experiences of the Sino Japanese war, and the rape of his people, Chao more and more came to recognize that humans could not "enlarge the knowledge of the good" nor attain goodness. They were not able to regenerate their personalities themselves, and moreover, they could not save themselves by their own efforts:

"The more advanced the civilization, the more undisciplined the people. They can single-handedly conquer heaven, but they cannot single-handedly conquer themselves. Heaven proposes, man disposes, as the old saying goes, but humans have fallen into the abyss. They can control what is beyond themselves, but not what is within. They can order creation, but cannot regulate their own hearts." (*Another View of the Problems of the Christian Student Movement*)

Especially following his prison experience, T.C. Chao had to reflect on the redemption of Christ, had to look to "the cross high among the clouds ..." Actually the result of the over-idealization and sinification of Christianity was simply to make of Christianity a philosophy, an -ism, to place it under the judgment of culture. An inkling of this type of thinking is quite clearly revealed in Chao's review of the works of Karl Barth in the late thirties: "For Christianity to surrender to culture is really a great mistake, for the church to submit to humanism is disloyal to God. Culture must be under the judgment of the word of God, the word of God cannot admit the judgment of culture." (*Christianity Explained: Christianity and the World*) Perhaps this was the soil which bred the seeds of the thought of these two theologians. The later theological configuration of T.C. Chao has an obvious overlay of neo-orthodoxy. Yet, T.C. Chao by no means felt that mental and spiritual reconstruction or personality generation was *passee* for a strong people. All along he felt that a strong and great personality was essential for a strong and great people.

Once T.C. Chao had correctly ordered the relationship between reason and revelation, he was no longer embarrassed by those Christian doctrines which transcended reason. He believed that the natural world and even different cultures of humankind could reveal God to us, to a greater or lesser extent (in this he differs from Barth) but that such universal revelation could not help us to know God completely. "The special revelation of God is in the person of Jesus Christ, he is God's most important revelation." The Incarnation is the most complete revelation. At this



point we can see that T.C. Chao was no longer constrained by liberal theology and traditional Chinese culture, but had transcended them. He had entered neo-orthodox revelation theology.

## **Christianity and Ethical Regeneration**

Any civilized society or nation must have a code of conduct in order to maintain national stability and elicit people's compliance. Such a code is many-layered and multifaceted; its most external expressions are laws. Whether one agrees with them or not, they are imperative and coercive in nature. "Laws alone cannot uphold personality, it is essential that personality uphold the law. The law is mechanistic ... it can punish bad people after they have broken the law, but it cannot aid good people before they have done good." (*The Theology of Barth*) Ethics and morals are in fact inner codes of conduct and are partly-coercive, partly-voluntary in nature. If the deepest motive force of moral practice is a sound, Christ-like personality, then it becomes happily voluntary in nature. This type of ethics is the life current of a sound personality. It is an inner vitality expressed in action. It is unquestionably the most reliable safeguard of the stability and prosperity of a nation. Yet, amidst the calls for the downfall of Confucius and Mencius, after two world wars and numerous instances of internal strife, the four safeguards of the Chinese nation - propriety, morality, modesty and a sense of shame - were completely lost, its culture and ethics bankrupt. In his later years, T.C. Chao came increasingly to "have the profound feeling that his people's future was at risk, to be convinced that China's whole problem was basically an ethical one: "to establish the nation, (one) must establish the heart," and to speak of the heart was to speak of ethics. In the midst of national crisis, Chao attempted to "establish a basis upon which his compatriots could live in peace." (*Jesus' Philosophy of Life*)

The New Culture Movement pervaded Chinese society in the early twentieth century and few intellectuals failed to throw themselves into the fray. The people stood in need of reflection, of enlightenment, of renewal. T.C. Chao's reaction to the movement, however, was one of deep anxiety. He felt that the new thought tide attacked more than it built up, destroyed more than it established, and that at the time, "intellectual circles in China are quite ignorant on this point, they think that if you do away with Confucius and Mencius, stand human relationships on end, and do away with all religion and superstition as if they were so many idols, then Chinese society will become a new and prosperous nation." (*Theory of Christianity, 1948*) Thus from May Fourth until the late 1940s, he continued to declaim loudly and persistently: "Fools, to strike something down is easy, to build up a personality is tremendously difficult. It would be a great mistake for your leading thinkers trod the path of destruction and not of building up and creating." (*Christianity Explained: Christianity and Chinese Culture*)

T.C. Chao was a builder as well as a thinker. For Chao, the key to building was construction of the human heart or personality and this could not be separated from ethical construction. The May Fourth Movement began to resuscitate the ancient, vast, closed land of China like a spring breeze, yet the New Culture Movement did not make a constructive contribution to our moral life. In the midst of pleas for concern about one's country and people, our people seemed to overlook "those things which make life human." These were not things which a few could create within a few days. ... "If the things which make life human collapsed one day, everything would collapse, even the people of the nation." (*Christianity and*

*Chinese Culture*) Thus it was that T.C. Chao willingly dropped back, to calmly ponder and analyze:

"The New Culture Movement has satisfied our demand for liberation, but it has not given us constructive power; it has given voice to individual demands for social development, but has not brought standards for construction; it has satisfied our demand for a re-evaluation of values, but has not brought us a stable basis for life and peace of mind ...." (*Christianity and Chinese Culture*)

The New Culture Movement brought about gradual liberation from the bonds of tradition and from old ethical concepts. People were no longer points in the warp and weft of the web of feudal ethics but began to be conscious of their own worth. However, with the ego developing "without universally recognized standards," people fell into the morass of extreme individualism. The New Culture Movement emphasized "experimental behavior." Relativity, by its wholesale questioning of everything, created a situation in which "people have no need of an absolute faith." If people's enthusiasm were to flag, they would fall into the abyss of nihilism. Actually, T.C. Chao by no means lagged behind in the New Culture Movement, but was one of its clear-headed thinkers. He neither clung stubbornly to the past, standing in the way of new thinking, nor did he blindly follow new thinking.

Since "a single torch can burn to cinders all that our forebears left us, we should ask where are the materials with which to build the new dwelling? Where are the corner stones for the new foundation?" ("New Wine," in *Truth and Life*, vol.2, no.9, 1927) As we attempted to show in the foregoing, T.C. Chao's thinking was under girded by traditional Chinese culture. He was not one to blindly "run west." He believed that Christianity must sink its roots in China, must contribute something to China, integrate with China and explain Christianity in terms of Chinese culture. In this way Chinese culture would find its completion in Christianity. Neither did he, like Liang Shuming and others, "run east." He analyzed and assimilated Chinese tradition for his own purposes. The new ethics he constructed were a hybrid with, naturally enough, Christian ethics as the mainstay and traditional Chinese ethics as the raw materials. As early as the 1920s he saw that Chinese ethics were "ethics of filial piety," and that the spirit which lay behind this "filial piety" could be blended with Christianity to enable every person to have faith in God, to face God and his or her sisters and brothers in a spirit of filial piety.

Traditional Chinese ethics emphasize personal relations; its most important teaching is kindness (*ren*, in Chao's translation -ed.) which is expressed in the principles of loyalty and compassion. T.C. Chao says: "The meaning of loyalty is to strive to fulfill one's responsibility and ideals, the meaning of compassion is to be filled with empathy, to think of others," and the basis of kindness is filial piety." (*Christianity and Chinese Culture*) However, any type of ethics must have a basic foundation on which the whole rests. The foundation of traditional Chinese ethics is its theory of the cosmos. But as a foundation this is extremely weak, because it is characterless, based on a nature in which heaven and man are one. Such an ethics, based on a de-personalized "heart of heaven and earth," is easily secularized. Therefore T.C. Chao pointed out quite clearly in the 1930s that a sixth relationship ought to be added to the traditional five of father-son; husband-wife; brother (older) -brother (younger); ruler-subject; and friend-friend: the relationship between humanity and God, which would become the basis of a new ethics.

With this addition, the other five relationships would no longer be relations of subordination and submission but, with God as Father become equal relationships among brothers and sisters. In this way, the traditional ethics of filial relationships or the spirit of filial piety has been taken into God. Or, Christian ethics with God as the foundation have been injected into traditional Chinese ethics.

Traditional Chinese culture was also a human-centered culture. Humankind is confined by the world and the purpose of life is concentrated within those limits. Humankind has no metaphysical impulse and therefore overlooks the transcendent God. Humans become slaves of ethics. Because traditional culture lacks the Christian "consciousness of original sin," and holds to the perfectibility of human nature, it is "lacking in an appropriate metaphysical foundation which could act to sustain it."

Chao was a rather Confucian theologian. There was in his subconscious the Confucian principle of "inner sage, outer king" reflecting off his liberal theology, which meant that he could not but be concerned about society. It was Hu Shi's opinion that "the individual and society are inextricably linked together; unless the social forces which shape the individual personality are transformed, there will be no transformation of the individual personality." However, the early T.C. Chao held quite the opposite view: the path he followed was that of the transformation of the individual personality. He felt that if the personality were established, everything else would follow. Moreover, his route for the establishment of the personality was nearly the same as the "inner sagehood" of traditional culture and the moralization of Christian faith, that is, a person might, through self-cultivation, regulating the heart, sincerity, and modeling on Jesus, achieve an exalted personality like that of Jesus. An integrated person and the ideal society were two sides of the same coin.

After the 1940s, T.C. Chao realized that such a dream could never be realized. Humankind created civilization but humans could also destroy it. Liberal theology in fact had not seen the human character evolve to greater heights, and Confucian "inner sagehood" had never truly made anyone into a sage. Of course, T.C. Chao had not lost all hope for the whole world. He cast off his old naivete and optimism, but he in no way abandoned his concern for the suffering masses. Because in his early period he had entertained boundless hope for humankind, the church did not occupy any illustrious position in his thinking. It was but an instrument of paradise, or social transformation, which we could do without. But in the post-1940s, T.C. Chao's views of and feelings for the church underwent a sea change. The Christian church was no longer simply an instrument but rather "the body of Christ, an incomplete, extended incarnation." (*Jesus' Philosophy of Life*)

In his early period T.C. Chao's ethics and his understanding of "religion" were closely bound up together. In 1929, in his essay "Religion in Tao Qian's Poetry," he pointed out that religion consisted of two fundamental elements: "one is an affirmation that the highest aspect of the value of human life is spiritual freedom and development, the second is the affirmation that religion is the way of thought, feeling, experience and action in which relationships between people, and between people and nature and all that is good, beautiful and true achieve harmony and union." (*Truth and Life*, vol.4, no.3, 1929) For Chao, religion is purely subjective, it is just a spirit which moves the quest for truth, a kind of emotion which blends into truth, goodness and beauty, an inner experience which sublimates the personality. Such a humanistic understanding of religion deletes God from every aspect of the universe. Only in the individual heart or in society may we hear the still small voice of God. The center of such a

religion is not God, but humankind. T.C. Chao moves the transcendent God into the human heart, putting religion and humanism on an equal footing. His thinking is based on the so-called scientific attitude, on idealism and traditional Confucian thinking. In order to respond to the challenge of the times and to comply with the call of traditional culture deep in his consciousness, he could not prevent his religion from becoming humanized and Confucianized. In order to wrest breathing space for Christianity in the prevailing atmosphere of science and idealism, T.C. Chao went to great pains; the sad thing is that such a religion had already become philosophy and ethics. Traditional Chinese society was a society grounded in ethics, in which ethics provided the meaning of human existence. Religion was ethics and ethics was religion, with the result that ethics had no objective foundation or practical strength; likewise religion had no object of worship, nor any ultimate aim. Humans were powerless to develop their personalities or to sanctify themselves by their own strength.

It was not until the end of the 1940s that T.C. Chao realized that "Confucianism proposes that 'man can glorify the truth, but the truth does not glorify man,' which stresses moral laws and moral capacity in human nature, while ignoring the God who transcends humanity. Man is gained but God is lost." Confucianism emphasizes inner transcendence and overlooks absolute transcendence, seeing humankind as the highest, not God. Confucianism says that 'man can glorify the truth'. In fact, though humans were originally able to do this, the ability has been lost through sin and they cannot regain it by themselves. They need salvation, a transcendent power from God." ("Religious Questions of Modern Man," in *Truth and Life*, vol.9, no. 1, 1935) Without salvation, without the strength that comes from a transcendent God, the (Barthian) "ethics of conscience" of liberal theology and Chinese culture cannot really achieve anything, nor can a humanized religion fulfill expectations. After T.C. Chao was released from prison, he wrote in his *Prison Memoirs*, "I feel deeply that the religion I formerly maintained, with a scientific attitude and idealism, was simply a matter of borrowing the name of religion in order to do what was morally good. Both approaches are out of joint with the truth. Religion is not the moral life, rather it is people, because of faith, accepting Christ, and the liberation and freedom of truth that is with God. In this way, religion becomes reality and there is a correct view of morality; the two parts - religion and morality - are joined in the whole." Words of regret which reveal T.C. Chao's repudiation of the moralized religion and morality-cum-religion brought about by the combined forces of his former liberal theology and traditional Chinese culture.

And so T.C. Chao felt that humanity "could not attain the way through its own efforts, but needed a way to salvation, a strength from the transcendent God." Brutal reality, the suffering of the Chinese people, plus his own personal experiences, made Chao realize that "Chinese culture and world culture are both in a state of collapse, only Christianity presents a genuine occasion for saving the good in the collapsing culture and establishing a secure foundation for humanity." (*Theory of Christianity*) The optimistic, idolatrous humanism which had emerged from the meld of liberal theology and traditional culture of Chao's early thinking, was gradually strained out by the reality of suffering. His optimism was replaced by deep anxiety and despair over the fall of humanity.

In his early period T.C. Chao was a typical liberal theologian, and even after the 1940s we cannot say that he was clear of all influence of liberal theology, but he was by then no longer a liberal theologian. Changes in his theology away from humanism and toward Theocentrism, however, did not lead him to distance himself from society. If we were to say

that in his early period his concern for society was human-centered, then after the 1940s, his concern for society was God-centered. At first he did not place any importance upon the church, but after the 1940s, his social concern could not be separated from the church. The relationship between heaven and the church was no longer one of servant and master; the kingdom of heaven was no longer a new society created by humankind.

From the late 1930s on, Chao began to say farewell to liberal theology and turn toward a theology of revelation. But his about-face was not only due to a shift in world theological trends. If we say that Barth's theology could not be separated from the soil which nurtured it, then in the same way we can say that T.C. Chao's change of direction cannot be separated from his disaster-ridden native land. In the face of the suffering of his people and human inferiority T.C. Chao could not continue to be lulled asleep by liberal theology. Following his time in prison, he awoke from his humanistic fairytale.

Chao's early theory of religious knowledge could be characterized as one of knowledge leading to belief. In the post-1940s it changed to belief leading on to knowledge. Previously he had taken reason and traditional culture as the standard of faith, now he used faith and revelation as the standards by which to examine reason and traditional culture. In the late 1940s, in the representative theological work of his later period, *Four Lectures on Theology*, he criticized liberal theology for "taking faith as reason or reason as faith," in the belief that this "is to deny revelation and speak exclusively of experience, which was alien to the essence of Christianity. It is the same as humanism." Of course, Chao did not become an obscurantist, denying reason and science, but came to a deeper understanding of reason and science. Faith was "not against reason, not opposed to logic," but it "transcended reason without opposing it." T.C. Chao believed that "reason can only order the substructure, it cannot exhaust the metaphysical"; "knowledge is not exhaustive and the end of knowledge is faith; that which knowledge is capable of explaining is not necessarily the truth; that which it is not capable of explaining is not necessarily not fact." Thus, "how stupid it is to attempt to completely contain God within the net of whatever logic." This is to be ignorant of the fact that reason is finite. Chao points out that "all philosophers are lost sheep! Their common error is to approach God through theory." If religion is nothing more than a human affair, if there is no revelation, then religion is ethics or moral theory. However, "Christianity is a revealed religion; we must first believe and then we may know. We do not first know and then believe." We might call Chao's knowledge of faith in this early period human-centered, moving from down to up, from inner to outer. After the 1940s, his thinking was no longer human-centered, but God-centered: "God bends down and man struggles upward towards God," and the point where they intersect is faith and revelation.

Once T.C. Chao emerged from his mistaken rationalism and emotion, he finally saw God's revelation. We should not deny the influence of Kierkegaard and Barth upon Chao, but neither should we overlook the discoveries of a theologian grounded in his own soil, painfully striving.

