

**CHINESE  
THEOLOGICAL  
REVIEW**

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## From the Editor

With this volume of *The Chinese Theological Review*, a new numbering system goes into effect. Originally, each volume was designated by the year in which the articles it contained were written. In practice this system became rather mechanical and unwieldy, particularly as the volume was often retrospective rather than current. With the increasing amount of material available for consideration, such time constraints are even less desirable. While the *Review* will continue to offer mainly current writings, a simple volume number should allow greater flexibility and less confusion. The current volume is volume 8, containing sermons and essays published 1992-1993.

One change leads to others. A new volume number provides a good opportunity to introduce a more distinctive cover design, graced with our title in Chinese calligraphy written by Mr. Xu Rulei, the Librarian of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. In addition, individual pieces in the essay section of each volume will be accompanied by a brief introductory note which will provide the reader with a more concrete frame of reference and preclude the need for a lengthy preface.

The sermons in this eighth volume are taken from a collection of sermons by young seminarians at Nanjing Seminary and published in 1988 as a *Nanjing Theological Review* publication, *The Mountains n' Spices*. The title is taken from the Song of Solomon 8: 14: "Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices." Most of the authors have completed their seminary studies and are now working in churches, seminaries and Christian Councils throughout China.

I would like to thank the authors of the essays and sermons in this volume for allowing us to share their work through translation. The Publications Department of Nanjing Seminary has responded to many requests for information and pre-publication articles, and I would especially like to thank Mr. Chen Yongtao for his assistance. I am grateful to the translators as well: Peter Barry, Gail V. Coulson, Kim Dickey, Craig Moran, Claudia Wahrisch Oblau, Gotthard Oblau, Sheryl Rowold, Henry Rowold, Dirk Skiba, Don Snow, Britt Towery and Philip L. Wickeri; some of them have been part of this effort since the beginning, as has Eva Lai Woon Ching, who types the manuscripts. This volume has benefited from the careful proof-reading of Susan Raeburn-Cherradi. Our new cover has been designed by Lois Cole and Cecilia Ip has done the layout. As always, I would like to thank Marvin Hoff, Joanne Hoff and the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia for their continued support.

Janice Wickeri  
Hong Kong

## ESSAYS

### 1. Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary - K.H. Ting

K.H. Ting (Bishop) is president of the China Christian Council, chairperson of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Association and principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

*Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary is a collection of essays by Seminary faculty spanning the forty years since its founding in 1952. Most originally appeared in the Seminary journal, the Nanjing Theological Review, though there are examples from Tian Feng and Religion as well. In his introduction, Bishop Ting, who is President of the Seminary, places the writings in the context of the Chinese Protestant experience, Chinese society and world Christian theological dialogue and provides a good overview of the recent development of Chinese Protestant theology.*

#### FOREWORD

The publication of *Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary* is a joyous event.

If theology is the church in the act of thinking, then I feel that *Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary* does indicate to a fairly large extent what the Chinese Protestant church has been reflecting on over these years, as well as how that process has taken place. Our theological work is naturally conditioned by the historical and ecumenical church, but it is not imitation work. It is rather based on reflection by Chinese Christians ourselves as we face up to the problems of the Chinese church. We naturally welcome and are grateful for the listening-in and advice of theologians from overseas, but they are no longer the arbiters of right and wrong. The rank-and-file Chinese Christians are not only those whose quality of faith is to be enhanced through our theological work, but also are turning more and more from being just listeners and passive receivers to being active participants in dialogue.

These forty some essays do not touch on every issue of theological reflection in the Chinese church but, even so, one can see from them that in these years the field and scope for theological reflection has been rather limited. Certain hot issues in international theological circles, such as those related to church order, views on Biblical authority, history, peace and justice, women's liberation and sexuality issues in today's society, issues concerning the family and the environment, the ethics of ecology, and so on, have received little attention here. In fact these issues are almost a blank page. The theological reflection of any church at any time has its limits and lacunae and China is no exception. This in turn tells us how essential is the opportunity for mutual exchange, complementarity and enrichment offered by the church universal.

As far as China is concerned, I think that, in addition to the usual limitations affecting theological reflection, there are other conditions which impinge on the situation: Chinese Christian unity, from the national to all levels of organizations, is a good deal broader than that which comes under the aegis of councils of churches or other church bodies in other countries and regions. The range of its unity is unprecedented. To maintain such a broadly-based unity, we adhere to the principle of mutual respect in matters of faith and worship. There are quite a number of Chinese Christians who disdain or even disavow the value of theological thinking; they too are part of our unity. For the sake of unity, the individual theologian does tend to exercise a certain amount of restraint in expressing his or her views. This shapes a situation in which there is more of tolerance and making allowances and less of innovation. We might say that this is the price we pay for unity; but improperly handled, it could lead to theological stagnation. The poet-essayist Su Dongpo once praised the painter Wu Danzhi by saying that he "brought forth something new from within the norm." It has been our experience that for the sake of uniting and keeping things tranquil, the church frequently emphasizes the "norm," and that, therefore, the "new" comes forth infrequently. If I am not mistaken, it seems that other churches also find themselves in that situation; theological creativity is in inverse ratio to the degree of unity a church maintains.

This much is fact, but I would not like to overstate the case inappropriately. Those engaged in theological work in China are well aware that vis a vis the mass of Christians in China their role is educative and that they have a responsibility to improve the quality of people's faith. For this reason, they have never been willing to pursue their own interests without regard for the effectiveness of their theology. They do not see their overseas counterparts as their audience. They humble themselves, identify with Chinese Christians, establish lines of communication with them, take the people's issues as their own, and take pleasure in being able to help them, without undue pressure, to improve. They prefer not to say anything startling which transcends the "norm" and is thus far removed from the mass of Christians.

From a larger point of view, Chinese Christians have, for over one hundred years, always been a very small minority, surrounded on all sides by non-Christian and even anti-Christian thinking and influence. Even today the number of Christians in China is lower than one per cent of the population. From time to time those who regard themselves as radicals and hostile to religion appear here and there in China, making use of current slogans to lend them momentum, manufacturing opinions which would incriminate religion. In such circumstances, even though there is an unevenness in the implementation of China's policy of religious freedom, having such a policy is a very different matter from not having such a policy. This policy is of great benefit for the very existence and functioning of Christianity in China. At the very least it has given Christianity time to make self-government, self-support and self-propagation a reality and to strive to make the church well-governed, well-supported and well-propagating, so as to be able to meet our fellow Chinese on a more advantageous footing. This is why we believe that, as long as the church can have the space to carry on the worship of God, to witness to Christ to men and women in the world and to enter into dialogue as regards the implementation of the policy of religious freedom and other policies, we should enjoy and make use of these opportunities with thankful hearts. Some people overseas seem to assume that our correct course should be one of confrontation and martyrdom. But we think that, in the Chinese context, this would be an abrogation of responsibility toward God's church and its

members. Such behavior would also be heedless of the nation's safety and opposed by the mass of Christians. However, given the situation of the church in our country, it is understandable that a fairly large portion of Christians tend, consciously or not, to make personal salvation in Christ the sole message of the church, to the neglect of all other concerns.