T.C. Chao saw Jesus' personality as two-fold: on the one hand he was the transcendent God and on the other, he bore the weight of human suffering and sin on his shoulders. Actually Chao himself had two such components in his own personality. He treasured both Christian faith and his own disaster-ridden land. He was not a scholar studying dead tomes, the pulse of his theology always beat together with that of the fate of Chinese society. His

later period differed from the earlier one in that he was much more concerned later on about society.

He also identified two unassailable bastions of power in the world: one was political democracy, the other economic democracy. The first made people slaves of economics, the second made them slaves to the despots in power. Both made people into machines, transformed them into tools. People were being alienated. Chao was deeply influenced by Kant and already in the 1920s in his *Christian Philosophy*, he had clearly stated that humans were the sons and daughters of God, sharing the same nature and being as God. People were of infinite value, they were all brothers and sisters, sharing weal and woe, a common lot, and one had to respect the character of others; all persons had dignity. Human were the goal, not the instrument; interpersonal relationships were relationships of equality, brother-sister relationships. For post-New Culture Movement Chinese, intellectuals in particular, such new ethical concepts undoubtedly hit the mark. Experiencing awakening for the first time, Chinese were gradually coming to realize the dignity of the individual, persons were no longer sacrificial objects in some relational net. Chao's ethical view was realistic. It was also an essential inner part of the reconstruction of the national spirit.

Yet ethics could not be separate from society and practice. In the vastness of the social morass a new ethical concept might meet with a premature end. A new ethics required a new pattern, a new environment to give it expression. New wine requires new wineskins. Thus, as his knowledge of society and human nature continued to deepen in the late 1940s, T.C. Chao felt that Christian ethics required the church as its background "... and as its center, with the world as the perimeter. Then it may expand in an unbroken chain until the world is drawn into the inner circle of the church ... Within the church, people are profoundly uplifted, ready to be trained, and when they enter into society beyond the church, they naturally sustain and contribute in moral terms." (*Christian Ethics*, 1948) It may perhaps be said that the church is the cradle of the new ethics as well as its testing ground. The older T.C. Chao grew, the more he saw the church as a refuge from the world: "When humanity can no longer fend for itself, when the world is turned upside down, when culture is in decline, the human heart must turn back to God, it must seek Christian ethics, it must come back to the church." (*Christian Ethics*) Because of T.C. Chao's over-idealization of the church, when he came face to face with corruption within the church, he was terribly distressed. He saw the great changes in society as God's purification of and judgment upon the church and this paved the psychological path for him to make the transition to the church in new China.

Ethics are an essential component of the spirit of a nation. Without a whole and healthy ethics, there cannot be a whole and healthy people. Traditional Chinese ethics were in decline, had, in fact, been destroyed; yet for several thousand years, the ethical spirit behind those ethics could not be cast off, because it was part of the essence of the tradition and soul of a people. And T.C. Chao had raised his voice in warning and admonition at the beginning of this century:

"The old ethics are finished, even their spirit has been abandoned. Loyalty, filial piety, chastity, righteousness, and all the moral virtues have been struck down by a retrograde evolution. Even the righteous strength and resolution, the struggle, tears and blood behind these qualities have all dissipated. When the day comes that our foundationless human lives are to revert to the apes, there will certainly be nothing we can do. My beloved compatriots! I

warn you, I exhort you, if you wish to sustain your *raison d'etre* as human beings, the *raison d'etre* of your nation, then quickly take up religion." ("The Chinese Church that Rises from the Storm," in *Truth and Life*, vol.2, no.2, 1927)

Of course, the religion Chao is referring to here, is the religious spirit, a flowing upwards of life. We could say that T.C. Chao's ethics are a precise blend of national and religious spirit.

After the 1940s, along with the changes in his theological viewpoint, he also had completely different views of religious and ethical questions. God was not the periphery of history, but rather its center. The incarnation of Jesus Christ was the fundamental doctrine of Christianity. T.C. Chao believed that Christ was at the center of the Christian faith. This nature of Christianity determined the nature of Christian ethics. The incarnate Jesus Christ linked the transcendent, inner world of eternity with the moving and changing real world. The incarnation was the cornerstone of Christian ethics, if this were denied, "Christianity would lose that which makes it a religion, or would be submerged in moral action, but would be without the faith which makes it a religion." Christian ethics "is founded on the highest good and highest love of the divinity of God, it is rooted in the eternal world and brings forth flowers and fruit in the real world." Christian ethics straddles two worlds, but its root is the relationship between humankind and God (religion) and its branches are relationships among persons (ethics). It is the breaking in of the transcendent world upon the brokenness of the present mortal world, the manifestation of the divine nature in human nature and because of this, such an ethics is "an ideal, a cry, an unceasing prayer." It is the exact opposite of traditional Chinese ethics in which there is only the present world and no transcendence. In the end, however, T.C. Chao was a man of tradition with an unseverable "umbilical cord" to his native culture. He begged to "add an ethical foundation to Chinese ethics, that is, the relation between God and humanity."

### **Christianity and the Ideal Society**

A philosopher once said that idealism may be nurtured in the soil of discontent or suffering. It is precisely because of discontent with the world as it is, that philosophers have hypothesized various ideal worlds. From Plato's "ideal" to the "great harmony" of the Li Ji, from Thomas More's Utopia to the Christian kingdom of heaven, all reveal the human thirst for utopia. It is due to this impulse that we find throughout human history epics about those who have struggled against heaven. T.C. Chao's inclination toward and longing for the kingdom of heaven of the Christian faith was intensified by the national crisis. Such faith and such longing was no abstruse mystery of the likes of Tao Yuanming's Peach Garden, no eremitic escape to a life of contemplation in the mountains, but a concern for national salvation - a natural result of the combined influence of his faith and traditional culture.

Chao's theological views, deeply influenced by western liberal theology, underlay his ideal society. The social gospel in particular played an important role in nurturing his desire for national salvation and the construction of an ideal society. Evolutionary social theory - "every day in every way we are getting better and better" - caused many people of the time to live in a complacent state from which they were only roused by the gunfire of two world wars. According to liberal theology, humans were not utterly depraved, but were animals,

who in the beginning evolved upward to a higher level of existence. Humanity's innate goodness was even now gradually evolving toward a higher level of good. So-called sin was simply a lack of wholeness, a step which human beings should, in fact, must, pass through in the process of evolution. The inevitable result of evolution would be the advent of the golden age of humankind. However, T.C. Chao's ideal society did not entirely originate in western imports. Perhaps it can be said that popular theological thinking of the day stimulated ideas already latent in him: the traditional theory of the end of history and the model of an ideal society. His construct of an ideal society was born of the joint forces of social gospel concepts and traditional Chinese thinking. In the 1930s, Chao said: "We are Chinese, born into a Chinese environment, inheritors of many good teachings and exemplars from the ancient sages. These teachings and these exemplars are frequently analogous to the teachings of Jesus." (*Learning Kindness*) Jesus and Confucius were the two foci of T.C. Chao's thinking.

Just what was T.C. Chao's ideal society? In his own words, it was the kingdom of heaven. For Chao "the kingdom of heaven" had two layers of meaning, one referred to a healthy and whole personality or a Christianized personality; the other to the ideal society. "The kingdom of heaven" is also divided into the realized heaven and the heaven to come; the former refers to the "realm of love" in the regeneration of personality, a kind of upper realm of the good and the beautiful. This is the individual heaven, as well as that of which the Bible speaks, as in "the kingdom of heaven is within you." The latter refers to the generation of a kind of will to the good in society; this belongs to the whole of society and also lies in the future.

"The kingdom of heaven is an established fact, in a person's heart, in people's hearts, in the love people have for one another. Heaven is also to come. The ideal society I hope for requires that we exhaust our strength in seeking it and bringing it to pass ... To complete humanity and make heaven a reality are two tasks which dovetail with each other, two aspects of the same task. Humankind needs to establish personality; personality is kingdom of heaven on the individual level. Humankind needs to establish the will for good in society. That is the kingdom of heaven for humankind ..." (*Jesus' Philosophy of Life*)

This so-called heaven refers to the realm of the "new man" and to the "new man's" society. "Heaven grows, as do the people of heaven, and what is called new life also grows day by day. The kingdom of heaven is also an upward movement of the heart and will, a casting off of one's selfish desires and putting on the new humanity made glorious by God." (*Learning Kindness*) Yet society is organic. The relationship between human beings and society is like that of the vine and the branches. Humanity is singular, it is also plural. It is the individual, it is also the society or the cosmos, and so the completion of humanity and the perfection of society are two sides of the same coin. While humanity is creating heaven, they are also creating themselves; while humans are creating themselves, they are also creating heaven." (*Jesus' Philosophy of Life*)

From this it can be seen that the starting point for the construction of T.C. Chao's ideal society is the establishment of the new person. Traditional theology separates human from divine nature. However since he had been deeply influenced by Confucian humanism and liberal theology, in his early writings, T.C. Chao took exception to this. In his view, Jesus and humanity shared the same nature and the same experience. "Jesus is a major part of God, and we are a small part of God." (*Christian Philosophy*) Where humans differ from Jesus is in



degree, not in kind. Everyone has the potential to become Christ According to the traditional Chinese view, everyone has the potential to become a sage king. Thus, Chao believed that "the world is eternally advancing and human beings could urge it forward, bringing it close each day to being the kingdom of heaven, a perfect home for humanity." ("Unfailing Christianity," in *Truth and Life*, vol.1, no.7, 1927) In this ideal world, there is a whole and healthy personality, a whole and healthy ethics; everyone reveres God as Father, and Jesus a Savior. However, since the whole world is one organism, the idea society cannot find expression in a single country. In this way, the ecumenical spirit of Christianity broadened Chao's vision to include the whole of humankind. To Chao's mind, the concept of nation and world view, the lives of the citizens of one nation and that of citizen of the world dovetailed and interwove. But faced with the "tattered flag of the early republic," he still prayed "leave us proud an unyielding Chinese people." ("The Nation's Tattered Flag," in *Truth and Life*, vol. 1, no.2, 1926)

Though this strongly utopian-flavored ideal society was in accord with traditional Chinese sentiment, the cruel reality of society made T.C. Chao realize that such an ideal society was a very long way from realization. And after this, he seldom mentions the construction of an ideal society, but turns his sights toward the church and the mission of the church. This is not to say, however, that he had given up his vision of an ideal society and a new world. In fact, though his attention was mainly focused upon the church, the church was for him but an instrument in the realization of a new world, the channel by which the old world would enter into the new.

By the late 1940s, Chao felt that the church was, "a country within the country, a society within the society, a culture within the culture." (*The Significance of the Christian Church*, 1948) It seems that more and more as time went on, the relationship between T.C. Chao's "kingdom of heaven" and the church grew closer. The church was not heaven, but heaven could not be separate from the church. The church trained up personalities for heaven, it nurtured unity. The church was the leaven of society. Early on in the 1920s, T.C. Chao was aware that national thinking and church thinking are closely related, "the development of national thinking is a profound sign of church consciousness." ("The Chinese Understanding of the Church," in *Truth and Life*, vol.2, no. 1, 1927) Perhaps his desire to save his people was too strong, whatever the case, he did not turn this around to realize that church consciousness is also the profound sign of national thinking. So in the late 1940s he said: "That I did not earlier find a way to bring the church and Chinese society into a closer relationship was a mistake," and the remark was tinged with regret. (*The Significance of the Christian Church*) It was not so much that Chao had abandoned his idea of the ideal society, but rather that he considered the idea against the background of the real world and the church.

Y.T. Wu had the same sort of idea at the time. In his critique of the Five Year Movement, a revival program proposed at the (Chinese) National Christian Council of 1929 with the slogan, "Revive the church, Lord, but first revive me," Wu pointed out that heaven was an ideal social order where economic poverty and inequalities were no more, where people enjoyed abundant and peaceful lives. The church's task was to strive with all its strength for the realization of this ideal realm. When one's attention is concentrated on society, one will of course have an ideal construct of society and one must seek a realistic way to make this idea a reality. With his unique qualities, T.C. Chao was never able to cast off his own society or forsake the world and become a recluse. Thus in his thinking about the nation the ideal society was not cleansed of the mud of reality. We can only say that real society was always being

corrected, always drawing closer to his ideal. T.C. Chao's ideal society was the home of the new humanity, the yearning desire of the born again humanity, a pure world bathed in the light of heaven. The realization of this ideal society relied neither upon the liberal theological concept of Parousia nor upon violent struggle, but upon self-revelation, self-creation and self-renewal of human nature by humanity itself. However, in the winds and storms of reality, in the inescapably sinful nature of the inner man, this over-idealized ideal had to be limited by human repentance and hope before God.

The two world wars shattered idolatrous belief in human nature and blind optimism in the future of the world. Thus, T.C. Chao later spent much time and effort in studying Richard Niebuhr, who had made a thoroughgoing analysis of human nature and society. He spent an even greater amount of time reflecting upon the church's mission and its significance. This was an inevitable direction for his thinking to take. In all of this, we can see the formation of the heart of a theologian firmly based in his native soil, wanting to make Christianity the foundation of Chinese reconstruction.

T.C. Chao felt that the purpose of the redemption of Jesus Christ was to recreate or create once again a new heaven and a new earth, a new human life, a new society, a new humanity. The birth of the new person, however, could only take place through the redemption of Christ. It did not depend upon the evolution of human nature or the attainment of inner sagehood. "The collective body of the new man is the kingdom of heaven ... and the kingdom of heaven is Jesus Christ, that is the personality of Jesus extended into a society where mutual love prevails." (*The Significance of the Christian Church*) This is the society of the new humanity, a redeemed society overflowing with the personality of Christ. But its innate nature is formless, of the spirit: "it takes form and body in the Christian church." (*Four Lectures on Theology, 1948*) That is to say, the kingdom of heaven is the truth and the church is the instrument. Without the instrument, the truth is not made manifest; without the truth, the instrument is lost. The innate character of the church is the extended incarnation, Christ, but its expression and form in the world is the instrument which carries the truth. The church is the new world, transcendent, breaking in upon the old. The goal of the incarnation is that the word becomes flesh. The church must bring this broken, perverse, crazy world under control so that it can change its nature and be brought anew into the life of the church where it can become a new and recreated world. The incarnate Christ is the Savior of humanity. The extended incarnation which is the church, also shoulders the task of redeeming the world. It must save the individual soul as well as the soul of the nation. Yet, the Christian church is not, after all, an instrument of social revolution. T.C. Chao pointed out that the purpose of the church is to establish a venue for a strong personality in accord with God and humanity. The church is a society within society, culture within culture, the leaven of the ideal society.

Religion, and Christianity especially, is the primary force in creating a shared consciousness. The deeper the religious faith of a people, the more unified is its national consciousness, the more closely knit it is. If the opposite is true, unless political repression holds it together, then the people are like a sheet of loose sand. T.C. Chao held that "As a people, we Chinese have the least religious faith. We are also least able to unite; it is everyone for his own benefit, everyone for himself or his family. Now we should reflect, we should have some understanding of Christianity. Chinese Christians always want religion but do not care for the life of the church. They seek their own benefit in the church, without considering their contribution to it; they have not come to the realization that the most pressing and urgent need in China today is the unifying force which the church can offer." (*The Significance of the*

*Christian Church*) The church can preserve values for the society, can train up strong personalities for the society, hold the whole society together. It can do what the law, morality and education cannot. It is the vessel of the truth. A whole and healthy society cannot be separate from the church. And, in the same way for T.C. Chao, a whole and healthy church cannot be separate from society. Without society, the church has no roots and without the church the society is like a body without a soul.

Here we can see that T.C. Chao has emerged from his human centered illusion that personality can save the nation. He cares for society as much as before, but the road he trod before was that of ethics and morality. The road he now treads is that of religious faith. He is no longer under the illusion that human strength can build the kingdom of heaven, nor does he await the second coming of Christ who will renew creation. His hope lies with the church in this world. He hopes that it can become the great fire which will temper the spirit and refine the personality. Over half a century has passed. People still hope to hear T.C. Chao's call: "O world, turn your head, turn and look upon the cross."

This essay is a combined and condensed version of the author's two lengthy essays on T.C. Chao which appeared in the *Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 13 (2, 1990) and Nos. 14/15 (1-2, 1991). The translator is responsible for any resultant distortions of the author's argument or meaning, with apologies.

Translated and edited by Janice Wickeri.

## 10. On Theological Contextualization - Kan Baoping

Kan Baoping (Rev.) is a graduate of Nanjing Theological Seminary and now serves as an instructor there. He has also studied in Canada.