After so many years, has a Chinese systematic theology taken shape in the Chinese church? I can only say, not yet. It is not that there have not been individuals who have been inspired to try; but how representative their finished works have been is a very big question. What I am about to say may be "self-justification": Paul, faced with flourishing churches on every hand, was busy making visits and writing letters, using theology to solve the pressing questions of the time and place; as for his systematic theology, it was up to those who came after him to put it in order.

But this is not to say that after forty years, theology is in disarray, or that a general theological direction has not emerged in Chinese Christianity. I believe that a central concept in Chinese Christian theological reflection is in the process of taking shape. A central feature for growing numbers of Christian intellectuals, especially the younger and middle-aged among them, is the cosmic Christ. This Christ is the co-creator working with God in the process of creation, the revealer of God's love, the Risen Lord who sustains all things by his powerful word.

The reason we say that Christ is the revealer of God's love is that in reading the four Gospels we are so deeply moved by his kind of love to the end for men and women that no lesser description can be sufficient. In him humankind receives an insight into the way the highest reality in the universe exists by loving. The first attribute of this highest existence is not so much his coercive power and might, his omnipotence, his omniscience, his omnipresence, his aseity, or his majesty, sovereignty and arbitrariness, but this love to the end. Love is the first factor in the universe, the mover in the work of creation. A universe of love is in the process of being formed. We are still uncompleted products of the process but, at the same time, co-creators with God. From what we know of the love on the part of the father and the mother and of the person in love, Christ helps us to grope and fumble after the reality of the highest existence in the universe and to learn to call him Father.

Increasingly, we cast off the pedantry over the human and divine natures of Christ. Beyond the human/divine issue, our theological thinking is liberated and deepened and finds greater cohesion in terms of Christ's cosmic nature. The cosmic nature of Christ is the Christology to be found in the New Testament books of Colossians, Ephesians and the Gospel of John. It is a conception which contains great riches, able to break boldly through the barriers of traditional thinking and enrich Christians' worship and spiritual life, which can further challenge denominational biases, and lead to trust and unity among Christians. I am not trying to suggest that the phrase "cosmic Christ" has already entered into the common vocabulary of the mass of theological workers, but it can be said that increasing numbers of Christians are encountering this Christ by various paths and, in their own ways, are bringing people to know and adore this Christ. Inspired and stirred by Christ's sublime love which impels him to serve and not to be served, to the extent of giving his life as a ransom for others, his disciples have chosen to engage themselves in the world as salt and light, bringing benefits to humankind. In

this way our personal life gains meaning by becoming harmonious with the principle by which the universe is run.

Many of us share the feeling that intellectual circles in China may be today more well-disposed towards and sympathetic to Christianity than at any time since Christianity was introduced to China. The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary Library has over a hundred volumes of works of research and appreciation of Christianity and of translations of western theological works - all done by scholars outside the church. I expect that the publication of the present volume will gain the attention and interest of intellectuals outside the church.

I would like to raise a point here for their consideration. Friends outside the church frequently express their opinion that Christians and non-Christians are all patriotic Chinese and supporters of socialism, and that the only difference is that Christians just add to this a faith in life in paradise after death. Their reason for saying this is simply to express their feeling that there is not a great distance separating Christians from the mass of the Chinese people, and thus to affirm that Christians are part of the United Front in China and to uphold the policy of religious freedom and oppose discrimination against religion. We are of course grateful for this. At the same time, we of course also agree that there are Christians who look after the cultivation of their souls for the sake of gaining paradise after death. However, the majority of Christians care far more about life after birth than they do about life after death. Like ordinary people, they must live, work, study, and establish families; they have ideals, they seek truth, goodness, beauty, and such being the case, they do care about the things of this world. I think the readers of *Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary* will find that the essays presented here do not treat Christian faith as a ticket to paradise. Using a vocabulary that is old and seems hard to change, Christian faith presents a world view and a spiritual culture. It is a guide to how to view life, how to be involved in reality and moreover how, through the common body of the church, to gain for oneself and for all humankind what Christ called "abundant life." These essays demonstrate the Christian goal of helping people to live and to live well. Without this emphasis on living a good life, how can we find our places within the United Front? A few years ago one of the social science publications carried an essay which held that religious believers think only of going to heaven, and "muddle through" while on earth, "not daring to look upon the colors of the world or hear its myriad sounds, not daring to think of anything not found in the scriptures," and viewing "reasonable calls for improving material life as the source of sin." That the writer characterizes religion in this way is probably due to the fact that he or she has never made friends with a religious believer.

This volume has been edited by Revs. Chen Zemin, Wang Weifan and Zhang Xianyong of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. We are most grateful for all their hard work. We hope the publication of this volume will be helpful in the exchange of ideas and will further the flourishing of Chinese theology.

I I September 1992

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## **2. A Brief History of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary 1952-1992 - Xu Rulei**

Xu Rulei is the Librarian of Nanjing Union  
Theological Seminary.

*Nanjing Union Theological Seminary celebrated its fortieth anniversary in November, 1992. The occasion was marked by a large gathering of alumni and several days of activities, including speeches and the presentation of academic papers. In this essay prepared especially for the anniversary, Mr Xu traces the Seminary's history from its foundation in the early 1950s to the present institutional structure. The course titles and research topics included illustrate some of the issues prominent in Chinese theological education throughout this period. The essay has been slightly shortened in translation.*

The first forty years of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary can be divided into three periods: 1952-1957; 1958-1978; and 1979 to the present. In this brief history, I will deal with each period in turn.

### **I A Pioneering Task (1952 - 1957)**

(1) Seminary union a model of unity for the church.

The opening of a seminary is not an unusual event, but the opening of our seminary was unprecedented, because it was formed through the union of a dozen others. These included: Central Theological Seminary (Anglican in Shanghai), China Baptist Seminary (Shanghai), China Theological Seminary (Hangzhou), Nanjing Theological Seminary, North China Theological Seminary (Wuxi), Cheelo Theological Seminary (Jinan), Minan Theological Seminary (Changzhou), Fujian Union Theological Seminary, and three Bible schools, Trinity Theological Seminary in Ningbo, Jiangsu Baptist Bible School in Zhenjiang and Ming Dao Bible Seminary in Jinan. If we add the Jinling Women's Seminary which had opened only the year before in conjunction with Nanjing Theological Seminary, that makes twelve altogether. These seminaries encompassed many different denominations. They included both the so-called "Fundamentalists" and the modernists, whose theological views were altogether different.

Why was union necessary? On the negative side, it was the result of force. The Korean War broke out in June 1950, and in December the United States announced that it had frozen China's assets in the US, trying in this way to make things more difficult for our people's government. This also threatened all educational, cultural and welfare work which received support from US sources, as well as the livelihood of Chinese church workers. It was an attack on our church's recently inaugurated "Three-Self" Movement. Some missionaries observed: "Things will fall apart without our money, our teachers, and our running things." This was not necessarily so. But the sudden cessation of donations did in fact cause serious economic

problems for some seminaries. All that could be done was to embark on the path of union, pool personnel and resources and carry on with running our new seminary.