The contextualization of theology has been a subject of debate for some time. Today especially, as more and more Chinese church personnel realize the importance of theological development for the Chinese church, the question of theological contextualization inevitably becomes a focus for discussion. From the entrance of Christianity into China until the establishment of new China in 1949, the Chinese Protestant church was under the supervision of foreign missionaries. She was like an infant who had not yet learned to walk, nor was she given the chance to learn. Under the foreign missionaries' exacting supervision, the maturation of the Chinese church was fraught with difficulty and was painstakingly slow. Each step in that maturing process had to follow in the missionaries' footsteps. Only after the establishment of new China, when the missionaries had to leave, did people realize how weak the Chinese church really was. Of course in the past some farsighted Chinese church leaders had raised the issue of independence. But at that time China was subject to the foreign powers, how could the church speak of independence? This historical background is the reason Chinese theology has essentially been a direct reflection of western theology. As Professor Chen Zemin, Vice-Principal of Nanjing Theological Seminary and Professor of Systematic Theology, has pointed out in his essay, "The Task of Theological Construction in the Chinese Church," many people in the Chinese church conformed indiscriminately with whatever theological trend was fashionable in the West. Although foreign missionaries have been gone for over forty years, for some people in the Chinese church, that outmoded theological thinking still represents orthodoxy.

Today, as people consider how to establish a Christian theology with Chinese church characteristics, the issue of contextual theology has been put on the agenda. Just what is contextual theology? Why must theology be contextualized? The issue must be conscientiously studied because such research will help us to find our own way in developing a Christian theology which fits the revelation that God is giving to Chinese Christians today, and which has both Chinese Christian characteristics and a close relationship to the context of the Chinese church. Our theology should not be an unexamined clone of western theology.

### **What is Contextual Theology?**

Before we can define contextual theology we must first understand what theology itself is. Paul Tillich considered theology to be an explanation of the content of the Christian faith (God's revelation). Professor Chen Zemin defines theology as: "the theory of the spiritual experience of the church; it is a summation of the religious experience of the church in a given historical period. As a system of thought, it begins with traditional doctrines and beliefs, but then takes fresh and distinctive spiritual experiences, systematizes them and elevates them to the level of theory which is then used to guide the work of the church and to

point out the direction in which it should move." This is a broad definition of theology because it can generally be applied to all specific theologies. Or to put it another way, we can say that it includes all the explanations of the content of Christian faith. Furthermore, each specific theology is fixed by its specific historical and social conditions, cultural background, theological task, purpose and method. Let us take apologetics for example. According to Tillich's definition, the theological task of apologetic is to answer all questions the context asks of God's message. Systematic theology, for instance, is a systematic explanation of the content of Christian faith. J.C. Wenger has said that systematic theology is "the content of the revealed Word of God. ... Systematic theology then takes the Biblical teaching which has been derived from exegesis and from Biblical theology and combines the fruit of these studies into one comprehensive statement of the truth." (*Introduction to Theology, 1954*) Here, Wenger determines the method of systematic theology. Different theologies are concerned with different theological tasks and purposes, and therefore they choose different theological methods.

In the whole history of theology there has never been, nor can there ever be, a so-called "normative theology," which could be used at all times and under all circumstances to effectively guide the establishment of the Chinese church or Christians' spiritual life and practice of faith. And it is highly unlikely that there would be a theology that could act as a norm for or pass judgment on the effectiveness of other theologies. As was mentioned above, the reason for this is that each theology is limited by its own special context, theological task and purpose. There is no one suit of clothes which will fit every person. Clothes must be measured and tailored. Likewise in doing theology, it is the concrete context which determines the theological task, purpose and method.

Contextual theology cannot be identified with any other theology; however, it is not unlike other theologies. Professor Douglas John Hall has perceptively pointed out: "From its definition, Christian theology is basically interrelated with context. Christian theology is contextual by definition." (*Thinking the Faith, 1989*). That is to say that theology itself is already contextualized because any theology is interrelated with the concrete context in which it finds itself. No theology is produced in a historical or social vacuum. This is so because theology is a human activity. Humans live in time and space, and human thinking inevitably reflects the time and space in which those humans live. Therefore, no theology can avoid reflecting the context which produces it.

Since theology itself is already contextualized, why emphasize theological contextualization? In reality this emphasis is a reaction to the trend toward theological norms in traditional theology. Some people feel that certain old theological views should be considered "genuine" theology. In their view this "genuine" theology is not limited by time or space; it can be used to expound God's revelation in the same way to different churches and believers, regardless of social, cultural and historical conditions. It is, they feel, as universal and effective as the word of God. The idea of creating an "almighty" theology unrelated to a concrete context is sheer fantasy because theology in and of itself is interrelated with context. If someone can make this fantasy become a reality, the product is no longer theology, but a kind of religious ideology. The rationale for contextualizing theology deals with this problem.

It is worth noting that contextualization is not the same as situationalization. Context takes a historical view of social conditions of a given time. It emphasizes the link between past, present and future. Its concepts are two-dimensional. Situation on the other hand points to

those things which happen around a given moment in time, including cultural, political and economic matters; it does not touch upon historical development. Its concepts are one-dimensional. Contextual theology, however, is produced in the two-dimensional plane of context. Contextual theology is the result of the contextualization of theology. The contextualization of theology allows for the expounding of God's revelation to the church and to believers at a certain moment in time while taking into account the historical, social, cultural and political environment and the background of that church and of those believers. Therefore, theological contextualization is not emphasized solely in order to raise past theologies to a new theoretical plane, nor simply to form a theological theory with context as the medium. The purpose of the contextualization of theology is to listen to how God speaks to the context, and to see how our faith is closely interrelated with God's revelation, and indeed with our very existence. During the process of contextualizing theology, we must be clearly aware, at each moment, of who is doing theology and of the cultural, social and political factors, and of the historical conditions, under which it is being done. Without these few premises theology cannot be contextualized.

### **The Importance of Theological Contextualization**

Why do we emphasize the importance of theological contextualization and why do we say theology in and of itself is already contextualized? First, because theology is a human activity and all human activities are restricted by the social, cultural and historical conditions in which humans act. Doing theology is no exception. Humans are limited, and they are subject to the above-mentioned limitations. Therefore it is impossible for us to completely penetrate and comprehend God's revelation to us. We can only grasp the revelation God gives us at a specific historical period and under specific social conditions in a limited way. "For we know only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:9-12). Humankind's understanding of God's revelation is subject to the limitations of human nature, as well as being subject to the limitations of the context. At the same time, God gives his revelation to human beings in accordance with the context in which they find themselves. It is not certain that the understanding of God's revelation under one set of historical and social conditions can be used to explain God's revelation under another set of historical and social conditions. If we recognize this fact, we must of necessity deny the possibility of establishing a non-contextualized theology or a theology which is suitable to all historical periods and to all social environments. Therefore, we cannot merely duplicate a former theology with its understanding of God's revelation under the specific historical conditions of that time. Rather we must understand the revelation God gives us today under the conditions of our own time. Moreover, we cannot merely copy modern western theology. Rather, based on our own concrete context, we must establish a theology which expresses our faith in accordance with our own special characteristics. Actually, we can use much of the content and theological method of western theology for reference, but using something for reference is not the same as borrowing it.

Human limitation is not the most important reason for the contextualization of theology. That is to say, it is not only because human beings are limited that we must have a limited understanding of God's revelation to us based on our context. The most important reason for contextualizing theology is because our God is a living and true God. The Christians of the first century believed that God was with them. We also believe that God is with us today. This proves that we believe that God is a living God. As Professor Hall pointed out, every time we say that God is with us, we at the same time acknowledge one fact: our theology has our context as its background. Our experience of God's presence among us explains the interrelationship between God's revelation and our specific context. If God did not reveal Himself to us in accordance with a concrete context, how would we be able to experience God's presence among us?

The contextualization of theology has also to do with the guiding role of theology in the practice of faith. Theology is not just abstract theory. It should both arise out of the practice of faith and guide it. The Christian practices his or her faith within a concrete context. Since theology comes from the practice of faith, then it must be interrelated with the context of faith practice. It is only because theology is interrelated with this context that it can turn and guide the practice of faith. Christians who live in different contexts have different faith needs, different comprehensions of Christian doctrine, and different understandings of God's revelation, and they will choose different expressions of faith or different ways of putting their faith into practice. If theology is not interrelated with a concrete context, then it would be impossible for it to be interrelated to faith needs, and therefore it could not be an effective guide for the practice of the faith.

To sum up, theology must be contextualized, and the key to the contextualization of theology is engagement. For theology to be contextualized, it must interrelate with context, and this interrelationship can only come about through engagement. Only through engagement with the concrete context can theology establish a relationship with the context, and thus become contextualized. Only because the Latin American theologians became engaged themselves in the struggle for liberation, only because they themselves accompanied the masses in their struggles for political and economic liberation, could they establish the liberation theology which so well expresses the faith of the mass of Latin American Christians. Therefore these theologians are able to impart the grassroots church's message of liberation theology in a systematic way and on a higher theoretical level, and use it to guide the faith practice of Latin American Christians. The major content of their faith practice is the message that God is just, and that he enters into the struggle against political and economic oppressors. The same holds true for Black theology. Professor James H. Cone, a theologian from New York's Union Theological Seminary, is himself a black person. Living in the United States, he has personally experienced the prejudice that a black person meets with in that society. Therefore the first line on the first page of his book *A Black Theology of liberation* emphatically states: "Christian theology is a theology of liberation." (*A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1991) This represents the call for equality of the great majority of black Christians living in the United States. God speaks to the context. Only if we become engaged with the context and establish a relationship with the context can we really receive the revelation God is giving to us.

Of course, there is the possibility that the contextualization process might get dangerously sidelined and a theology fail to become genuinely contextualized, in which case it could not be

an accurate guide for the faith practice of the church and of Christians. In order to avoid this, we must be aware of several problems:

1. God speaks to the context, but he is not bound by the context. Although he is in the midst of the context, he is above the context. This is the meaning of the text: "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). We must not, by emphasizing the transcendence of God, ignore the important fact that he speaks to the context. But at the same time because of the importance of context, we cannot disregard the universality of God's truth. Otherwise God's truth would be reduced to relative truth because its efficacy would only be felt in a specific context. Therefore we must treat the relationship between God's truth and context very carefully. Although contextual theology emphasizes the context and not the environment or the situation, it is necessary to deal carefully with the relationship between the context and the tradition of the church (this tradition does not refer to some customs or characteristics of the local church, but to the tradition handed down to us from the apostles.) Contextual theology cannot simply repeat tradition, nor can it completely abandon it. Context is the situation of the interrelationship between the past and the future. If completely cut off from tradition, then it becomes situation and it is no longer context. If theology enters into context without tradition and seeks to listen to God's word in that context, it will become bound by the surrounding environment. In this way, when we try to understand God's revelation in the environment in which we find ourselves, we will be readily controlled by social trends. Society's ideological trends and prevalent customs continually change, and we could only drift with the tide and lose our purpose and our prophetic character. When that happens, theology will become a "trendy." Strictly speaking such a theology is not theology at all. It is only a religiously colored viewpoint regarding the ideological trends and problems in society. The movement to establish a "normative theology" is a reaction to this kind of "theological trendiness."

2. Context is not a norm for examining God's revelation, nor is it a tool for interpreting God's revelation. That is to say, contextual theology does not use context to explain God's word. Rather, within the context it observe how God speaks to that context. This is a crucial distinction. If we make context the norm, then we are guilty of the error mentioned above, namely that theology becomes secularized. However, if we make tradition the norm, theology would not be interrelated with the concrete social existence of Christians, nor would it be interrelated with their concrete faith needs. Observing how God speaks to a context from within that context prevents us from making the two errors mentioned above.

3. Contextualizing theology is not the same as localizing it. Here we touch upon the question of indigenization. Indigenization or sinification as it refers to the church, means that the church in China should sink roots in the soil of traditional Chinese Culture. The church should not be the product of a foreign culture, but rather have a Chinese existence. The Chinese church ought to identify with Chinese culture. This will lead to mutual enrichment of both Chinese and Christian cultures. The purpose of the indigenization of the church is not only to cause more people to be baptized, but more importantly, to make the Christian gospel more meaningful. Contextualization, on the other hand, refers only to theology, indicating that Chinese Christians ought to develop a theology which is based on their own specific context, and not just appropriate western theology. Chinese Christians ought



to identify with the Chinese people, and Chinese Christian theology ought to be closely interrelated with the Chinese context. A contextualized theology can provide a theoretical base for the indigenization of the church.

Theology must interrelate with a concrete context. Only in this way can theology on the one hand correctly understand the message God is giving to the context, and on the other hand accurately express the faith of Christians and satisfy the concrete needs of the church and of Christians. But it is important to note that contextualization is not the same as localization. When we relate theology with our concrete context, which is different from other contexts, we must remind ourselves that we are part of the universal church. This is so because no matter what context a church is in that church springs from "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). From another angle, when we are doing theology, although we must consider any new meaning in the revelation which God gives us because this revelation occurs in accordance with our concrete context, we must also consider the meaning of this revelation in the tradition of the church and of faith because God's truth is everlasting and universal. Only in this way will the message of God recounted in our theology be in accordance with God's will, and appropriate to the needs of the church and of Christians.

The context in which today's Chinese church finds itself is that China is in the midst of carrying out a reform the likes of which she has never seen before. Through this reform we want to make our socialist motherland more strong and prosperous. During the process of this reform western ideas are flowing thick and fast. The Chinese church is no exception, but is on the receiving end of all kinds of theological opinions. In 1991, the China Christian Council was accepted as a full member of the World Council of Churches. This strengthens the link between the Chinese church and the universal church. In such a context, how can we run our church well in accordance with the Three-Self principle? How can we be compatible with socialism, and at the same time function as light and salt in society? How can we have our own special characteristics, and at the same time share together with the brothers and sisters of the universal church each one's spiritual experiences? First we must correctly know ourselves and know the concrete context in which we are placed. We must listen attentively to what God is saying to our context.

To produce a theology with Chinese Christian characteristics will be a slow and arduous process. But like a boat returning from a long journey, we can already see its mast cutting through the wind and waves on the far horizon.

Translated by Peter Barry, M.M.

## 11. China's Nicodemuses - **Bao Zhimin**

Bao "Zhimin (Mr.) a graduate of Nanjing Theological Seminary, is assistant editor of *Tian Feng*.

Modern Chinese history is generally reckoned as beginning with the May Fourth Movement in 1919, a cultural renewal movement initiated by Chinese intellectuals. Participants in this movement had the destiny of their people at heart, and in their pursuit of science many opposed and rejected the imported Christian religion. Sixty years later during another cultural movement - the Cultural Revolution - Christianity, like other religions in China, suffered even greater devastation. People liked to use the term "opiate" to characterize the way Christianity functioned in society, in the belief that this was Marx's definition. However, with the continuation and deepening of the government's open policy, in the late 1980s the situation in China began to change, and Chinese intellectuals, in the course of understanding western culture, science and technology, have been able to take a more objective and interested view of Christianity. In recent years, a considerable number of articles and books have appeared which contain introductions to or detailed discussions of Christianity and there are some series which present a systematic introduction to the subject. This is a pleasant change. Some of these intellectuals have found in the Christian spirit or in certain of its concepts an approach to the critique of Chinese culture. And for a few, this has been transformed into a kind of faith. Bishop K.H. Ting has termed these people "unbaptized Christians" or "Christians outside the church."

For many years, superficial propaganda caused people to link religion with "ignorance," "backwardness," and even "counter-revolution." Most Chinese people would not even consider the abundance of religious interpretations available to them in facing the great issues of human life. However, since 1988, a young scholar of religion, Mr. He Guanghu, has devoted himself to editing the series *Religion and the World*. He likes to quote Paul Tillich: "Religion is the ultimate concern of humankind." He has already accepted the idea that religion is an exploration of human life. In the "Translator's Introduction" to *Theology and Metaphysics* by James Richmond, he states that the interesting thoughts and profound insights contained in theology and metaphysics, viewed from our habitual and narrow modes of thinking, may give us a feeling of "ascending to a high point for a better view," and "opening up our horizons." He says, "we are sojourners and guests in this world, but, if we do not want to be ignorant and confused travelers, ... then we should give some thought to these fundamental questions." In his introduction to T.S. Eliot's *Christianity and Culture*, he reminds scholars that "in studying culture, we must also study religion and western culture, and even more importantly, we must study what its representative thinkers (such as Eliot) believe to be the nucleus of the essence of its spirit-Christianity."

The tragedy of May Fourth and subsequent movements which opposed Christianity is that when people have no genuine understanding of Christianity, they reject it out of a kind of blind zeal. Another young scholar who has done considerable study of Christianity points out: "Besides the specific historical reasons, an important factor in the serious misunderstanding of

Christianity upon its entry into China was that the Chinese did not attempt to acquire a profound understanding of Christian doctrine in the deepest reaches of their hearts." This statement is taken from the forward to Jiang Qing's translation of James Reid's *Facing Life with Christ*. It is almost as though he is "speaking for himself" through this book, which introduces a Christian's view of life.

The great enthusiasm for and interest in Christianity which appeared in China during the 1980s has been termed "Christianity fever." However, scholars have not limited themselves to understanding Christianity; they have also used Christianity to reflect on traditional Chinese culture. They believe that the fatal weakness of ancient Chinese culture must be supplemented with another cultural construct - Christianity. This has become an impetus behind the current enthusiasm of many intellectuals for introducing Christian doctrine and theology. An Ximeng feels that western modes of thinking differ from Chinese modes in their tripartite division of things in terms of God, human beings and nature. The view of nature as an independent realm is one of the reasons for the huge advances in western science and technology. Traditional Chinese thought posits a unity of man and nature, with nature being ignored and mercilessly exploited. Thus, he believes: "a Christian must love and respect God's creation. Such a 113 view of the universe and nature is lacking in Chinese philosophy and religion."\*

(\*Nature, however, is not necessarily well treated by Christianity either. See, for example, H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Fortress Press, 1985) -ed.)

This movement from reflection on Chinese tradition to Christian thinking is also reflected in the perspective of some Chinese artists. Of course, artists are concerned first of all with the spirit expressed in art. "The Art of Ding Fang: Formed of the Dynamics of Deep Suffering," by Li Jiatur (*Chinese Art Journal*, No. 38 [1987]) represents such an understanding. Li points out that "due to concepts formed by several thousand years of the Chinese agrarian system, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have all emphasized the perfection of the individual personality in different degrees. In comparison with western culture, such scholars believe that what is most lacking in Chinese culture is the spirit of a greater humanity found in Christian culture. Christian consciousness of original sin is expressed in western art as a deep concern for the fate of all humankind." Li quotes Ding Fang as saying: "Only the enchanting religious sentiments of the great sacred music of Beethoven, Bach and Handel, can make me forget everything. In this day and age when this spirit is universally in decline, truly, I often feel that I am sinful, that I bear the heavy sins of the nation and seek the salvation of its soul." Likewise, another Chinese scholar, in a volume introducing the Bible and its cultural influence, *New Thoughts on the Bible* states: "That which a people most fear is often precisely that which they seek. In Christian culture the people fear God's supreme, suprahuman principle of original sin, but this means that they are seeking God's grace. Then what do the Chinese people fear? They are most afraid of "the words of others," and in order to get a good report from others' lips, they are not squeamish about denaturing themselves, practicing self-deception." He goes on to observe that "the fear of God can not only check human desires, it can also restrain the violence of the mighty. Christians proceed step by step from reality to the ideal. Between steps they ponder the nature of God, and concern themselves with leaving in each footprint the will and glory of God."

No matter whether it is Christian's consciousness of original sin or their fear of God, not a trace of such an understanding can be found in traditional Chinese culture. However, by

reflecting on Chinese culture, these scholars finally come to see what was originally foreign to them, a way of thought at once old and new - Christianity. In the statements quoted above, we discover their sincere yearning for Christian thought. Among these scholars, the most outstanding is Liu Xiaofeng. A graduate of Beijing University, Liu moved from aesthetics to psychology to philosophy, and into the realm of theology. His early work *Poetic Philosophy* shines with his concern and quest for human life. He ponders: "this man who cannot escape death, where, after all, in this world, - sun-drenched by day, dark-shrouded by night - did he come from? Where is he going and why? Where can his finite life seek transcendence, where can he find rest for his soul?" Like many modern scholars, Liu decries the spiritual loss of humankind brought about by industrial civilization. For this reason, he takes romantic aesthetics as the starting point for his philosophical researches. Liu feels that love is an extremely significant theoretical starting point found in romantic philosophy. This quest for love may be the impetus for Liu's journey toward Christianity. The next stage of his exploration is represented by his book *Salvation and Escapism*, where it can clearly be seen that Liu has links his concern for human life to the salvation of Christ. He says: "From the standpoint of Judeo-Christian tradition, the misery of humankind lies in the fact that humans can either fall or be saved. With unwavering, tearful eyes, Jesus, the Son, gazes at the human evil, and with his own suffering and self-sacrificial love, he dispels the dark, demonic forces of evil." Liu has already realized that "the darkness of the world is created by the absence of a sacred presence ... only when the human spirit of its own accord rejects the truth of the existence of the sacred, does the world become a wasteland without roots, without a master..." If we say that Liu's first stage, that is, the one represented by *Poetic Philosophy*, expresses human "self-salvation," then what is found in *Salvation and Escapism* draws closer to the Christian doctrine of salvation, that is, the doctrine that humankind depends for salvation upon a transcendent God and the saving power of God's love. This transcendent faith is also concerned about this worldly well-being. What is lacking in Chinese culture also helps to explain why some Chinese intellectuals have become Buddhists, but not Christians, or they have supplemented traditional culture with the personality of Christ or some Christian concepts, but they have not been converted to Christ. It is no wonder that some fear that Liu might "be mistakenly led along this path." (see the foreword to *Towards the Truth of the Cross* [ I I K: Joint Publishing, 1990]).

Beginning in the autumn of 1988, Liu began to publish a series of articles introducing contemporary western theology in *Dushu* magazine. This shows that Liu's explorations of Christianity have entered a new stage. Liu has seen the Christ of the cross, for he says: "True and ultimate meaning in human life and action, suffering and death, ultimate answers to the riddle of human life and the world, is found only in Jesus Christ, who died tragically on the cross and rose again from the dead." In his most recent book, *Towards the Truth of the Cross* he goes a step further to affirm that "However, in order to bestow his love on humankind, God became flesh and came into the world, suffering great tribulation on the cross, where he bore so much suffering, humbling and offering himself for us. ... If our knowledge of God ends in philosophical concepts of the nature of divinity, devoid of emotion, and does not first of all feel the suffering of God on the cross, then, we have no way of coming to an accurate knowledge of God." (p. 443-444)

In moving from a concern for human suffering to a concern for the suffering of Jesus Christ, Liu has come to a turning which should be the experience of a every Christian. However, as Chen Yongtao, a student at Nanjing Theological Seminary has pointed out, for

Liu Xiaofeng "though God is right before him, he does not worship God. At most he *respects* God" ( see "God is God," in *Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 12). In spite of this, however, we can still wait for Liu Xiaofeng, just as we wait for many Chinese intellectuals to come to Christ and know him as Lord.

Translated by Philip and Janice Wickeri.

## SERMONS

### 12. The Tree of Life is Ever Green This sermon was preached as a eulogy for Bishop Zheng Jianye (1919-1991) - **K.H. Ting**

Text: Revelation 14:13

Today we gather before God to remember our beloved colleague, Bishop Zheng Jianye. The Scripture verse I have chosen is one which is frequently used at funerals or memorial services, and I think it is especially appropriate to read it today. Bishop Zheng's life was indeed a life of labor and his labors will continue to bear fruit.

I met Zheng Jianye in 1937, fifty-four years ago. I also knew his father, Bishop Zheng Hepu, and many of his brothers and sisters. During these fifty-four years, there were periods when I saw Jianye daily and others when I did not see him for years at a time. But no matter whether I saw him or not, he knew my thoughts and I his. When we were together, we never stopped talking. In 1949, he and his wife were in Canada while I was there and I went to see them. We talked together for several days. At times, we had different views, but we understood each other extremely well.

In the early days of our friendship, he was a student at Soochow University, a very well-read young man with a wealth of ideas, and in this respect he never changed. He would gather information, gain an understanding of the circumstances, think through the problems, explore the issues and form brilliant opinions. This was his consistent pattern, whether in the Shanghai Christian Students Union and the Student Fellowship we organized in the Shanghai Community Church in 1942, or when studying abroad; in the Henan Anglican Church or the Anglican Church of China; in the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China or in the China Christian Council. He was extremely good at cutting through the mass of routine and raising issues to the theoretical level. This enabled him to get twice the result with half the effort.

One of Zheng Jianye's special talents was his ability to start from practical facts and concrete situations and arrive at a universal. This is seeking truth from facts. He disliked most glib slogans delivered in a loud voice. Someone famous once said, "The traditions of our dead forefathers entangle the minds of the living like a nightmare." It can be said that in our friendship, and indeed his whole life, Zheng Jianye was most able to cast off the fetters of tradition and gain freedom of thought. He was familiar with ecclesiology and also with the hearts and minds of the mass of Christians. He was never one to obstinately try to force people to do things. Several years ago, one of the leaders from the Central Committee once said to me, "You people in the church leadership must never do things which the ordinary Christians do not like." What warm concern such sincere advice shows for our church. It is an apt description of Bishop Zheng. I cannot think of a single time he ever advocated anything in the work of the church which the mass of Christians would be displeased with or oppose. Because of this, he captured people's hearts and there was much good feeling towards him among his colleagues and fellow Christians. He always began with practicalities and proposed appropriate measures. He never made high-sounding suggestions which would have a deleterious effect.

There is one important principle behind our Chinese Christian unity: in matters of faith and worship, Christians from various backgrounds all respect one another. We call this "mutual respect." Zheng Jianye was tireless in thinking of ways to enlarge this unity to its fullest extent for mutual respect. I remember one meeting of the National Chinese Christian Conference in the 1950s when, in order to unite with one or another denomination, after arguing and pleading, he even began to cry during the session. Later someone asked him, "What were the feelings which caused you to do this?" Quite clearly they were love for country and love for church, because unity was one of our nation's hopes for us, as well as the prayer of Christ. Not long before Jianye was taken ill, he proposed seven principles of Christian unity which are still frequently mentioned today.

During the past ten years, we have been consistent in stressing that the church should be run well, self-run and well run, self-supported and well supported, self-propagated and well propagated, It is worth my mentioning here that Zheng Jianye was one of the earliest to commit himself to making the church well run. He spoke of it with me when he returned to the Henan Diocese of the Anglican Church of China. It was clear to me that he had come with the aspiration of making the Henan Anglican Church well run, that he had come forward to enter upon this difficult task. Afterwards, he helped Bishop Robin Chen to go to each and every diocese, to organize study groups, to reorganize diocese, to consecrate Bishops and to get the Anglican church back on the right course.

Zheng Jianye was not only a student of theology, but of social science. Let me give an example. Marx, speaking of German thinkers, once made a remark the gist of which is that criticism of religion is the prerequisite for all criticism. There are people in China who think that then of course we should do likewise, that in China there should be criticism of religion on a grand scale. Jianye wrote an extremely persuasive essay in which he made use of a great quantity of material to illustrate that things from Germany could not be taken wholesale into China, because China is not Germany. In China, it is not religion which functions as religion does in Germany, but rather several thousand years of feudal thinking and the patriarchal clan system. This alone is the "nightmare that entangles the minds of the living." So in China the prerequisite of all other criticism is criticism of this system. Another example: A few years ago, together with colleagues from social scientific circles, Bishop Zheng co-edited the volume *A Dictionary of Religion*. He maintained a seeking truth from facts approach throughout, opposing the argument that religion is tantamount to opium. Following Jianye's reasoned approach, we find in the introduction and entries in that volume no mention of opium as the nature of religion. For the times, this was truly an impressive feat.

I should not speak too long. But I want to say this: for fifty-four years, Zheng Jianye was truly my friend and mentor; even more, he was my teacher. I believe many of his colleagues, fellow Christians, and friends share my feelings.

When we were young, we never thought of death, we knew only the joy of life which filled our hearts. It's different now. Our loved ones, those in the same generation, are dying one by one. Where do we find consolation? All that God has made is good, especially people. As Shakespeare said, "What a piece of work is man." God is love, therefore, it cannot be that it is the fate of all these good things and good people to be obliterated. As on that day when Christ took up several loaves of bread and a few fish, so he will accept them, bless them,

give thanks to his father in heaven and break them. And in his hands they will be changed, they will multiply and will be offered up to God.

In the Communion liturgy of the Anglican Church there is the following prayer: "And we also bless thy holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear; beseeching thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom."

Death is a change in life, not its end. Within the realm ruled by God's love, positively no good thing can be lost or destroyed. It is as Goethe said, "Dear friends, the golden tree of actual life springs ever green." Death is but the transition from one stage of life to another. In our prayers, especially in the Blessed Sacrament which our Lord Jesus established, we are in communion with each other. And this is where our comfort lies.

Let us pray: We ask the Lord's mercy, to be before us and lead us, to support us from behind, to encourage us through the example of the saints who walk before us. May our prayers hold us up. Accept the work of our weak hands, correct our errors. May they become a pleasing offering, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Tian Feng*, July, 1991, p.2.  
Translated by Janice Wickeri.



### 13. Pastor and Priest - **Chen Zemin**

Sermon preached at an ordination service held by the Jiangsu Christian Council in St. Paul's Church, Nanjing, 28 April, 1991.

Text: I Pet. 5:1-4.

The apostle Peter writes in First Peter, "Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it - not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away." In the same letter he also says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Today, the Jiangsu Three-Self Association and the Jiangsu Christian Council are holding a solemn ceremony to ordain six brothers as ministers. What we call "the ministry" in our churches is based on the teaching of the Bible as well as on church tradition. In the churches, we ordain selected people and appoint them to propagate the gospel well, to run the church well, and to fully commit themselves to the task of caring for the believers and serving God. In the history of Christianity, there are, roughly speaking, two different systems of ministries. One has three ranks which include bishops, pastors and deacons. For "bishop," the Bible sometimes uses "overseer;" a "pastor" is a local church leader and can also be called "father" or "priest;" "deacons" see to the management of church affairs. Even now, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches have preserved this ministerial structure. The other type consists of only two ranks: pastors and deacons, with elders and overseers sharing the same rank with pastors.

Most biblical scholars who have examined the book of Acts and the letters of Sts. Paul and Peter are convinced that the New Testament churches had only two ministries, namely elders and deacons, and that the titles of "overseers," "elders" and "pastors" referred to the same ministry.

As it is recorded in Acts 20:17; 28, Paul "sent a message from Miletus to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him." And when they met, he said to them: "Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God..." And in 1 Pet. 5:1-4 (which we have just heard) it says, "As an elder myself, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge ..." In Tit. 1:5,7 Paul writes, "I directed you to appoint elders in every town," and, in the same context, "a bishop is God's steward..."

These passages, together with many others, clearly identify elders as overseers and bishops and describe their task as tending the sheep, thereby characterizing them also as pastors. In the New Testament, the terms "pastor," "bishop," and "elder" all refer to the same ministry. It was not until the third century that the church developed the ministry of bishop ranking higher than pastors and elders. As a result, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches have a three-rank system. In our Protestant churches in China, we have bishops as well, but they are different from Catholic and Orthodox bishops. Our bishops have a special call and spiritual

standing, they enjoy high spiritual authority and great prestige among the believers. But they have no diocese, and are therefore for all practical purposes pastors, with no extra rank in the hierarchy of ministries.

A conceptual difference between elders and pastors emerged only with the reformation in the sixteenth century. Based on 1Tim. 5:17, Calvin distinguished between elders "who rule well" and elders "who labor in preaching and teaching". Consequently, the Presbyterian churches have special elders for administration and leadership, mostly appointed by ordinary believers, but usually not in full-time positions. Only their elders who "labor in preaching and teaching" are actual pastors.

In the Bible, the term "pastor" is used only once. This is in Eph. 4:11, where a distinction is made between "pastors" and "teachers." In the original language, the expressions "pastor," "tending the sheep," and "shepherd" are all derived from the same root word. In the Old and New Testaments, this form of address appears more than a hundred times, in reference to the shepherd who tends the Lord's flocks. This same word is behind our term "pastor," which is therefore a fully appropriate and biblically based title.

Our Protestant churches in China have no unified ministerial system yet. Some local churches have established even more ministries; besides pastors, elders and deacons they have evangelists and teachers. Some have no pastors but only elders, while differentiating between elders and pastors, with "elders" referring to those who rule and administer a church. Deacons are usually those who assist pastors or elders in handling the church's finances and other business matters. All in all there are no strict and unified regulations. We follow the principle of mutual respect and wait for the Holy Spirit to guide us towards greater unity in the future.