On the positive side, union was the fruit of the Three-Self Movement, "God's own mysterious undertaking."<sup>2</sup> The Three-Self Movement was a patriotic movement of Chinese Christians ourselves, a movement away from sin towards God, a church movement established in accordance with the will of God. In order to build up the church, we needed pastoral workers, and therefore seminaries. The launching of the Three-Self Movement and the throwing off of foreign mission board control, awakened the consciousness of the clergy and prepared the way for the opening of a union seminary.

1 *Nanjing Theological Review*, inaugural issue (Sept., 1953), p. 18. [hereafter *NTR*].

2 *NTR*, (Sept., 1953), p. 18.

How was the seminary unified? In 1952, a national program for the "re-organization" of schools and universities was undertaken by the government. Mr. Y.T. Wu, the chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the "Resist America, Support Korea" Three-Self Reform Movement, and several colleagues, responded to a number of seminaries' calls for union by calling together the East China Theological Education Forum. With the support of the Office of Higher Education of East China and the East China Religious Affairs Bureau, the meeting ran from August 25-29, 1952 in Shanghai, with representatives from ten seminaries and Bible colleges taking part. These included: Central China Seminary (Wujiang), Yanjing School of Religion (Beijing), West China Seminary (Chongqing) and South China Union Seminary (Guangzhou). The chair of the meeting was Y.T. Wu, with the Anglican Bishop Robin Chen, Rev. Jia Yuming of Shanghai and Baptist leader Rev. Qi Qincai, also of Shanghai, as vice-chairs. Other participants included major figures associated with theological education, leaders of important churches and institutions and some theological students. The meeting itself was an unprecedented mark of unity for the Chinese church. There was conscientious discussion of problems to be faced, principles of union, the basis for union, and so on. The meeting concluded with the establishment of the nineteen member East China Preparatory Committee for Seminary Union, with Mr. Y.T. Wu as chair, Rev. Cheng Jingyi (former president of Nanjing Theological Seminary) and Rev. Jia Yuming as vice-chairs, and Rev. K.H. Ting (former General Secretary of the Christian Literature Council in Shanghai) as Secretary.<sup>3</sup> It was decided that the new Union Seminary was to be located in Nanjing.

3 *Tian Feng*, September, 1952, p. 3.

On September 22, 1952, the Standing Committee of the Preparatory Committee on Seminary Union met for the second time and formally designated the name of the new union

seminary as "Nanjing Union Theological Seminary". It took only two months for the various regional seminaries to relocate in Nanjing.

On November 1, 1952, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary held its opening ceremony. In addition to the more than one hundred teachers and students from the seminary who attended, there were many guests and over four hundred Christians and colleagues from Nanjing. The Three-Self Preparatory Committee Chair Mr. Y.T. Wu personally came to act as master of ceremonies. In his comments he pointed out that the task of the Seminary was to promote patriotic consciousness, nurture the life of the spirit, and do theological research in order to bring up and train church personnel committed to three-self. The key to whether the Seminary could fulfill this task, he said, lay in unity. The Director of the East China Religious Affairs Bureau, Mr. Luo Zhufeng, the vice-mayor of Nanjing and Director of the Committee on Cultural Life, Comrade Jin Baoshan, and the Director of the Nanjing Religious Affairs Office, Mr. Wang Danian, also came to offer their congratulations. In their remarks, they too emphasized the importance of unity. Rev. H.H. Tsui, General Secretary of the Church of Christ in China, Bishop Z.T. Kaung of the Chinese Methodist Church, Rev. Zhu Guishen and Rev. Xie Yongqin from the Board of the National Conference of Chinese Independent Churches and Rev. Qi Qincai, Chair of the Chinese Baptist Convention, all came specially to Nanjing to offer their congratulations. The Chair of the Nanjing Christian Three-Self Committee, Mr Chen Heqin, the Vice-Chair, Rev. Luther Shao Jingsan, and Committee member Rev. Shi Xinsan also spoke at the ceremony. In addition to emphasizing unity and working together, they expressed the hope that the Seminary could make a contribution in the area of self-propagation. A letter stating that the East China Education Bureau had approved the establishment of the Seminary was read out at the ceremony. This news was met with thunderous applause. Everyone felt that allowing the Seminary to join the ranks of Chinese institutions of higher learning indicated that the Party and government were not biased against institutions of religious learning.

After further consideration, the Three-Self Committee decided that a seminary was not an institution of higher learning in the ordinary sense and that it would be more appropriate to undertake its work with a board of directors under leadership of the Three-Self Committee. The inaugural meeting of the Board took place in Shanghai on December 10, 1952, with 27 members representing all the major denominations in China. They passed the constitution of the Seminary, elected Y.T. Wu as Chair of the Board and H.H. Tsui, Marcus Chen (President of Chongqing Seminary) and Luther Shao as Vice-chairs. K.H. Ting was appointed President, and Cheng Zhiyi (President of the former Nanjing Theological Seminary) and Ding Yuzhang (President of the former North China Theological Seminary) as Vice-Presidents. Seven members were also elected to the Board and a committee on finance and property was established.

The Board passed the following statement of faith for the Seminary:

1. All scripture is inspired by God. It includes everything necessary for salvation and (is) the basis of the Christian's faith and the standard of conduct.
2. The one God is the creator of all things and the Father of humankind, full of justice and love.

3. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became flesh and was crucified in order to save humanity, who rose from the dead to become head of the Church and saviour of the whole world.
4. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, the source of regeneration and sanctification, and in the Church, gives believers every kind of grace.<sup>4</sup>

On the educational side, the Board decided that the Seminary should set up a research department, a theology department and a Bible department. The length of the course of study was changed to three years. In order to improve the educational level of young people who came to seminary after working in the church, a one-year preparatory course was established. And for the continuing education of church workers, a one-year refresher course was also proposed.

The teaching staff numbered 33, one-third of whom were Fundamentalists. There were 105 students (including 10 new students), sixty per cent of whom were also Fundamentalists. Courses were offered in "Baptist Basics", "Anglican Worship," and other denominational practices, in order to put the principle of mutual respect into practice. Bible and theology courses were all given side by side, one course for Fundamentalists and another for Modernists. Who would attend which separate class was decided by the Administration on the basis of the students' background and theological viewpoint.

4 Quoted in Philip L. Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground (Orbis. 1998). pp. 223-224.*

With regard to religious life, a common service of worship was held each morning before classes, with a member of staff or a church representative presiding. Each evening prior to study time, evening prayers were held, led by students from the upper classes; these student leaders also chose the liturgy and form of worship. Time was set aside each morning and evening for individual devotions and each Sunday evening a service of spiritual sharing was held. On Sundays and feast days, Anglican staff and students held the Eucharist according to the *Book of Common Prayer* in a small chapel set aside for this purpose. Once each semester a retreat was organized. Hymns sung during services were taken from *Hymns of Universal Praise*. At the request of some staff and students a "hymn selection committee" was formed which chose seventy-three hymns favored by the students from eight denominational hymnals. These were gathered into a book of "Selected Hymns" to supplement *Hymns of Universal Praise*.

Not long after the inauguration of the Seminary, a Students Association was formed by the students on the occasion of commemoration of the "December Ninth Student Movement." The

religious, intellectual and sports activities arranged by the Students Association served to unify the students, which was important in promoting the theological education task of the Seminary.