According to the Bible, the special task of a pastor is the tending of God's flock. This implies that a pastor follows God's will in "looking after" the believers and acts as their "overseer." These terms connote concern and love, as well as leadership and organizing work. Our word "overseer" is reminiscent of a superior person exercising control over others, as for instance a government official does. But I don't think this is meant in the original. The point is that a pastor must follow the will of God and apply God's guidance and love as his standard. He cannot simply follow his own personal wishes and impose them on the believers. Most important, however, is the expression "tending the flock;" this is a very suitable metaphor. A shepherd, in caring for his sheep, first of all feeds them, which means supplying them with spiritual food. He also tends them, protects and consoles them, gives them medical care and all forms of guidance. One who is ordained must also be a good leader to the believers, just as Jesus is our "chief shepherd" or as Yahweh is our shepherd.

Such a heavy responsibility shall be exercised "not under compulsion but willingly." What is meant here, according to the original, is a committed and unreserved enthusiasm. Also, it shall be done "not for sordid gain but eagerly." Becoming a pastor means to respond to a call from God, to happily say: "Here I am, use me!" Who would fuss about any disadvantages emerging from such a self-sacrificing commitment? Who would care about personal ambitions like career, reputation or financial reward? St. Paul writes in 2Cor. 6: "We work together with God and do not accept his grace in vain; in every way we have commended ourselves as servants of God." "I disregard honor and dishonor, ill repute and good repute; I am unknown and yet well known; dying, and yet alive; punished, and yet not

killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; I have nothing, and yet possess everything." Such inner freedom and greatness belongs to an abundant life.

A pastor must not strive for power. "Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples of the flock." The power held by pastors is entrusted to them by God, they must not abuse it. Much may be entrusted to them: the flock of believers, all church property, administrative leadership, teaching authority, and so forth, yet they cannot behave like dictators, although some church leaders unfortunately do make a fetish of their power. Peter says: "Be examples to the flock!" The power of an example is most persuasive: it has the authority to sincerely convince others. A pastor must therefore, as St. Paul says in 1Tim. 3: "be above reproach, be temperate, sensible, respectable, an apt teacher ... a worker who is reliable before God and has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth." Pastors must make themselves examples and influence others through virtue.

So far I have been talking about the biblical demands on a pastor as a shepherd. But apart from that, a pastor is also a priest. As priest, he represents the community of believers when he brings the offering to God, he intercedes, presides over the worship and administers the sacraments. As time is limited, let me simply make a few points:

From the entire Old Testament to the four Gospels and the book of Acts in the New Testament, the word for "priest" occurs more than three hundred times. In most cases it refers to religious professionals in Israel or other nations who are assigned to represent the believers in the communication between God and humans. In Israel, they are descendants of Aaron and Zadok or Levites. They hold an almost hereditary office, though one should still see it as a voluntary commitment. By the time of Jesus, the priests, just like the Pharisees, clung so obstinately to the letter of the law, that they missed the spirit of it and became an obstacle for the direct communication between God and people. Hence they faced condemnation from Jesus.

When the Catholic and Orthodox churches developed their three level ministerial hierarchy, priests became a privileged class monopolizing divine power and separating God and the masses of believers. Only much later, during the Reformation did Martin Luther propagate the priesthood of all believers. As a result, the concept of priesthood was blunted in the Protestant churches. Some Christians are even hostile to it. However, what Jesus and Martin Luther actually opposed was only the abuse and misunderstanding of priesthood. They never denied that a pastor can represent the believers and has the special commission and capacity to guide the believers in worship and in their sacramental dedication to God.

Our great pastor and chief shepherd Jesus Christ holds a threefold office: In one person he is king, prophet and priest. The book of Hebrews refers to Jesus as priest or High Priest over a dozen times. According to the order of Melchizedek, he puts himself in the place of all believers, and gives himself up to God, atoning for our sins with his own precious blood. Just like our great shepherd, an ordained pastor holds the office and capacity of a priest. The liturgical texts we are using in our ceremony today frequently use the word "priest", and so it is clear that a pastor is also a priest.

First Peter 2:9 also makes reference to priesthood at one point: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Included in the "priesthood" mentioned here are all believers who have received baptism, entered the church

and accepted salvation. Those who are addressed by Peter as priests are clearly named at the beginning of the letter (1 Pet. 1: 1-2): "the exiles of the Dispersion in many places, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood." Biblical scholars tell us that these phrases refer to the entire body of believers. The same is true for the worship of the church; it is a collective dedication. In the New Testament churches, the title of a priest is never applied to overseers, elders or pastors as individuals.

In the Christian teaching, the word "priest" therefore has a fourfold implication: It refers first to Jesus (Hebrews), secondly to the community of believers (Peter), thirdly to individuals ordained as pastors (church tradition), and finally to every single believer (Martin Luther). Martin Luther, however, never denied the priestly function of a pastoral ministry, especially not where the administration of the sacraments is concerned.

These four implications do not actually contradict each other, but are rather mutually related and complementary. The priestly function of a pastor is first of all derived from the atonement achieved for us by Christ, the High Priest (with Christ's priesthood having nothing in common with that of the priests in the Old Testament). Also, the priestly function of a pastor as a chosen, ordained and spiritually empowered representative of the believers is strongly related to a Christian community and can only be understood in this context. If he leaves the church, he loses this capacity. As an individual believer he would still be a priest in Martin Luther's sense, but no longer in the sense of a representative. In order to be a priest in the latter sense, a pastor needs to be ordained in a church if he or she is to be qualified to represent the church and its members. To be ordained means that one recognizes before the assembly, that authority comes from Jesus Christ and expresses the power of the Holy Spirit. This understanding is based on the Bible and is also very important in theology.

Finally, let me once again cite the apostle Peter: "You have been chosen and destined by God the father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood, to be "a royal priesthood, ... to tend the flock of God that is in your charge ... willingly ... and eagerly,... to be examples to the flock ... to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ... And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away."

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 14/15 (1-2, 1991), p. 132.*

Translated by Gotthard Oblau.

## 14. That You Be Trustworthy - K.H. Ting

Bishop Ting preached this sermon at the joint service of ordination held 5 January 1992, during the Fifth NCCC at Chongwenmen Church in Beijing. Forty-five new pastors were ordained during the service.

Text: Psalm 136: 1-9.

Please turn to Psalm 136 in your Bibles and let us read it together responsively.

This Psalm reminds me of something from my childhood which I would like to share with you. My mother had four children, and I was her third child. She died a few years ago in Shanghai at the age of one hundred and one. She was a woman who loved our Lord very deeply, and in all the world, it was she who prayed most and most earnestly for me. And I believe that now, having drawn much closer to God and immersed in God's light, she still offers ceaseless prayers, for me and for the church here on earth. When I was small she led all of us in family worship each evening, singing hymns, reading the Bible and praying. But we children were rather naughty - while she was reading the Bible, we fooled around, often hitting and punching each other. She thought of a way to deal with us: if we didn't sit quietly, she made us turn to Psalm 136. This Psalm has twenty-six verses in all, and the second half of each verse is the same: "For his steadfast love endures forever." She would read the first half of the verse, and the four of us children would respond together in a loud voice: "For his steadfast love endures forever." We thought it was great fun, and by the time we had read all twenty-six verses, we had quieted down, and mother could continue to lead the family in worship.

Now although we were a naughty bunch, the message that God's "steadfast love endures forever" found its way into our hearts and made a deep impression on us. Ever since that time, I have heard that phrase echo in my ear. During the Cultural Revolution, when all the churches in China were closed, when many who believed in Christianity were ridiculed, Nanjing Theological Seminary was taken over by the Red Guards and used as their headquarters. The Red Guards ordered my family to vacate our house within four hours and crowd into much smaller lodgings. It was extremely hard for me to take all this in. During those days, this same phrase "his steadfast love endures forever," came frequently into my heart. It restored my inner balance and gave me a sense of great hope and peace. It said to me that the many things happening around us did not represent God's love, that they were due to human selfishness and human evil, and yet God's love endures for ever, so that at a certain time, when conditions are right, God's own will would triumph, and God's love would overcome all human impudence.

I think that the experience and history of our church aptly illustrates this understanding that the Lord's love endures forever. Consider the situation of the church in China today. The number of Christians has increased by many millions. From the Cultural Revolution days, when there were none, the number of churches has increased to seven or eight thousand, and one third of these are new churches. In rural villages many Christians have built their churches with their own hands, forming long lines and passing bricks to the builders two at a time. From 1979 to the present, the number of churches has increased by three every two days. We also

have tens of thousands of home worship gatherings or meeting points. And we have already printed several million Bibles. Christians have a great hunger and thirst to read the Bible and to learn the word of God. Just imagine what it would have been like if during the Cultural Revolution, when so many were suffering, the church had not suffered as well. What if it had received special treatment and had been praised by the likes of Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao? Then our present situation would be entirely different than it is now. It would not be possible to find so many cadres and people from all walks of life willing to help in the implementation of the religious policy. And who would come to church to hear the gospel? Precisely because we were attacked, because we suffered and have gained the affection of the people, our position today is solid and people are willing to hear the gospel we have to preach.

People with little understanding of Christianity sometimes say to us: Don't you say that Jesus will come again? Because of this, you don't have to be so conscientious in the way you run the church. There's no need for long-term planning, so why all this talk about running the church well? There are also those in the church who say: Jesus will come again. We don't have to till the fields. We don't have to work, we don't need homes. We can go into the hills and greet Jesus and wait to be lifted up. But please don't think this way, my friends and fellow Christians. Some years ago the president of Nanjing Theological Seminary was Ding Yuzhang, one of the vice-chairpersons of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM). He used to tell a story which is the best response to this type of thinking. The story tells of a pious carpenter who loved to tell of Jesus' second coming. But the wooden utensils and furniture which he built were especially solid and sturdy. Someone once asked him: Isn't there a contradiction here? You keep saying that Jesus is about to come again, but you also make such solid furniture. If Jesus is indeed coming, and we will all go to heaven, what's the use of your wooden utensils and furniture? The carpenter replied: Jesus will certainly come again, he promised this himself. I must prepare my soul to meet him. I have to be ready any time. If he comes tonight, then I can go to greet him. If it's tomorrow night, I can go then too. But the wooden things I've made with these two hands have to last a hundred years, five hundred, or even a thousand years. My dear sisters and brothers, we should learn from this carpenter. We must prepare ourselves spiritually to meet our Lord at any time, but the work of our hands cannot be slipshod, we must plan for its long-term worth. Our Lord Jesus was also a carpenter. I believe that the things he made of wood must have been the best and the most durable, certainly not the sort of thing you use once and it's broken.

This tells us that the church is not just for today, we have to plan for the longer term.

You are all aware that since the 1950s we have been saying that the church must be self-governed, self-supported and self-propagated. And today, for the most part, it is. But this is only the first step. We are self-governing, but not yet well governed; self-supporting, but not yet well supported; self-propagating, but not yet well propagated. Our church is self-run, but not yet well run. Right now we are holding our Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference here in Beijing. The theme of this meeting is how to run the church well. We know that in some areas, in some respects, the church is being run very badly. It does not resemble a church and many Christians are quite disappointed with it. They shed tears over it. We cannot just treat running the church well as something for the short term; it is not a task which God has entrusted to our generation only. The church is the business of many generations, of hundreds of generations; it is the great task of a hundred years, or a thousand. We must be like that carpenter and his wooden handiwork. We are not building something to last for just a few days,

a few months or a few years; we must consider several generations, several hundred years, even several thousand. Today many government cadres and people in intellectual circles talk about the long-lasting character of religion. As Christians, we should even more recognize the eternal character of the gospel.

We thank God that the Chinese church has been specially blessed. During our times of trouble, many church workers were spared, and continued to serve the Lord, even into their seventies and eighties. The church, however, cannot end in that generation's hands. They must have successors. There are several million Christians, but what dismays us is the fact that in China today there are less than a thousand ordained Protestant clergy. We are also dismayed by the fact that we hear fellow Christians and colleagues saying that though the harvest is great, the workers are few. Yet among the one thousand several hundred graduates of our thirteen seminaries over the past six years, only a few dozen have been ordained. This number is too low, unbelievably low. Today we have gathered several dozen young colleagues who have been accepted for ordination by their provincial and municipal level church affairs organizations, and we are holding a large-scale service of ordination. We hope this will have a two-fold impact on the whole church: (1) to encourage churches to ease up a bit, to open the gates wider and accept qualified candidates for ordination into the ministry of the church as soon as possible, allowing them to continue to mature there, to ensure that the church has successors who maintain peace and order over the long term; (2) to encourage more young Christians, men and women, to heed Christ's call and dedicate their lives to the work of the church and the gospel, to undergo training and become envoys of spiritual nurture who will enable ordinary Christians to raise the level of their faith and improve their ideological perspective, to build up the church as the body of Christ and thus prepare the Christian church to adapt to the coming high tide of Chinese culture.

In this way different generations will be brought together with the elders fostering the youth and the youth taking over from the elders. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and dedicated his life to the task, spending forty years in the desert. But God wanted him to rest in peace rather than lead the Israelites into Canaan. So Moses willingly and gladly handed over his burden of leadership to the younger Joshua. Joshua was not without his faults, but he learned from Moses' loyalty to God, and he cautiously took up Moses' mantle. When Eli was young he was a faithful servant of God; in his old age he devoted himself to nurturing the less advanced Samuel, helping him to recognize the voice of God and to become an instrument even more suited to God's purposes than he himself had been. Elijah was a great man of God, but he also grew old and gladly let Elisha continue with his own tasks. Elisha was so modest that he said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, but he compared Christ to a bridegroom, and hearing the bridegroom's voice, he was glad, saying, "For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." The kingdom of God, and not John himself, was most important. In addition to these Biblical figures, we could look at the way Paul nurtured Timothy and others, and the way they modeled themselves on him in their loyalty to our Lord, but I won't go into each case here. All these examples have a very important message for our Chinese church today, and it is a message we must hear.

Now I would like to say a few words of mutual encouragement to our young colleagues who are about to be ordained today. Please forgive me for telling another

story which concerns my mother. After I graduated from seminary, there was a period when I came to feel that the sacrifice was too great, and I didn't want to be ordained. I had all sorts of reasons. I stressed that I wasn't good at speaking, that I wasn't good with people, that I couldn't solicit contributions, that I wasn't a good preacher, that I didn't know how to talk with ordinary Christians, and so on. It was very painful for my mother to hear all this and she cried, but she never stopped praying for me. One day she turned to I Corinthians 4: 1-2 and read them to me. There Paul says, "Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be trustworthy." Then she said to me, 'Yes, maybe your qualifications aren't perfect, but as Paul tells us ... it is required of stewards that they be trustworthy.' What is most important, is not a golden tongue, social graces, or the ability to get things done. What is most important is that you be trustworthy, for that can make up for all your shortcomings." Mother read the first chapter of Corinthians again, where Paul points out that not many who have been called are wise by human standards, not many are powerful or of noble birth; none has anything to boast of on his or her own account before God. She also turned to chapter thirteen. Paul tells us that even if we could speak all human languages and the language of angels, if we had prophetic powers and understood all mysteries and all knowledge, still all this is as nothing. It is only love which never ends. What my mother said was so simple, so touching. I felt that she was truly a trustworthy steward. I felt at the time that the spirit which had moved her, was also moving me. Her words became the point when my life changed for the better. I have taken part in many ordinations in the last few years, and when I am asked to say a few words, I never fail to mention the help my mother gave me. And so I have mentioned her help again today, as mutual encouragement: what is required of us first and foremost is that we be trustworthy. Before we pray for any other gifts, let us first ask the Lord to give us trustworthy hearts.

There is no calling more worthy than to lead people to Christ our Lord. However, because our church has long neglected the training of personnel, has long neglected the work of pastoral care and nurture, the numbers of new Christians far outstrip our ability to provide pastoral care for them. And the quality of faith in our church has therefore dropped. Many believers lack the ability to discriminate among heresies, fallacies, and false theories which come from the outside and threaten to split us. Because of this, the top priority for Chinese Christians today is not to increase numbers by dragging all sorts of people with little or no understanding of the truths of the Bible into our churches; rather it is to make the church well run, which means self-governed and well governed, self-supported and well supported, self-propagated and well propagated. This is consolidation work. We must first strengthen the body of the church, which means to raise the quality of the church. After his resurrection, Jesus said three times to Peter, feed my sheep. So it is our hope that the new generation of pastoral workers understand this point, and in the present period, make running the church well and doing a good job of pastoral work their top priority.