Having undergone these practical experiences, everyone felt that union had been a success. Vice-President Cheng Zhiyi said that for 14 denominations to unite and offer 75 courses for 105 students was a pioneering effort for the Chinese church and the world Church. Another Vice-President, Rev. Ding Yuzhang, formerly President of the Fundamentalist North China Theological Seminary, said that this was an unprecedented miracle for the Chinese church. The reaction of Rev. Zang Antang of the China Baptist Theological Seminary in Shanghai, after ten months' experience of union in Nanjing, was that "the Union Theological Seminary is truly a harmonious one." He added, "There is a difference here between the old and the new; no one denies this, but there are living examples of mutual respect, and none of mutual contempt. Of course the Union Seminary is not yet perfect, but its overall direction is correct and the harmony of its life is admirable."<sup>5</sup>

Rev. Luther Shao, Vice-Chair of the Board, said: "The Seminary emphasizes spreading Jesus' spirit of 'love for one another'... 'that they may be one'. Differences in theological viewpoints, along with the special characteristics of the different denominations in matters of faith, order, organization and worship, all follow the principle of 'mutual respect'. This is something for which I have heartfelt admiration .... Over the past ten months, the Seminary has achieved a great deal in this respect. The unity among teachers and students is unprecedented. We hope that the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary can go one step further on this foundation in establishing (itself) as the standard for the work of union in the church in new China, that it will do an even better job of uniting."<sup>6</sup>

(2) Training pastoral workers who love the country and love the church.

Because the organization of the various seminaries was not uniform, the new Seminary decided to accept new students each term. Some students graduated nearly every term as well. The dormitory could only accommodate 110 students. At the time of union there were 105 enrolled, with the greatest number of students 117 during the autumn term of 1956 when 54 new students were accepted. The usual number of students varied between 70 and 90, with women students accounting for one-third to one-half, and the student population divided among the Bible course, the theology course, the research course and the refresher course. From the time of union in the fall of 1952 until the end of the spring semester in 1957, 114 (68 men and 46 women) students graduated; of these 9 were from the research course, 61 from the theology course, 26 from the Bible course and 18 from the continuing education course. In the late 1940s, before the Union Seminary had been established, only one-fourth to one-half of seminary graduates went on to work in the church. Among the graduates of our new Seminary, such graduates were in the majority.

<sup>5</sup> *NTR*, (Sept., 1953), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *NTR*, (Sept., 1953), p. 16.

On January 17, 1956, the Board of Directors proposed that the Seminary should offer a specialized course in pastoral work, a four month course for 70 to 100 students. The



Seminary's newly formed Academic Affairs Committee would be responsible for this new course. After three months' preparation, the first course opened on April 16, 1956, with 89 students, (62 men and 27 women), from 23 denominations, with 46 students from Jiangsu, 30 from Zhejiang and a total of 13 from Shandong, Anhui, Shanghai and Fujian.

The specialized pastoral work course was a new departure designed to help in solving some theological problems in church work which had come to the fore since the initiation of the Three-Self Movement, especially after the turmoil caused by Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee.

The course content had to be concise and to the point, and so the Academic Affairs Committee set four basic classes: "The Essence of the Bible", taught by Seminary staff and church leaders who lectured on those books and passages from which they had learned the most; "Topics in Theology", with the emphasis on some of the more prominent theological questions facing the church; and "Biblical Word Studies", which would be geared to the specialized theology, considering certain terms from the Old and New Testaments, giving a comprehensive and systematic introduction to references in Biblical and theological research. The fourth course was "Pastoral Work" which, in addition to hearing reports and reading related materials, adopted a discussion format to investigate problems facing the church.

After four months' study, the students felt they had gained a lot, including some knowledge of a number of then current complex problems such as: "Can the church be fallen?", "How should the value of human beings be understood?", "How should Christians understand the world?", "How should one understand the meaning of life?", and so on. In making the distinction between the poison of imperialist thinking and the truth of the Bible, "The Essence of the Bible" and "Topics in Theology" provided a great deal of help. Many students felt that their studies in the specialized course enabled them to understand more fully the meaning of Christ, strengthened their faith, enriched their spiritual life, trained them in distinguishing truth from falsehood, and increased their zeal for spreading the gospel. There were also many students whose doubts about the future of the church were dispelled and who re-dedicated themselves to God, so as to give themselves to building up a church consistent with the current situation in the nation.<sup>7</sup>

The first specialized course ended in August 1956. The second began in September of the same year and the third in the first half of 1957. The 303 church workers (222 men and 81 women) who took the course, played valuable roles in the three-self movement in the local churches.

### (3) Contributions to self-propagation.

With the birth of new China the church entered a new historical era. There were many matters which we had to re-think. "Self-propagation" was not only a question of "who propagates" but even more of "what is propagated". Bishop T.K. Shen said, "The task of theology is to elucidate the faith and experience of Christ's revelation intellectually. This revelation can be compared to a vast river such as the Yangtze and theology to the scenery along its shores. The scenery of the Yangtze gorges is not like that of the river's lower reaches, and this scenery in turn differs from

that of the Wusong River. But the shallows of Sichuan and the delta in the south are part of the same river. Revelation is the river; theology its shores and the riverbed." The development of history into different eras is like the Yangtze flowing to different parts of the land. Different scenery appears along the banks, and we must come up with differing descriptions. A seminary specializes in the study of theology, whose development ought first to explain the scenery which has already appeared.

In the first semester after our Seminary was opened, a committee to direct theological research was formed in the Board which decided that its first task would be to undertake a reevaluation and analysis of Chinese church history, in particular the history of the past 150 years. It was to meet every two weeks when one instructor would present a paper. Papers presented included: "The Unequal Treaties and Chinese Christianity" (Wang Zhixin); "The Unequal Treaties and the Mission the Missionaries" (Xie Jingsheng); "The Problem of Suffering" (Zhao Hongxiang); "The Question of Church Unity" (T.K. Shen); "The Christological Question" (Han Pide); "Life and Right and Wrong" (Gao Tianxi, Zang Antang and Sun Hanshu); "Faith and Works" (Ding Yuzhang and Liu Yuegin); and "Hymns in the Chinese Church" (Huang Suzhen).

7 *NTR*, No. 5 (1956), pp. 50-52; 59-60.

8 *NTR*, No. 3 (March 1955), p. 11.

The Seminary also invited church leaders and theology professors from Shanghai and Beijing for meetings, lectures, the sharing of spiritual experience, and to introduce what they had learned about self-propagation. Rev. H.H. Tsui, Rev. Xie Yongqin, Bishop Robin Chen, Rev. Qi Qincai, Bishop Z.T. Kaung, Rev. Huang Peiyong, Ms. Jiao Weizhen, Rev. T.C. Chao and others all responded to the invitation.

The opening of the specialized course on pastoral work also gave impetus to research in self-propagation. Lectures in the course "Topics in Theology", such as "Introduction to Theology", "Theology of the Holy Spirit", "Theology of Salvation", "Theology of the Church", "Human Value", "The Problem of Sin", "Christians and the World", and other urgent questions for the church after Liberation, all contributed to a new theological understanding.

In September 1953, the *Nanjing Theological Review* was launched and published seven issues up until August 1957. Besides reporting to alumni and colleagues on Seminary activities, it made a special point of carrying essays exploring the concrete problems involved in church unity. For example, with regard to socialism and propagation of the gospel, it published K.H. Ting's "Why We Still Need Evangelists Today", "How Should Seminarians Read the Bible?", and so on. There were essays on all aspects of church-state relations such as "Church - State Relations" by Jiang Wenhan, "Socialism from a Christian Standpoint" by Huang Peixin, "On Christian Theism" by K.H. Ting, "The Future of the Church as Found in the Bible" by Gao Tianxi, and so on. On the subject of reason and spirit,

we have "Reason and Spirit" by T.K. Shen, "Is the Bible Against Reason'?" by Xu Rulei, etc. Essays on the subject of theology and church history included "The Task of Theological Construction in the Chinese Church" by Chen Zemin, "Issues in the Study of Church History" by Yang Zhentai, "The Reformation in Europe During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" by Zhang Shixin, etc. Criticism of Wang Mingdao's *Spiritual Food Quarterly* published by the *Nanjing Theological Review* included Xu Rulci's "Who Has the *Spiritual Food Quarterly* Served These 29 Years'?". All these essays represent important fruits of theological construction in new China, which have played a significant role in shaping Chinese Christian theological thinking during the socialist period.

(4) Adhering to the impartial principle of independence in international relationships.

"Three-Self" promotes independence and self-administration, in line with the Biblical teaching of the particularity of the church. But the Church is the Body of Christ and the local churches are limbs of this Body, caring for one another. Thus three-self is not given to "closed-doorism" and is certainly not isolationist. Following the principle of equality, the Seminary received a great many foreign friends and overseas Christians: from the Indian churches and visiting delegations of the YMCA/YWCA; a Japanese Christian visit to China, a delegation from the Australian Anglican Church, Walter Freytag from Hamburg University in Germany, Bishop Peter Janos from the Hungarian Church, and the President of Bratislava Seminary in Czechoslovakia, Prof. Jozef Hromadka, among others. We also sent groups overseas for visits or to take part in meetings. In June 1956, Bishop K.H. Ting visited England to represent the Chinese Anglican Church at the Preparatory Meeting for the Lambeth Conference of 1958. Following the meeting he visited British churches, churches and seminaries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Seminary Vice President Rev. Cheng Zhiyi also visited overseas. This sort of exchange was very beneficial for sharing thinking, sharing experiences and strengthening friendship.

On March 21, 1956, Bishop Peter and Prof. Hromadka came to lecture at the Seminary. They were the first Christians from the socialist republics of Eastern Europe invited to China. Bishop Peter saw China's Three-Self Movement as a spiritual experience and a witness to a profound and thoroughgoing social change. He raised three issues on the basis of the experience of the churches in China and Hungary: 1) *Relations between the church and the social order*. He said the church was not necessarily limited by the social order. The social order had changed many times over two thousand years, but the church still continued to exist and was renewed. 2) *The question of repentance and the future of the church*. He pointed out that only through repentance could the church have a future. The western church had passed on to China and Hungary "rebellious Christianity" which called us to distance ourselves from the masses of the people. The Chinese church should make a witness of repentance in order to show western missionaries that they might also repent. Today it is the Chinese church which should guide the western churches with the truth it has seen. This is the world mission and future of the Chinese church. 3) *The shape of the church in a socialist society*. Bishop Peter said that Jesus Christ had formed many different kinds of churches. In a socialist country, the

Lord would also want a new form of church. Different ages produced different kinds of churches, but the gospel never changed. In our age, the people had for the first time consciously changed their lives and our church should also discover a shape to match the conscientized people who were building socialist society. We should work together with God to build up a new church. The issues Bishop Peter raised were geared to actual circumstances and deserved our attention.

In his lectures, Prof. Hromadka pointed out that western theologians mistakenly equated Christian ideals with western culture. A theologian should not close him or herself in an ivory tower, but should become involved in life and in solving people's problems. He raised three issues facing European theologians: 1) What is God's revelation in a secularized world?; 2) What, after all, is the church?; 3) What is the church's mission in the world? He did not go into these problems in concrete terms, but simply raised them for our reference and enlightenment.<sup>9</sup>

Prof. Freytag from Hamburg University in West Germany came in mid-February 1957 to give two lectures at the invitation of the Seminary. But he used a lot of theological theory and the study of comparative religion to bring Chinese Christians a "message" which none of us could accept. An essay was later published in the *Nanjing Theological Review* on the subject "Modern Cynicism or Realism," which said that if we were to analyze all these attractive theories of religion, we would see that the "message" which Prof. Freytag spoke to us about was very obvious and simple. He "warned" Chinese Christians not to be too naive, not to be taken in by the good points of socialism. All good things of the world were potentially enemies of God. If Chinese Christians wanted to guard well Christianity's special characteristics, then they should not draw close to the world. Prof. Freytag was attempting to give us a suspicious and negative attitude. He wanted us, in the midst of the upsurge of socialist construction, to keep our "vigilance", so as to maintain a definite distance and tension in our relationship with our nation and political order. This type of message, from either a political or religious standpoint, was extremely erroneous and detrimental. His article pointed out that the Chinese church was in the process of developing a new church-state relationship within a new era and a new social system. His thinking and emotions were typical of a western political view and he was unable to understand church life on the basis of the changes taking place in the whole society of new China. Therefore he could not but take an attitude of repudiation toward all modern "isms", and in the name of realism, propagate a theology of nihilism."

4 *NTR. No 5 (July 1956).*

In receiving foreign friends, we expressed our gratitude for all helpful guidance received, but if we felt erroneous statements were made, we would offer our own views. When criticisms

were not offered out of good intentions, we had to oppose them. When meeting some Third World visitors, especially those from Africa, we would, with a sense of deep gratitude for our own experience, introduce them to the present, as well as the past, of Chinese Christianity, and our experience of the policy of religious freedom and the United Front, which could serve as references for them. All in all, in our exchanges with visitors, we tried to apply a principle of equality that was neither haughty nor humble.

## II Vacillation and Stagnation

### 1) The socialist education movement.

In 1957, a movement was begun by the Communist Party to rectify its work style and to attack its "capitalist" or "rightist" faction. The Seminary and those from religious circles were not supposed to take part in the movement; they merely had to undertake some socialist study sessions, so that summer the faculty and staff gathered for a period of study.

10 *NTR, No. 7 (August 1958).*

In the spring of 1958, a "Conference of Five Religions" (Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Taoism and Islam) was held in Nanjing for the purpose of socialist education. Each religion chose representatives to attend. The Seminary enjoyed an exceptional advantage in that the entire staff and student body attended. Because of this, classes had to be suspended. Who could have known that they would not begin again for three years?

This so-called "Socialist Education Movement" was in fact the initiation in religious circles of the "Rectification" and "Anti-Rightist" campaigns. The number of anti-Party and anti-socialist capitalists and rightists in every unit was uncompromisingly set at "five per cent bad elements." For the 52 faculty at the Seminary, this figure was slightly lowered, but still two rightists had to be ferreted out from our number. (They have since been rehabilitated.) Of course, there was no way the movement could avoid harming unjustly some faculty and students. Following the "Anti-Rightist" movement there came "Baring one's heart to the Party", in which everyone had to write out their own anti-Party, anti-socialist thoughts, analyze and criticize them. This later came to be called the "Three-Self Spirit" - self-exposure of problems, self-analysis of problems, self-solution of problems; it lasted for over a year. The good point was that the targets of the movement received rather thorough education in patriotism and socialism and came to realize that patriotism meant loving the nation and following the socialist path under the leadership of the Communist Party. Their consciousness of the problem of imperialist use of religion for aggression was also raised.