We also hope the new generation of pastoral workers ponder well what God has entrusted to them, think of the believers' hopes, and not seek fame or position, and not consider pastors to be a cut above other Christians and in a position to give orders. Rather they should see themselves as servants, and be honest administrators, democratic in spirit, and not dictatorial. We hope they may be modest and diligent, respectful of their elders, and strive to equip themselves, to enhance their own spiritual, moral, cultural and theological qualities. This will



enhance their ability to serve fellow Christians so that they may enable them to improve in knowledge and in the spirit, rather than stop at a primitive level of faith.

God's love endures forever. This is what we Christians believe and it is where our Christian hope lies. With this as our foundation, let us strive together for a Chinese church with Christ Jesus as its cornerstone, a church that is well run, that is light and salt to the world, loved by the people and supported by Christians themselves. And let us strive so that its moving purity and freshness appear on the eastern horizon like the shimmering rays of the sun, rising steadily, making Christ known to all the world, so that the perfect and eternal love of God may penetrate deep into the hearts of all people.

*Tian Feng*, March, 1992, p.37.

Translated by Philip and Janice Wickeri.

## 15. Always in God's Love- Jiang Peifen

Jiang Peifen (Ms.) is president of the Jiangsu Christian Council. Always in *God's Love* was the closing devotion at the Fifth National Christian Conference.

Text: John 13:34-35, 15:9-12; 1 John 4:16; Jude 20-21

Before leaving his disciples the Lord Jesus said to them: "You should always live in my love." God also told them how always to live in his love. The Letter of Jude said it clearly: "Keep yourselves always in God's love."

### Following in Jesus' Footsteps

We must always abide in God's love, not in our devotions only but in daily life. We often plead with God not to leave us. In fact, if we do not leave him, but instead follow him closely, he will never leave us. The Lord Jesus said: "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be" (Jn. 12:26). Where is the Lord Jesus`?

In voluntarily becoming the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus accepted the brief span of human life and all that daily life entails. He reflected God's glory and beauty in everything he did, and so God was well pleased with him, this Son of Man.

We are all made in the image of God and all are loved and saved by him. He does not despise even the lowliest of people. He searches for and saves those who are lost. Jesus did not even scold Zacchaeus whom people looked upon as a sinner. He chose the tax collector, Matthew, to be one of his disciples. Through love, he inspired people to repent of their own free will. He laid hands on the sick, including those affected with leprosy whom others avoided.

He comforted the sad, helped the weak and gave the weary eternal rest. He fed the hungry and opened the eyes of the blind, leading those who had gone astray to walk in the right path.

Wherever Jesus went he brought peace and joy; he fulfilled people's needs. His footsteps were footsteps of self-sacrificing love for others.

As the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus acted according to God's will in all things. Jesus said (to them), "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work" (Jn. 4:34). He was a witness to the loving God. Every moment he is in God the Father and God is in him (see Jn. 14:10, 15:10, 12:21).

The Lord Jesus also told us that all who believe in him would have new life, experiencing within themselves the life of the Risen Lord and presence of the Holy Spirit. If we are linked with God we are linked with life. Together we believe in one Lord, one God, one Holy Spirit. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. If we follow closely in his footsteps, then wherever our

Lord is, we are with him. Wherever he does not go, we do not go. We then live together with God, abiding always in his love.

### **Follow the Command to love One Another**

The redemption of the cross allows us to return to the love of God. If our relationship with God is changed then our relationship with others will also be changed. When we separate from God and go our own way, we also become more separated from one another.

Today, having returned to the love of our Lord, we should bear witness to one another in love. Before our Lord Jesus was crucified, his disciples were still arguing as to which of them was the most important. They also argued as to whom should sit at Jesus' left and right hand in his Heavenly Kingdom. Our Lord Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (Jn. 13:35, 15:10).

It is our Lord's command that we love one another. We are all children of God. We are also members of his Body, therefore we should love, care for, and support one another, so that the body may grow in health. We should definitely not harm or reject one another.

If anyone in the church seeks to benefit themselves or gain a name by inappropriate means, the Body of Christ will be divided, the whole church will suffer and our Lord's name will be dishonored.

Every person who is saved is a member of the church of our Lord, we are saved by his precious blood; our duty is to love one another. We must certainly not harm or take advantage of one another. It is our Lord's command that we love one another, there is no reason to quibble.

### **Build Yourself Up in Truth**

To grow spiritually is to grow in love. How can you grow continuously in God's love? Here we are told "you should build yourselves up in holy faith" (Jude 20).

We do not read the Bible only to get sermon topics or content, but first and foremost to use God's word to build ourselves up. Our physical life depends on bread, our spiritual nourishment depends on the word of truth (Mt. 4:14).

We must attain the light of the truth to better understand ourselves; relying on the power of the Holy Spirit we must abandon all thoughts, words and actions that are opposed to the will of God. We must also more thoroughly, and more frequently, offer ourselves as instruments of righteousness to glorify God.

If in our hearts we harbor such things as pride and selfishness, if we keep an account of the sins of others, then we are not in God's love, we are not with Jesus.

Jesus prayed to his Father: "I pray that you may sanctify them with the truth, your word is the truth."

Whenever we open the Bible to read the word of God, we should reflect upon ourselves in the light of the image and will of God. Gradually we will live and work as God intends, abiding in his love.

### **Pray in the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God. When we come before our Lord in prayer it should not be to make selfish requests, but to understand the will of God the Father through prayer and change our selfish desires according to the will of God.

When the prayers of our hearts and the prayers of our mouths are in accordance with God's will, then we do the will of God and our prayers will be answered. To read the Bible is to listen to the word of God. Prayer is opening our hearts to God. Bible reading and prayers are the content of our daily devotional life, not simply for personal enjoyment or for pleasing God, but that we may be built up by the Lord, to gradually know God and ourselves, to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, to use God's word in the cleansing of our souls, to receive daily life and the energy to work, and to live in the Lord always.

The Church is the fellowship of life, the fellowship of love. For the church of our Lord to be well governed, well supported and well propagated, we must build ourselves up in love and keep ourselves always in the love of our Lord.

The Risen Lord saves us and loves us to the very end. We need to communicate with him always, follow closely in his footsteps, and not leave his church. We must train ourselves in piety. Then we may always live together in the Lord and in his love.

*Tian Feng*, March, 1992, p.28.  
Translated by Gail Coulson.

## 16. Humanity, Women and God's Work, A Meditation on Some Women in the Bible - **Wu Ying**

Wu Ying (Ms.) is a fourth-year student at Nanjing Theological Seminary.

Though there were only two people in the garden of Eden, it was a world, perfect and complete. It was complete because there were a man and a woman. Each book of the Bible records the names of women. Though some of these women were not very great or important figures, women are still a very important part of God's work of salvation. One writer has put it this way: "A world without women would not be a true, or a good, let alone a beautiful world." Similarly, without women, God's plan would not be so moving, or so beautiful. Humanity has its contradictions; according to Jakob Boehme (1575 - 1624) the human body is marked with both the image of earth and the image of heaven. The same holds true for women: In their bodies earthly and heavenly elements are mixed just as well. Women have a beautiful, shining side and an ugly, dark side. In what follows, I will talk about some women from the Bible and how these two aspects of their natures were related to the God's work, so that we may draw some spiritual nourishment from their stories.

### *1. The "earthly" character of women.*

Looking at the first woman in Genesis, our earliest ancestress Eve, we are not left with a very good impression. Facing the three great temptations the devil placed before her – covetousness, desires of the flesh and this-worldly pride - our ancestress showed herself very weak. Why did she so easily believe the words of the devil? Why could she not make the right choice between what the devil said and what God said? Why didn't she have the strength to withstand these temptations? I won't deny that this was due to her weak faith, her doubts about what God had said, and her fragility and immaturity. In fact, anyone faced with such a beautiful lie as Eve was might be just as weak. People are free and not free at the same time. After Eve had eaten from the forbidden fruit, she gave some to her husband as an expression of love. He freely accepted this love, but it caused him to lose his freedom.

Another woman in the book of Genesis is the mother of many nations, Sarah. Abraham respected and honored her above Hagar; and it is perhaps due to the fact that Paul, in the New Testament, saw her as a representative of the promise that many Christians have seen only her magnificent side. But the exterior is only one aspect of an incident or a person; there is more behind it. When we read this text, we realize that there is also a dark side to Sarah. She herself gave her maid I Jagar to her husband as a concubine, but when Hagar had borne a son, and Sarah's own dignity was not absolutely honored, she showed herself extremely prejudiced, mean, callous and selfish. Relying on her own position with Abraham, she had Hagar driven out into the wilderness. Poor Hagar: She had neither sufficient water nor bread. Mother and child were lonely wandering in the desert. Sarah and Hagar were both wives, both mothers, both God's daughters: How could Sarah be so hateful and unconcerned? God was different, he called out for Hagar, he cared for the troubled orphan and widow: He gave Hagar water. We can see how God's love, care and compassion are glaringly juxtaposed to Sarah's prejudice, meanness and selfishness. Though the Bible does not record that God criticized Sarah, his action is the judgment of hers.

God does not take Sarah's side while callously casting aside this orphan and widow. On the contrary he comforts them, cares for them, answers them. God is just, he does not take sides. At the same time, we have the Latin proverb "Man is a wolf to man." That is because some people are like Sarah, they see their own power as absolute. If their privileges are threatened, they find all kinds of excuses for turning others out, for treating them like dirt - the one to be pitied in this story is not Hagar, it is Sarah. To defend Sarah and ignore the cries of the orphan and the widow, would be the saddest thing of all.

Rebecca is another woman in Genesis. She was a beautiful, industrious, hospitable woman. When Abraham's servant Eliezer, approached her leading his camels, she took the initiative in drawing water for the camels to help the guests who came from afar. She was not a delicate harem beauty but a grassland, desert rose. She became Isaac's wife. But there was also an ugly side to this beautiful woman. Perhaps it was just common human weakness that she loved her younger son Jacob more than her older son Esau, but as a result the family was split and the brothers harbored hatred for each other. To judge events and criticize others according to one's own pleasure will, in the long run, lead to unforeseen evil consequences. But God is not biased, he does not pervert justice on behalf of the poor, nor contradict himself for the sake of the rich. Augustine says, "God loves everybody, and he loves everybody the same."

There are many more such examples in the Bible: Delilah's boundless pride, licentiousness, and shamelessness; the jealous quarrelling between Syntyche and Euodia and so on.

Brothers and sisters, these weaknesses of the female sex are also the weaknesses of all humanity. One could say that they are deficiencies in human nature, the "earthly" part of our character. Even a reborn Christian cannot be of any use for God's work, for the church, or for the family unless he or she has left these deficiencies behind.

## *2. The "heavenly" character of women.*

The Bible is a like giant mirror, reflecting not only people's inferior sides, but their glory as well. And in the light of God's grace, many sisters overcame their human deficiencies and became God's precious vessels. If we say that their dark sides are a warning to us, then we must also say that their glorious sides are examples for us to emulate.

The book of Samuel tell about Samuel's mother, Hannah, a very pious woman. For many years she was barren, and she silently suffered the humiliation of not having a son. At that time, a woman's worth was decided by whether she had children or not. If she did not have children, she was worth nothing in the eyes of others. What a price a woman, a young woman, has to pay of she goes against the prevailing current of a corrupt society! Still, she quietly put her sufferings before God, gave them to him, though this just earned her the ridicule of others. This is what happened: She quietly gave her troubles to God, and prayed, until finally God granted her wish. The prayer of a good person is very powerful and effective. She became pregnant and gave birth to Samuel, who became a great and useful servant of God. Piety is the first step in working together with God. Without Hannah's piety, there would not have been a Samuel, there would not have been a servant of God, and even less would there have been an epic in Israel's history that has moved many people to tears. People are limited, but from within these limitations one can think and strive without limitations, and this is the manifestation of infinity within the

finite. It is only by this "image of heaven" that God has bestowed on humanity that limited human beings can know and plead with the Unlimited One - God.

The Old Testament Book of Esther records the story of an Israelite heroine - the empress Esther. Her self-sacrificing spirit has been praised by people throughout history. When she was chosen for the palace, the people of Israel were at a dangerous moment of their history: Haman had been able to get an order from King Xerxes to eradicate the whole people of Israel. We can imagine, that if Esther, at this critical point, had been just a little careless, she would not only have lost her position as empress, but would also have endangered her life. But she did not give a single thought to this. Instead, employing her position and the respect she enjoyed with the king, and putting to use the wisdom God had given her, she destroyed the enemy and brought lasting peace for the Jews out of a situation of danger. We should especially emulate Esther in one thing: she did not rely only on her own abilities, but on God's action. She asked all the Jews in the city to fast with her for three days and three nights. This shows her piety, her reliance on God, her cool-headedness, and her wisdom. Though her position was so elevated, she did not forget her responsibility and her mission. This story shows us the glimmer of the heavenly glory visible in human beings: We can dare to break through the confines of darkness, we can know that power includes responsibility, and that glory contains a mission.

The book of Joshua tells about a foreign woman called Rahab. She lived in the city of Jericho and was a prostitute. Now when people hear this word "prostitute," they think of a brazen and licentious woman who sells her body. Rahab was such a despised, loathed person, treated with disgust. But in the end, this woman whom everyone despised, became one of the great people of faith, and even part of Jesus' family tree. The Bible tells us how Rahab relied on faith when she sheltered two enemy spies and how resourceful she was in leading astray their pursuers. She ensured their safe return and so made it possible for the Israelites to attack and seize Jericho. Rahab is renowned and honored because of her resourcefulness and courage, her choice to take a risk, and also because she recognized that the God of the Israelites was so high that nothing was above him, that he was the Most High, the only true God. She knew that the one who could save her and her family was the God Yahweh. So she paid no attention to her lowly position, or to others' low opinion. She courageously received God's chosen people, and single-heartedly relied on God's care and salvation. Faced with the alternative of clinging to the past or going forward into the future, she chose the future; between existence and destruction she chose existence. She was resourceful, and, even more, intelligent. In her, we can also see the glimmering halo of the "heavenly image": Circumstances cannot destroy a person who has a firm faith; on the contrary, a firm faith does not only enable a person to dare transcend circumstances, but even to dare to transcend his or her own body.

There are many more such women in the Bible. For example, there is the love of Shulamith, the unquestioning service of the mother of God, Mary, and many others. It is because these women were able to overcome the deficiencies of being polluted by evil and were able to continue neither to stray from God's guidance and keeping nor from their own piety and service that later generations praised these women and followed their example.

### *3. Women in God's work.*

God's work of salvation cannot do without either men or women. Women hold a very special position in God's work. In Old Testament times there were female warriors who valiantly fought the enemy and wisely governed the country, and there were prophetesses who

cared about country and people and who cried out for justice. In New Testament times there were female pastors, deaconesses, and evangelists who loved God and the people and wholeheartedly gave their service. One can say that without women there would be no humanity. Without women, there would be no Christ, and there would be no salvation. Somebody once said: "Behind every great man there is a great woman." This is true. It starts right with Moses who led the Israelites out of Egypt: If he had not been protected by his mother and sister, there would not have been a Moses, and the dawn of the people of Israel may have been put off indefinitely. Behind both the old church father Augustine and the great reformer Martin Luther, were pious women who helped, encouraged, shed tears, and prayed.

Shortly before Jesus went to the cross, when he felt so wretched and when even his disciples who had been with him for three years could not comprehend him, only Mary Magdalene understood the Lord's feelings. She comforted him by serving him. When the Lord was nailed to the cross, only women stood silently underneath the cross, looking up to the Lord, staying with him. This is why God regards women so very highly. When the risen Lord first appeared, it was to a woman, Mary Magdalene. The message that the Lord was risen was first spread by women, too. Who knows, when the Lord comes again, the first one to see him may well be a woman!

It is the "earthly image" in people that obstructs God's work. On the other hand, it is their "heavenly image" that enables people to be co-workers of God, to participate in God's holy work. In the New Testament, among the great women who participated in God's work none is greater than Mary, the mother of the Lord. She was not only the carrier of the word who became flesh, but for God's holy work she also silently bore the humiliation of her virginity and the pain of motherhood. For the sake of the God's work she sacrificed herself, and her beloved son. Pious, obedient, she silently endured other people's disdain, she silently gazed at the son who had gone away from her, and she silently changed her own viewpoint- from stroking the head of her son Jesus to looking up and worshipping the Lord of Heaven. Her motherly feelings were deepened to quiet worship. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, her heart was nailed to the cross with the Lord, and when one of the Roman soldiers pierced Jesus Christ's side with a spear, he pierced the heart of the Holy Mother even more. As she stood under the cross, she did not wail and cry out, she did not call to heaven and earth, but because of God's work, she silently endured, was obedient and worshipped.