When the movement ended, some of the faculty and students responded to the call to go to the Xinjiang border area. Some staff went to the mountains to take part in starting the "Red Leaf Forestry Center" and a smaller number went to teach in middle schools. Those who stayed

behind undertook production in the Seminary grounds, growing vegetables, raising chickens and so on. At the same time they organized some of the more elderly faculty to write their memoirs for historical purposes. Except for a few who stayed behind to help with production, the students all returned to their homes.

## 2) Beijing's Yanjing Seminary joins the Union Seminary in Nanjing.

From November 12, 1960 to January 14, 1961, the Second National Chinese Christian Conference was held in Shanghai. A preparatory meeting was held first, with the regular meeting beginning January 9, 1961. Three-hundred nineteen delegates from 25 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions attended the meeting. It affirmed that personages in Christian circles had "also made great progress, but that there were still problems." The so-called progress meant that people in Christian circles had for the most part been able to withstand the international isolation of China. Pressure from the Soviet Union for payment of debts and the three years of natural disasters at home had not shaken them in their determination to follow the socialist road along with the Party. The meeting decided that Nanjing Union Theological Seminary should continue to operate, and in order to concentrate personnel, Yanjing Union Seminary in Beijing should also move to Nanjing.

Yanjing Union Seminary had been formed April 19, 1953 through the amalgamation of the Yanjing School of Religion, the Beijing Women's Christian Academy, and Beijing Seminary. The Chair of the Board of the Seminary was the Rev. Wang Zizhong. In the summer of that year, the Bible College of the Beijing Holiness Church, the Northeast Theological College in Shenyang and the Baptist Seminary in Kaifeng, Henan, all joined the Union Seminary and within three years, the Shekou Lutheran Seminary, the Hunan Bible School, the Truth Academy of the Holiness Church in Beijing, the Central China Union Seminary and the Xiangshan Academy in Beijing followed suit. So the Yanjing Union Seminary was also a product of eleven seminaries joining together. The Board of Directors was formally established in March 1956 with thirty directors. Rev. Marcus Chen was chair, Bishop Z.T. Kaung was vice-chair, and Rev. Yin Jizheng was secretary. They also appointed Rev. Li Rongfang as Dean.

In early 1961, when it was decided that Yanjing Seminary would move to Nanjing, the faculty and staff were still labouring in the countryside. Two members of our Seminary committee, Ding Yuzhang and Xu Rulei, traveled to Beijing to discuss the union. Things went very smoothly, and through consultation, it was agreed that those who were willing to come to Nanjing could do so immediately while those who were not able to come could remain in Beijing to work. The Seminary specially set up a research office in Beijing for this purpose. The elderly could retire. In this way Nanjing Union Seminary came to be the only seminary in the nation.

## 3) The seminary resumes classes.

Due to the emphasis on the "Three Red Banners" (i.e., the general line for socialist construction, the Great Leap Forward and the people's communes), religion came under heavy attack in 1961. Christians were busy with production and the number of people at worship services fell sharply. Because the churches were empty, there was a surplus of pastoral workers. It was decided to first hold yearlong refresher courses for 80 to 100 students, who would come mainly from local churches. The curriculum would be divided equally between religion and politics.

Before the new course started, the Seminary Administrative Committee met several times to sum up past educational practice, both the achievements and the failures. In their comments and remarks, everyone was concerned with the quality of current teaching and with running the Seminary well. Mr. Y.T. Wu, Chair of the Board, had come from Shanghai to take part in the discussion and his remarks gave colleagues a great deal of encouragement and enlightenment. He said, "God is God of the cosmos, and in every era of history, God is at work. In new China, in the midst of these earthshaking changes, do we really imagine that God is not at work? Earthshaking changes are also taking place within Christianity itself. There is a clear division in Chinese Christianity between the old and new eras and this is not only in terms of numbers, but is especially clear in terms of quality. Within Christianity itself, and indirectly through the great changes in the state, we have experienced much, and all this should have significance for our religious faith and Biblical perspective. Our Chinese Christianity is without parallel in Christian circles and we are unique. Chinese Christianity is 'poor and blank', but gathered together, we can discover a new revelation." 11

Mr. Y.T. Wu also spoke at the re-opening ceremony on April 7, 1961. He said that the Seminary ought to thoroughly implement the principle of mutual respect in matters of faith, unify under the banner of anti-imperialist patriotism, be conscientious and hardworking in study, and in the spirit of hard work and thriftiness do everything necessary to run the Seminary well.

The 86 students in this continuing education course came from 24 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, they included 72 men and 14 women. When the course finished a year later, the response of the students was that their theological knowledge and political consciousness had both been raised.

The first meeting of the Board of Directors following the union of Nanjing and Yanjing Seminaries took place in Nanjing on May 7, 1962. Twenty-six members of the Board were in attendance; eleven others were unable to attend due to prior business or illness. Following the opening ceremony Y.T. Wu spoke on the current situation and future prospects of the Seminary. He emphasized the need for the "nurture of new Christian students", so that they become "clergy for the mass rural church." He went on to say that one of the tasks of the Seminary was to form a small group of colleagues with a good theological foundation to undertake advanced theological studies. At this meeting, the Board thoroughly and enthusiastically discussed the problems of theological education in Chinese Christianity. They also discussed the past year's work and the work of the theology course, the continuing education course, the Committee on Academic Research and the Research Office in Beijing for the coming year, putting forth many

valuable suggestions. Rev. Jia Yuming, one of the Members of the Board, could not be present because of illness, but put forward three suggestions on the work of the Seminary following the meeting: 1. Biblical studies, as well as theology, should be emphasized; 2. Evangelism should be stressed along with the inner spiritual life; 3. Theological education should be a living example and not merely a matter of books. The meeting elected Y.T. Wu President of the Board of Directors of the Seminary, Bishop Robin Chen, Rev. Xie Yongqin, Rev. H.H. Tsui and Prof. T.C. Chao as Vice-Chairs, Rev. George Wu as Secretary and Bishop Z.T. Kaung and Rev. Li Rongfang as Vice-Principals."

11 Personal notes of Mr Wu's remarks.

12 *Tian Feng*, Nos. 3 and 4 (1961), p. 6.

The new academic year began on September 13, 1962. Two classes were accepted: the second continuing education course for pastoral workers and the regular theology course. In addition to students from all over the country, this continuing education course also included seven students from national minorities: the Miao, the Kawa, the Lisu, and the Lahu, all from the two provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou. Of these seven, three had some foundation in both spoken and written Chinese, the other four could not read Chinese and even had difficulty in speaking it. The Seminary set aside a special classroom for five of the Yunnan students and held separate tutorials for them. During classes, one of their number who spoke Chinese would translate word by word into the minority languages. In addition, twenty or so students in the regular theology course extended their period of study from four to five years and requested more study of foreign languages in hopes of training a better educated clergy.