Brothers and sisters, the difference in our sex has been predetermined by God. Whether we are male or female, we do carry God's special, beautiful intention in our bodies. The weaknesses of the female sex are weaknesses we have in common with all of humanity. Let us then strive, before the Lord, to cast off the "earthly image" in our bodies which does not give any joy to God, and put on the "heavenly image." The Bible is our mirror, so that we may not resemble Eve in childishness, Sarah in meanness, and Rebecca in bias, but rather that we do our utmost to follow the example of Hannah's piety, Esther's self-sacrificing spirit, Rahab's resourcefulness, and, even more, the Holy Mother Mary's silent obedience, worship, and gazing at the Lord of Heaven.

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Translated by Claudia Wahrisch Oblau.



## 17. God's Love is Greater than Father Love - **Chen Kuanrong**

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When Dr. Chou Lien-hwa of Taiwan came to Nanjing he preached in the Mochou Street Church using the verse "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). He began with the question, "What in the world has the greatest power?" The answer: "God's love." Then he asked, "Where then is God's love? Where can we go to find God's love?" Answer: "God is love."

This powerful, ringing answer brought a sympathetic response from my heart. Many people acknowledge that "God is love," and the lifetime of experience of many others confirms its truth.

But many people still do not understand God's love. What exactly does God's love mean and to what human love can it be compared? Some people say: "The Lord Jesus taught us to call God Father, and when praying most people like to say, 'loving heavenly Father,' therefore it is reasonable to think of God as a father figure, and natural to compare her love to a father's love."

But I want to add that while the Lord Jesus taught us to call on our Heavenly Father, he does not say God's image is that of any earthly father. What he wants us to consider is a father that earnestly looks forward - as the father of the prodigal - in hope to his son's return; a father who gives his child the milk of love without strings or conditions attached, an unlimited love. A love that fills a child's cup with true joy.

But how many fathers are there like that in the world? We Chinese have an old saying "a strict father and a loving mother." For most people, "father" means one who is very "strict," even to the point of being utterly unreasonable, often to the extreme of taking out his frustrations and anger by striking the child. This is what a tyrant does of course, and it is wrong. Even down to our day it has not been the experience of many people to link the idea of "father" and "loving" together. Hence for these people the image "father" conjures up is not a pleasant one, their view of what the word means has been warped. It becomes obvious that with the wrong kind of earthly father it is difficult for people to know God's perfect love. To find a better understanding of God's love we must examine it from different angles.

Indeed, God's love is perfect. Compared to the love of a parent or a love one her love is longer-lasting, broader in scope, higher and deeper. Her love is sacred, without limits, unending, filling every corner of the universe. The cross of Jesus Christ is the essence of God's love. Because of love Christ sacrificed himself to save the world's sinners. His love is complete in every way. He not only has the power of a prince to rule the universe, but also the strength of a warrior to save humanity and defeat sin. He also has a healing hand that can heal whatever ails the body the soul. At the same time, he has a mother's goodness, tenderness, and love, her quiet labor and self-sacrifice. Truly, God's love cannot be compared to human love. Yet in the Bible we discover God's love is more often than not compared to that of a parent, a lover, a friend and so on. But God's love is best compared to a mother's love. The prophet Isaiah said: "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your

birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (Is. 46:3-4).

In these two Bible verses we find some remarkable phrases which are repeated such as "borne by me," "carried," and "saved." These words easily lead us to think of a mother's love, of the comfort and tenderness of our mother's embrace. It is a mother's special task to carry a child in the womb, and so it is with God who treats his sons and daughters like a mother does her children.

Our God, from out of the highest reaches of heaven, shared his love with us sinners, by giving his only begotten son to suffer and die on the cross, a far greater suffering and pain than any mother ever endured. And because he suffered we receive new life.

When a child is young only the mother's love will suffice. Her love is painstakingly careful, gentle, and the dearest of comforts to the little life. She patiently teaches the child to walk, to talk, and knows the child's schedule so well that before the child demands it she has put her breast to its lips. There are no words that adequately express this kind of love. Our God treats us just this way. When we are young in the spiritual life, God cares for us like a mother hen cares for her chicks, gathering us to his bosom, to feed and nourish them.

It is just as the prophet Hosea said, "Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; ... I led them with cords of Human kindness, with the bands of love ... I bent down to them and fed them" (Hosea 11:3-4). This is how God loves us. After I repented and believed in the Lord, I felt that every verse I read in the Bible was a lamp unto my feet and a light on my path. Every step of the way she leads us to walk the upright path. When I feel something lacking within, the words of the Bible become my bread of life, for she is constantly feeding me. Truly, this is like a mother caring for her little ones.

Ever since I was a child I enjoyed teasing and playing with children. But when my teasing scared them, they would run to their mothers. In their mothers' arms they would turn their victorious little faces and give a reassured smile. When a child is sick or uncomfortable, nothing is better than resting in the mother's arms. We can see that for a child the mother's bosom is the warmest, safest of places to be. It is like having heaven in their heart. Is it any wonder that the child's favorite place to sleep is in its mother's arms? The Psalmist David said: "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother" (Ps. 131:2). He tells us that a mother's bosom can calm a wildly beating heart. What a beautiful scene. David is not really in his mother's arms, but because he has turned his life over to God, his heart is calm. He is truly lying in the embrace of eternal love; that is, the great love God has for us.

When a child is hurt and confused a mother will rack her brains thinking of every possible way to comfort, help and cheer up the child. Isaiah 66:13 says: "as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you." This naturally makes us all think of a mother's love. We have all experienced this as a child and we have likewise experienced God's comfort and care. Think back carefully on this eternal loving embrace. How many lonely, hurting hearts were warmed, how many wronged hearts were comforted, how many with grief and sorrow whose tears were dried. This is God's love.

True, a mother's love is great, there is nothing in this world so pure, so noble. That is because mother love never seeks compensation, does not even require a word of thanks. She asks only to see the fruits of her labors with her own eyes, and she is content. (See Isaiah

53:11.) Though there is no selfishness in her love, there is a spirit of self-sacrifice. This uncomplaining, self-giving spirit is what sustains a family through turmoil and trouble. Mother love even protects the nation and its people. Famous writers throughout history have written in praise of their mothers.

True, mothers are great, but they are also human, their lives are finite, and at any moment they may leave us. The prophet Isaiah said: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15-16). A mother's love is limited by time and space. But our God is omnipresent and is not limited by such things. Whatever the time or place, our God is with us. His love will follow us forever. In the English Bible, Isaiah, chapter 46, verse three, the words "borne" and "carried" are used. These words are in the past tense. A completed action. Verse four says "I will bear; I will carry" and "will save." This is future tense. This means God's love for us was, is now and always will be. From the moment of our birth through old age and even into eternity, he will never leave us nor forsake us. God's loves us to the very end, for it is a never-resting holy love.

Since God loves us with this kind of love, how should we love God? I ask this especially for those who have received God's call to his service. How shall we, who are called of God, carry out the task he has entrusted to us, how shall we feed God's sheep? Saint Paul said it well, "nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others .... But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children" (1Thess. 2:6-7). Every servant of God should have this attitude and commitment. A mother nurses her child, for this is the unique experience of mothers, but Paul here also has the experience of a child at the mother's breast. Because he has known a mother's love, he honors mothers from the bottom of his heart, and quietly and humbly learns from them. He wants to care for the Lord's sheep as a mother cares for her children.

And should we not have this same commitment toward the church? Let us look again at what the prophet Isaiah said: "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God" (Is. 40:1). Without a mother's love in his heart, could Isaiah fulfill this heavy task? In the family of God, he possessed sacred mother love, so he could comfort those who have lost heart and hope, those lost souls, and fulfill his mission from God.

Today God has given us the task of pastoring his church and comforting his sheep. We should be like the prophets, and the disciples finding revelation in mother love, so that we may attain both yang strength and yin\* gentleness, in order to be good stewards of God's church and be able to truly pastor the church well, as a mother cares for her children. We must have a mother's heart of love to love God and love people. May each of us who have received his call begin now, with all our strength, seek to live life, so that we are ever moving forward toward the wholeness and completeness that makes us more like our Lord himself, until we are loyal servants of one mind and heart with God. Amen.

[\*In Chinese philosophy and cosmology, *yin* and *yang* are the two aspects of the unity and harmony of the universe. *Yin* has been termed the female principle, while *yang* is the male principle.]

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Translated by Britt Towery.

## 18. What She Has Done Will Be Told in Remembrance of Her - Peng Yaqian

Peng Yaqian (Ms.) is a graduate of Nanjing Theological Seminary and now an instructor there. She preached this sermon at St. Paul's Church, Nanjing, on International Women's Day (8 March), 1992.

Today is International Women's Day and I'd like to wish all the women present a Happy Women's Day. Both my text and my topic for today are concerned with a woman, a Jewish woman named Mary.

Let us first read Mark 14, verses 3 through 9 and Matthew 26, verses 6 through 13. Both passages record the same story, and if we compare them we will discover that there are very few differences between them, though Mark's account is more detailed than Matthew's.

The story takes place in Bethany at the house of Simon the Leper. Simon the Leper, Jesus, the twelve and a woman (with a jar of ointment) are present. While they were at table, a woman came in with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, which she broke open, pouring the ointment onto Jesus' head. The disciples were very angry at this and questioned Jesus about it. Jesus said: "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ...Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Did you note the force of Jesus' words? "Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." I wonder if the women here today have thought about what it was that the woman did for Jesus'? What was it that earned her Jesus' praise?

Before we analyze what happened, let us look at two other passages of Scripture: Luke 7: 36-50 and John 12: 3-S, which tell a story similar to that in our first two passages; some people believe it is the same story.

Luke says: "And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he (Jesus) was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment."

Let us see what the Lord said to her: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

And in John we find: "Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?'" And what did Jesus' say of this woman's actions? "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

In these verses, we do not find Jesus telling his disciples that what the woman has done will be spoken throughout the world in remembrance of her. It is only in Mark 14:9 and Matthew 26:13, that we find Jesus making such a statement.

What then had this woman done to be praised so highly?

## I

The fact that what she did happened before Jesus was crucified has a special spiritual significance. It revealed that Jesus was king and that he would die and be buried.

In the Old Testament, those who were made kings were anointed by the priests. I Samuel 10:1 records the story of Samuel anointing Saul as king: "Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him, he said, 'The Lord has anointed you ruler over his people Israel.'" And again in I Sam. 16:13, we find the story of David's anointing. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers ....."

Jesus, however, is anointed by an ordinary woman; an event truly unprecedented in the history of the Jewish people of Israel. Samuel was a prophet, while this woman had no standing of any kind in society. Neither her name nor her standing is recorded in either Mark or Matthew. (In John's Gospel we are told that she is Mary, Martha's sister.) But God works through an ordinary woman to accomplish a *good service*. And in this event we can see that God is a God who transcends history, a God in whose eyes there is no difference between male and female; all persons are made in the image of God. In Biblical days however, the Jews unequivocally looked down upon women. They believed that women's lives revolved around men. Moreover, women and children were not included in the totals when the number of people were counted. "The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children" (Ex. 12:37). "And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children" (Mt. 14:21).

According to historians, in biblical times, the lives of Israelite women basically revolved around those of the men; but in religious matters, they could also, to a certain extent, become God's instruments; they could prophesy and be prophets. We might say then that in Old Testament (or biblical) times, prejudice against women existed such that men were valued over women, but that when it was necessary for the good of society, in matters of religion women also had position and power.

In this event, I see another point where women have profound powers of understanding with regard to the word of God. They do not simply rely upon reason, but more, upon knowing with the heart, and carry things out in action. So the women in the Bible frequently sense, understand and believe before the disciples do (see Mk. 16:10; Lk. 24:11). When the disciples see the woman break open the jar of pure nard and pour it over Jesus' head, they are thrown into confusion, some were so upset that they said, "Why this waste'? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor." And some of them were angry with the woman. See how some of them scolded her. They so misunderstood what this woman had done. They really couldn't work out why she had been so wasteful, how could this be worth anything? Yes, what they saw was limited to the material objects involved in her action - a jar of pure nard had been broken, what a pity! It might have been sold for three hundred denarii, no paltry sum. But they had failed to consider what was in the Lord's heart. He was to be crucified - how in need he was of kindness, comfort and understanding. If we

read on in the passage, we will find that in fact, Jesus had already told his disciples three times about his passion and resurrection. The disciples, however, listened but did not hear, looked but did not see, only the woman understood Jesus' heart, and before he was to be crucified, anointed him with this pure nard. Truly this was a good service and Jesus praised her greatly for it.

## II

This woman poured herself out for the Lord, with her life savings she completely and thoroughly offered herself, just as she broke the pure nard and offered it to Jesus.

In the currency of the day, three hundred denarii was equal to a year's wages for a laborer. Yet these three hundred denarii might have represented the savings of a long time for this woman, her life savings, all she had. She was like the widow with her mite, she gave the money she had to support herself to the Lord. Thus Jesus said, "She has done all that she can; she bought it so that she might keep it for my burial."

Not one disciple understood the true meaning of her action, what's more, they were angry with her. Here we can't help but think of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus returned and saw them all sleeping, he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?" At the time though the disciples' were not asleep, their eyes were heavy and they did fall asleep. Only this woman suffered together with the Lord. Her perception of what was in the Lord's heart gave him great comfort and help. None of the disciples could be compared to her. This passage tells of this woman's greatness, her selflessness, powers of perception and intelligence. From what is recorded in the gospel, we may make the following discovery: Women's faith seems to be stronger than that of the disciples. When Jesus breathed his last upon the cross, many women were there: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ... and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem." And the first person to go to the tomb was also a woman, as was the first person to see the risen Lord.

I am not trying to say here that women's love for Jesus is greater than that of their brothers, rather that women are as important as their brothers in God's eyes. But at times we may indeed have the feeling that God has specially blessed women. Think for a moment of churches all over China; women certainly outnumber the men at worship. Perhaps, to be more precise, we should say that Jesus has more affection for those who have no other to rely on but rely with all their hearts upon him; those who become like little children; those who hear and believe and do; those who sense and understand what is in his heart.

This woman was an intelligent woman loved by God who treasured every moment that she could spend with the Lord. She possessed all the virtues of a Christian: faith, hope and love, and eyes of wisdom and spirit.

May you sisters, even more you brothers, and all those who love the Lord, understand what is in the Lord's heart as this woman did and accomplish much good service.

Let us all hear and follow Jesus words to us: "Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

This sermon was inspired by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's book, *In Memory of Her* (Crossroad: 1987).

Translated by Janice Wickeri.

## 19. A Faith Transformed - Ji Tai

Ji Tai (Rev.) is a graduate of Nanjing Theological Seminary and now an instructor there in Old Testament Theology. He has studied in Germany and was ordained at the joint ordination service in Beijing during the Fifth NCC.

Text: Philippians 3:7

Paul was not one of the original twelve disciples chosen by Jesus: later, however, he was chosen by God to serve him in a special way. He was to spread the gospel to the Gentiles, that all people the world over might attain salvation. This tremendous change in his life was the result of his conversion on the road to Damascus. What was the transformation this unique experience caused in him?

### (1)

Paul was not a man without faith nor did he lead a wild or dissolute life. He was a traditional Jew who had been born into the Israelite tribe of Benjamin and was circumcised. When he had come of age, he was taught by Gamaliel, and joined the especially reverent and law-abiding sect of the Pharisees. Moreover, Paul was a zealous apologist who persecuted the growing number of "heretics" whom he felt should be imprisoned. These included those who believed in Jesus. He at first considered these aspects of his past life as "gains," insisting that only those who respect the law of Moses are saved and that Gentiles were outside God's grace.

The illumination on the road to Damascus and his period of "retirement" afterwards had a profound effect on Paul's faith. He said, "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ." In his vision of Jesus Christ, Paul saw that he had been blinded by his traditional beliefs, unable to see God's new revelation or the miracle of the Christian gospel. He also saw that God wanted this message spread, not only to the Jews, but to the Gentiles as well. Paul's impeccable morality had served to make him righteous in his own eyes, but was a denial of the saving grace realized by Jesus Christ on the cross.