But in 1963, the "Four Clean-ups Campaign" whose main purpose was to deepen the Socialist Education Movement was begun in the countryside. In the cities the "Five Evils Campaign" aimed at bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts and stealing of economic information - all as practiced by owners of private industrial and commercial enterprises. These two campaigns were seen as tactics to 'combat, prevent and control revisionism'. Later the Socialist Education Movement in both urban and rural areas was called "The Four Clean-Ups Campaign" (clean-up politics, economy, organization and ideology). As a result of this campaign religion was attacked as feudal superstition in the countryside. Under such circumstances, we did not see any possibility of accepting new students and only one class in the regular theology course was maintained until the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution".

13 *Tian Feng*, No. 6 (1962), p. 4-5.

4) The Cultural Revolution.



In early 1966 the political climate grew increasingly tense. On June 1, the People's Daily carried editorials entitled "Away with all Ox Demons and Snake Spirits", and "A storm has arisen in Shanxi..." The Seminary decided to allow its one class of students to graduate a year early and return home. In August, on the pretext of destroying the "Four Olds" (old thinking, old culture, old customs, and old habits), the Red Guards began their visits to the Seminary. As the days passed, the pressure increased, books were burned, and people were beaten. It was said that "for the first time in seventeen years, there was a dictatorship of the proletariat in the Seminary." The Red Guards ordered all faculty and staff to gather in the chapel, where they announced that the Seminary had been dissolved. They dragged a group of staff away for manual labour at the Mt. Qinglong Red Guard Tree Farm, a few of whom were first dragged to the YMCA to undergo criticism and struggle. The rest of the staff and faculty were ordered to go home, and salaries were no longer paid. The Seminary campus became the headquarters of the Red Guard. Although it was said that Red Guard orders were not valid, the Seminary remained closed for twelve years and was occupied by other units throughout that time.

In early 1968, the revolutionary committee of the Jiangsu Provincial United Front Organization held a study group for objects of united front work which the Seminary staff and faculty who had been sent home were also required to attend. Later, those faculty and staff who had been sent to the Red Guard Tree Farm, were also "liberated" and attended this study group.

The "study group" was a framework into which the United Front Organization could bring together the objects of its united front work. Once begun, it went on for ten years and there was no end to the study. It was entirely open-ended and there was no goal. The faculty and staff felt that this endless study, study and more study was pointless; they felt there should be some goal to these studies, some contribution which could be made to socialism through it. What might that be? Some went to teach English at Nanjing University; others joined the Translation Group for United Nations Documents at Nanjing University; and still others helped out in factories, translating materials from English, later some took part in compiling a "Chinese-English Dictionary".

During this decade and more of the so-called "Cultural Revolution period", the faculty and staff of the Seminary did gain something - they were tested and bore witness for the work of "love country, love church".

### **III Steady Development (1979-)**

I) The Institute of Religious Studies at Nanjing University.

In October 1976, the Gang of Four was finally overthrown, and the ten years of chaos of the Cultural Revolution came to an end. In December 1978, following the Eleventh Plenum of the Third Party Central Committee, things began to return to normal and all sorts of policies were reimplemented, including the policy of freedom of religious belief.

Because of the Seminary's close relationship with Nanjing University, Mr Kuang Yaming, President of the University, agreed in May 1978, that the former faculty and staff of the Seminary now at the University could set up the Institute of Religious Studies there. At the time, the Seminary campus was occupied by two government organizations and a factory. The government aided the Seminary in reclaiming some of our buildings, and after a period of preparation, on January 1, 1979, the Institute of Religious Studies of Nanjing University was formally established. K.H. Ting became Director, with Han Wenzao and Xu Rulei as Deputy Directors. On March 3, President Kuang Yaming and other leaders of the University, Fan Cunzhong, Zhang De and Gao Jiyu, visited the Institute and expressed great support for its work.

For a group of Christians to form a body for religious research was something new to the many state universities in China, unprecedented in the thirty year history of new China, and an expression of academic and religious freedom, as well as a sign of reform and openness. We decided upon the principle of mutual respect: there would be no condemnation of religion, nor would there be propagation of religion. Our object was to do research into religion, to cultivate religious research and to train scholars of religion and cadres for religious work. Our original plan was to do research in all religions; some Buddhist and Taoist scholars had expressed their willingness to take part in such research, but due to the reimplementation of the policy of religious freedom, they became immersed in their own work. Since they were unable to join our Institute, we were only able to work in our own field, making Christianity the focus of our research.

During these years, the Institute was active both within Nanjing University and beyond: writing the article on Christianity in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*; holding seminars; setting up courses in religion; inviting scholars and other persons of note from overseas, such as Dr. Raymond Whitehead from the University of Toronto, Dr. Eugene Nida, the American linguist and distinguished Bible translator, Dr. N.Z. Zia, the eminent Chinese Christian scholar, and the noted American evangelist Billy Graham, among others, to lecture on campus. We awarded master's degrees in religious studies to several students. In 1987, in cooperation with the Philosophy Department at Nanjing University, we initiated a four-year specialization in religion. Two groups of students, 24 persons, have completed this course.

To promote research in religion, particularly in problems of religion during the socialist period, and to share the fruits of our research, the journal *Religion* was inaugurated in 1979. At first this was an occasional publication, but it later became a biannual. Reader response to this journal has been quite positive. Circulation has increased from one thousand to eight thousand copies. One reader even wrote to say: "If I

don't read the journal for a year, I feel bereft." Many readers write to express their support for the editorial content and guiding principles of the journal: "Its theoretical depth is free of pedantic wrangling and it is both straightforward and innovative." Such comments are an encouragement to us.

## 2) The Seminary campus.

When the Institute of Religious Studies was set up, there was not a single Protestant church open in the whole country. After four or five months, one church reopened in Zhejiang. Beginning in the latter half of 1979, churches reopened for worship throughout the area around Nanjing and Shanghai, and at the same time, there were plans to reopen the Seminary. In October 1980, it was decided that Nanjing Union Theological Seminary should reopen. However, the Institute of Religious Studies had been open a number of years and had been well-received both at home and abroad; it would have been awkward to summarily close it. Later it was decided that faculty would serve in a dual capacity, serving two organizations and carrying out separate tasks, both as staff of the Institute and as faculty of the Seminary. Bishop Ting continued as Principal of the Seminary, while Rev. Chen Zemin became Vice-Principal. The campus and buildings were refurbished and a notice was sent to the churches announcing that the Seminary was accepting students.

Because the Seminary had been closed for more than a decade, local churches all over the country came forward to enroll students. Within the space of a month or two nearly a thousand had been enrolled. As facilities were limited, each church had to be asked to limit itself to sending one student, but even then there were four or five hundred prospective students. An entrance exam was set, after which 52 students were accepted and on February 20, 1981, they began to arrive for registration. Opening ceremonies led by Vice-Principal Chen were held on February 28. The Academic Dean, Rev. Sun Hanshu preached on the topic "A Full Life." The next day Nanjing's *Xinhua Daily* carried the news of the Seminary's opening.