The transformation of his faith was not easy or undemanding for Paul, it was a painful process. The Holy Spirit which leads to the truth cut like a sharp sword through the marks of traditions forged over thousands of years which shielded Paul. He then undertook a thorough-going process of theological reflection on the revelation of God, from ancient times when he spoke through the prophets, to the revelation of Jesus Christ, and he reflected on the Greek culture of his day. Whereupon he had to take up what the Lord had entrusted to him, to explain the fullness of Christ's gospel to the poor and simple people of the world, as well as to expound the mysteries of the word of God to the learned.

We can say that the transformation of Paul's faith was an act which raised it to the sublime. This act of elevation had a decisive influence on the spread of the gospel, and was the reason God called Paul at that time.



## (2)

Today, as we read the Book of Philippians twenty centuries after the time of our Lord and in a period which is completely different from Paul's, God is certainly giving us a new revelation.

In the 1930s, a French author wrote a book called *The Little Prince* which contained the following story. The Little Prince traveled through space until he came to a small planet where he met an old man lighting a street lamp. After saying "Good evening!", the old man blew out the lamp and then lit it again. He repeated this ritual once a minute. The Little Prince thought this was very strange, and so asked why the old man behaved in this way. The old man replied that the small planet was turning faster and faster, that each night was only a minute long and that the tradition for lighting and extinguishing the lamp was very old.

This story illustrates the inappropriateness of continuing old customs in the present. We live in circumstances completely different from those of our ancestors. Our social background is different, we have received a different education, we have different problems and a different way of thinking. Naturally, the way we receive and express our faith will also be also different. We cannot simply imitate what has been done before.

The gradual growth of believers among young people in recent years leads us to reflect on how to spread the gospel among modern people. We find that we must choose an appropriate language in which to preach the gospel among people who have received an atheist education and who have been taught to worship modern science.

## (3)

In order to fulfill this goal, we must constantly and deeply reflect on our own faith.

When we hear our Lord's call, receive his guidance and sacrifice ourselves for his gospel, we must undergo an experience similar to that of the Apostle Paul. Our faith must be transformed. This is something we must readily acknowledge.

I remember that when I first began to study theology, there were some brothers and sisters in my church who were afraid that I would gain knowledge, but lose my faith. Their anxiety was not unfounded. If our goal in studying theology is only to increase our knowledge of God, then our studies will not nourish our faith. However, if we really desire to know God in a way that combines our spirits and minds, then we will certainly discover that "whatever gains we had" are now to be "regarded as loss." This comes about "for the sake of Christ."

Very often we take certain external religious practices or certain people's teachings and accord them the status of objects of worship, rather than reserving this status for the person of Jesus. For example, I formerly thought that only baptism by total immersion was in accordance with the Scriptures. After I had done more systematic study of the New Testament and church history, I realized that baptism by sprinkling is consistent with Scriptures and was an early tradition of the church. What is important in this ceremony is not the outward form, but the repentance and rebirth that it symbolizes. I once heard some people expounding on the Book of Revelation, saying that it says that only 144,000 people will be

saved, and that those who have this understanding can feel assured of their salvation. Later, my understanding of apocalyptic literature and the truth of the Bible progressed, and I learned the symbolic significance of this, namely that it means salvation is for all people; that people from all races and nations will be called before God's throne. God does not want even one person to be lost; he wants everyone to be saved. The door of the gospel is open for everyone to enter.

We might say that something is lost when faith is transformed. But that which is lost is only what Paul also "regarded as loss" because it was an obstacle to his true understanding of Jesus Christ as Savior.

Let us reflect on the transformation of Paul's faith, open our hearts and receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Let each of us who is called, dedicate ourselves to God and become, like Paul, servants useful to God, that we may be a witness to the gospel of Christ in our time.

Translated by Craig Moran.

## 20. Some Things Left Undone - Zhang Xianyong

Zhang Xianyong (Rev.) is a graduate of Nanjing Theological Seminary and is now associate dean of studies there. He has also studied in the United States.

Text: Exodus 18: 13-27

In his fortieth year out of Egypt, Moses, the "man of God," was carefully explaining the law to the Israelites gathered on the Moab plain east of the Jordan River. Most of his listeners were young people who had grown up in the wilderness. Moses' talks here make up the content of the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses starts out by recalling his brilliant initiative in appointing judges as the leaders of the people and points out: "But how can I bear the heavy burden of your disputes all by myself?" (Deut. 1:12). Whereupon he decided, "Choose for each of your tribes, individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders" (v.13). Perhaps the young people were not clear about what disputes there may have been among the people, but the older people had fresh memories of them: for example, when they saw Pharaoh's armies coming after them, they complained: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" They felt it would have been better to be slaves of the Egyptians (Ex. 14: 9-12); finding the water of Marah bitter, they again complained against Moses (Ex. 15: 22-26); and later they complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, homesick for the fleshpots of Egypt (Ex. 16: 1-3); and later still, camped at Rephidim, they quarreled with Moses over water, complaining, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt?" The situation was serious and Moses prayed, "They are almost ready to stone me" (Ex. 17:1-7). These were events Moses would remember till he died, and in his later years was especially cheered by remembering the decision of that year to select the worthy to rule the people. Yet, even as we see in Exodus 18: 13-27, Moses' brilliant decision was the result of his adopting Jethro's suggestion.

The passage in which Jethro offers his advice, is a particularly well-organized and coherent narrative. More than this, it also contains abundant spiritual significance and profound teaching. At times we might even find there key factors about the modern science of personnel, management, the art of leadership, law, social psychology and even household management. But for today, let us focus on Jethro's suggestion and its significance.

Jethro was also called Reuel (Ex. 2:18). He was the priest of Midian (v.16) and he had seven daughters. One of them, Zipporah, had married Moses when he fled to Midian to hide from Pharaoh after killing a man, and had borne two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. At the time this passage refers to he had heard how Yahweh brought Israel out of the land of Egypt and so he brought Zipporah and his two grandsons to find Moses. When they reached the mountain of God, that is Mount Sinai, (which the *Today's Chinese Version* gives as Horeb in Deut. 1:9) and saw Moses, it was already three months since the Israelites had left Egypt (see Ex. 19:1). Meeting again after this separation, Jethro's first reaction was to rejoice that Yahweh had saved Israel, saying, "Blessed be the Lord, ... Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them" (see 18:9-11). And then he offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings, and, together with Aaron and the elders of Israel, ate "bread ... in the presence of God" (v.12). All of which goes to show that Jethro was truly a pious man who loved God. Looking at the whole process by

which Jethro offered his advice, we see that he was quite a wise man. The Bible records three steps in this process:

1) Investigation (v.14-16). Jethro lost no time in employing both his senses and his mental faculties in understanding the situation. He was very patient, "while the people stood around him (Moses) from morning until evening," Jethro stayed there throughout observing and pondering, and "saw all that he (Moses) was doing for the people." Not only did he observe things himself, he questioned those involved directly in order to ensure that the results of the investigation might be more objective and accurate. This was a wise thing to do, because an individual has the tendency to be subjective, or to project his or her own likes and dislikes onto the situation, and this can affect the accuracy of the judgment. If the judgment is faulty, then the policy or any suggestions based on it must also be thrown into question. Traditional Chinese medicine stresses the "four methods of diagnosis": observation, auscultation and olfaction, interrogation and pulse feeling and palpitation - a gathering of the data supplied by a comprehensive examination of the appearance, listening to the breathing, questioning about symptoms and taking the pulse for an accurate diagnosis leading to a correct prescription of medicine. The same principle applies here. Moses' replies to his queries aid Jethro by verifying his observations and helping him to understand the attitudes of those involved. From this it can be seen that Jethro's investigations were quite successful.

2) Criticism (v.17-18). Jethro is a pious priest who loves God; he is also Moses' father-in-law, and thus fully qualified to instruct him, but he did not bear down on him with all the weight of Mount Tai.\* Quite the opposite, he first expressed his good intentions and then made careful investigations. Only once he had a firm grasp of the facts on which to base his comments did he raise criticisms of Moses' leadership. "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." The way he raised his criticisms was also very astute: 1) he did not do it publicly in front of the people; 2) his target was the facts, not Moses personally; 3) in helping Moses, his intentions were good-he wasn't availing himself of an opportunity to strike Moses down; and 4) he set out the facts and used reason to win him over. As a result, Moses "listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said" (v.24). Often when we encounter a problem we have reasonable views to offer, but fail to consider whether they will be acceptable to others, and further complicate the matter with personal feelings, so that no solution can be found. I can offer many personal experiences of this by way of negative example. So if the old saying, "think thrice before acting," is to be vindicated, it would have to be proven through numerous successful instances.

[\*One of the sacred mountains of China, a symbol of great weight and import, and an old-fashioned term for father-in-law.]

3) Offering good advice (v. 19-22). Discovering the faults in Moses' work and offering sincere and well-meaning criticism is already quite a feat. A prescription for a solution poses greater difficulties, because the "man of God" Moses is also a miraculous healer versed in "medicine." Could you be more skilful? Never! But the point here is not to compare the brilliance of Moses as against that of Jethro, rather it is to underscore the fact that "everyone has both strengths and weaknesses." We have a folk saying that goes "the onlooker sees most of the game." We also say "he who can resist kibitzing while watching a chess game is truly a gentleman." If you jump in with all sorts of suggestions while others are happily engaged in a chess match, you're more than likely to receive a scolding for your pains. Suppose the game

is as good as lost and the person is not keen on making a comeback, but you persist in trying to plot his strategy. "He who receives ample assistance is blessed indeed," but being on the receiving end of all that advice does not necessarily engender feelings of gratitude. If you're not careful, you'll be checkmated: "Okay, know-it-all, how about you and I having a game?" Fortunately Moses, being Moses, could tell good from bad and did not take it amiss; and Jethro, being Jethro, though making negative criticism, also made positive suggestions and offered constructive opinions. And Jethro was also quite astute in giving advice - to know oneself is knowledge; to know others is wisdom. He knew Moses' gifts as well as his own particular skills. He did not have an "I'm better than you" attitude. And he certainly wasn't foolish enough to undermine Moses or try to take his place. Quite the contrary, in his fondness for Moses, he was thinking only of him, hoping Moses was determined upon reform, would set up an effective administrative system, and become a wise leader of the Israelites in reality as well as in name.

This third step marks the zenith of this passage. What Jethro said in his advice to Moses is extremely profound. Let us try to approach it from four aspects.

1) Entrusting things to God (v.19). "God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God." This means: 1) Look to God, draw ability, knowledge and wisdom from above; 2) Do not become a judge, settling the people's disputes; but become a priest, representing them in bringing their cases before God; 3) In order to have greater communication with the Lord above, to truly offer oneself, to be a true servant of God, one should not be encumbered by petty affairs of daily life. Such entrusting to God was of the highest importance to a religious leader such as Moses. In bringing this up, Jethro wasn't simply whistling in the dark. It would hard to imagine that the mediator, lost in the petty affairs of the people from morning to night, would have much time to draw near to God. Looking at Moses' whole life, we see that he had overcome many internal and external conflicts, and in this his main support was this entrusting of things to God which was part of his life of faith.

2) Teaching (v.20). "... teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do." Disputes were always arising among the people, there were endless accusations, which showed that they were uneducated, unable to tell right from wrong, undisciplined. But all these were problems related to leadership, as it says in the *Three Character Classic*: "If a child is not educated, it is the fault of the father; if the education is not strict, it is because the teacher is lazy." Moses had been determined to teach the people to know "the statutes and instructions of God" (v.16), but had not had much success and this led Jethro to stress the question of teaching. All colleagues and classmates here today are ministers of the Chinese Protestant church (current or future), and all of us have the common responsibility to teach and pastor the believers, to "teach them the statutes and instructions of God." But if we are to know what those statutes and instructions are, we must first learn ourselves. To send someone to their death for a crime without educating them is the greatest error; while one who knows (the law) yet deliberately breaks it, cannot be pardoned. When Jethro said it must be made known to the people "the way they are to go and the things they are to do," his purpose was not only healing, but prevention.

3) Selection of the able (v.21). There are two key points here: 1) In addition to ability, there were three other criteria: fear of God, trustworthiness and hate of dishonest gain. *Today's English Version* translates this verse as " They must be God-fearing men who can be trusted and who cannot be bribed." In Deut. 1:13-17, Moses sets this out clearly, those who are chosen to be leaders of the people, should be "wise, discerning and reputable to be your leaders ... you must not be partial in judging; hear out the small and the great alike; you shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's." Jethro's criteria can still guide us today in choosing people of ability and integrity, who have both spiritual and intellectual attainments, to serve the Chinese church. 2) Assign responsibility according to ability. Though not as marked as in the parables (e.g., Luke 19:11-27), the principle of the appropriate use of talent is still clearly contained in the four levels of position. People have different gifts and abilities and even similar gifts are given in varying amounts; therefore Jethro gives concrete advice about suiting the person to the demands of the job.

4) Division of labor (v.22). The first half of the verse talks about requirements, the last half about consequences. There are three requirements: 1) The duties of those selected: "Let them sit as judges for the people at all times." These words "at all times" are of great importance, because if there is to be division of labor, each one must fulfill their responsibilities to the utmost in mediating disputes, and must not "pass the buck," or arbitrarily procrastinate. 2) For important cases, Moses' intervention would be sought. Judges could not speak out recklessly, nor act upon their own presumption, in order to avoid embarrassment to the highest authority (Moses). Jethro made a point of reminding Moses that after selecting the leaders of the people he should still have them "bring every important case to you." He was obviously speaking out of the following considerations: one was that for certain complex and crucial problems the verdict could only be decided by Moses himself; the other was that Moses should still be in charge of important, fundamental matters. Things should not be allowed to go from "controlling with all matters alike regardless of their importance," to the other extreme of "relinquishing control of all matters alike regardless of their importance." A third consideration was that there must be an overseer in charge of the lower ranks of the people, in order to regulate their work and dealings with each other. Unfortunately, mortals never appreciate wisdom like this. When I was a boy I read *The Romance of the Western Han* and greatly sympathized with Han Xin, but I didn't think much of Lu Hou or of Liu Bang, who came to be revered as "Legalists". There were many reasons for my dislike of these two. One reason I sympathized with Han Xin, was the story of "the more the better." As the *Records of the Grand Historian* of China tell it: "'About how many soldiers could a person like myself command?' asked the emperor. 'Your majesty would not exceed the hundred thousand class,' replied Han Xin. 'And what about yourself?' 'As for me, the more the better!'"\* Han Xin told the truth, but elicited the envy and hatred of others, which finally caused his death. In fact, the key to Liu Bang's defeat of the Hegemon of Chu lay in commanding generals, not in commanding soldiers. 3) Taking a less cautious approach toward trusting in and handing over to one's subordinates also leads to cooperation in division of labor: "So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you."

Once Moses had taken his father-in-law's advice, things did turn out as Jethro said: "If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace" (v.23). From Deuteronomy, we find proof that the "new governance" Moses applied on Jethro's advice was widely welcomed by the people, they answered Moses saying, "The plan you have proposed is a good one" (Deut. 1:14).

[\*From "The Biography of the Marquis of Huaiyin (Han Xin)," in *Records of the Grand Historian*, translated from the Shi Ji of Sima Qian by Burton Watson (forthcoming from Renditions Books and Columbia University Press, 1992).]

As Orientals, and especially as Chinese reading this passage, it seems many times closer to us. The advice of Jethro, priest of Midian, not only helped Moses and the people of Israel, it also provided the theoretical basis for the establishment and perfection of Israel's civil administration in later years. Even more, for us today as we seek to follow God's will and run the Chinese church well according to the democratic spirit, relying on the wisdom and efforts of all, it contains much teaching and revelation. At the same time as we appreciate Jethro and his wise advice, we recall Moses, the "man of God," with even deeper emotion. He was God's servant, "faithful in all God's house" (Heb. 3:5; compare v.2), because "by faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ... for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:24-25, 27). Though a democratic system had not yet taken shape, and sometimes in his early governance of the people of Israel he tended to run everything without consultation, yet once he was corrected, he readily accepted good advice, said farewell to the past and opened up great prospects for future generations. The essence of Moses' "new governance" may be said to lie in "some things left undone." It was not a question of "attempting nothing and accomplishing nothing," but a more positive and wiser action: When one is a servant of God and a co-worker with others, some things must be entrusted to God; for others, one must rely on one's colleagues. Moses did not abuse God's gifts. In serving God he learned the lesson of knowing his subordinates well enough to assign them jobs commensurate with their abilities. He also knew himself and left some things undone precisely because he wished to allow God to accomplish even greater things in him!

Translated by Janice Wickeri.