A fundamental change had taken place in the Chinese church over thirty years. In the past there had been a profusion of denominations. But the first group of students after the Cultural Revolution had no idea what a denomination was. The Chinese church had entered a "post-denominational" era. The Seminary still held to the principle of "mutual respect": no required classes were held on Saturday so that students from a Seventh Day Adventist background could attend church services without falling behind.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, the church had experienced a surplus of pastoral workers. Following the Eleventh Plenum of the Third CCP and the reimplementing of the religious policy, the church was quickly rehabilitated and developed (actually a lot of churches had simply gone underground) and there were many sheep without shepherds. To meet the needs of the church, we divided the basic course into two parts. The first two years became a specialized course, after which a student could either graduate and return to work in the churches, or continue to the third year. After a graduate of the first two years had worked

in the church for a time, he or she, with the permission of the local church, could also return for the third and fourth years of study. This specialized course was eliminated in the autumn of 1989 and a four-year course system reinstated. In the autumn of 1987, one-year courses for lay workers were established and four courses were held with about 60 students each. In 1989 a correspondence course was also begun, and over 15,200 persons from 19 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions signed up. One thousand formal students were accepted, mainly chosen from among middle-aged lay persons from isolated areas without seminaries and from grassroots churches in key provinces and municipalities. Each year after that one thousand more persons were accepted for a three-year course. In order not to disappoint too many people, anyone who wished to pursue a course of self-study was supplied with the materials, and although they did not take part in examinations nor receive a certificate, about ten thousand students did choose this approach. At the same time, in order to train clergy at a more advanced level, we began a research course and also sent students abroad for further study. An art department was set up to research and teach religious art and train artists for the Chinese church. Since the reopening of the school, 441 regular students have graduated and 241 lay training class students have graduated.

### 3) The growth of publications work.

In the 1950s, the Seminary published seven issues of the *Nanjing Theological Review*. The *Review* was revived in 1984 with sixteen issues to date and a print run of 8000 copies for each issue. Beginning with the third issue, an overseas edition was added, typeset and printed in traditional characters in Hong Kong. Many readers have written to say that receiving the *Nanjing Theological Review* is like receiving a "precious jewel" ... "a manna." Six years ago, a 93-year old alumnus who received the journal was moved to say "it is 66 years since I left the Seminary. I am thankful that by the grace of God I can receive this theological wisdom today and come to know God better." Another reader wrote: "The *Nanjing Theological Review* has helped me to make great progress and achievements spiritually and in every sort of way. At the same time that it strengthens my faith, it helps me to resolve to follow the three-self patriotic path, and make my own contribution to the four modernizations." The *Nanjing Theological Review* has truly become the theological voice of the Chinese church.

In late 1980, a "Correspondence Course" was inaugurated for lay workers in the rural church. Because the contents of this "Correspondence Course" were fairly simple, it soon became a "Bible study aid" for rural Christians and the print run increased to over 40,000 copies for each issue. In 1988 it became a bimonthly. Readers wrote to say that it was a "spiritual treasure" ... "bringing these lost sheep back to the Good Shepherd." Lay workers in house gatherings used "Correspondence" as a guide to sermon preparation and asked that more sermon notes be included.

In addition to periodicals, we publish six types of "teaching materials for lay training classes," a catechism, a Bible correspondence course in two parts, eleven books in the "Correspondence Compendium" series, eleven books in the "Nanjing Pulpit" series, twelve

books in the "Theological Education" series, and four volumes of "Selected Word Studies". The Publications Committee of the Seminary plans to focus on publication of translations and works of scholarly value.

#### 4) Relationships with friends and churches overseas.

Developing relationships overseas is a form of witness for the Chinese church, the Three Self Patriotic Movement, freedom of religion and new China; it is also an opportunity to gain new friends, develop scholarly exchange, deepen spiritual experience, and give substance to the spirit of unity. We began our activities in this area through our participation in the movement for world peace.

From August 28 to September 7 of 1979, the same year in which the Institute of Religious Studies opened, K.H. Ting, Han Wenzao and Chen Zemin attended the "Third World Conference on Religion and Peace" at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ. Following the Conference, they took up invitations to visit U.S. churches and Bishop Ting also paid a visit to Canada and spoke at several seminaries as well as McGill and Toronto Universities. On June 18 of the following year, the General Secretary of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, Dr. Homer Jack, paid a return visit and the Jiangsu People's Political Conference held a welcoming tea party for him. Over the following years, a number of groups and individuals connected with peace activities, national and international church bodies, church leaders, theologians and theological educators visited our campus. A number of our students have been sent overseas for further studies, and delegations from the Chinese church have visited numerous churches and church bodies around the world. 14

#### 5) Educate the whole student.

Our educational policy at the Seminary is to train workers for the Chinese church who are well-rounded spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically and socially. In the decade and more since reopening, our facilities for achieving this goal have been much improved.

*Spiritual education* takes pride of place; this is determined both by the needs of Seminary life and those of the Chinese church. The Seminary differs from ordinary institutions of higher learning; a good moral character does not imply goodness in spiritual terms, but true spiritual goodness must be expressed in moral goodness. Book knowledge, even the ability to recite the Bible by heart, does not equal spiritual goodness. The task of spiritual education requires training the student in true knowledge of Christ, nurturing a personal spiritual life, a heart filled with love for the Lord and for the Church and a willingness to dedicate him or herself to the Chinese church. True knowledge of Christ must be Biblically based, because the Bible enables us to have

"instruction for salvation" (2Tim 3:15). We use the riches of Biblical knowledge to encourage everyone to read the Bible. By morning and evening prayer, fellowship meetings, and meetings to share spiritual experiences, the students are guided towards a healthier spiritual pilgrimage, one which emphasizes both individual Bible study, prayer, and individual communication with God, as well as moral cultivation and study to enlarge the intellectual component of the spiritual pilgrimage. By following such a path, our students become capable of settling down to work in the church, sustained by their spiritual pilgrimage. They have been commended by the older generation of pastoral workers. Even those who find themselves in difficult circumstances, are able to "sustain their work for the Lord and do not look for a way out."

14 A complete list of such visitors and return visits is given in the Chinese text, but has been omitted here. A typical entry reads:

19 November 1981 (morning) National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. 19 November 19 November 1981 (afternoon) National Association of Evangelicals (U.S.)

*Moral education* consists, in the main, of education in patriotism and "three-self," carried out through education in moral character. Some students in the 1950s, in spite of being unfairly treated, still maintained patriotic love for their country and upheld the three-self principle of the Chinese church. This can only be a result of the importance placed upon education in patriotism and three-self. Since the reopening of the Seminary, we have tried to explore educational methods suited to the youth of the 1980s. On the one hand, because youth of today have relatively little knowledge of history and current affairs, we offer a class in modern Chinese history and culture. In addition to directly expounding three-self, we also use the heuristic method of allowing students to teach themselves, first setting out their own ideas, organizing discussions and forming conclusions. These and other activities are designed to increase the students' patriotic awareness. Another component of moral education is education in moral character, which we combine with spiritual education. The content of morning and evening prayers emphasizes spiritual progress, including growth of character. At the same time, through the "student code of conduct" we point out to the students their moral requirements. However, since the Seminary does not exist in a void, but rather is located in a downtown area, the work of moral education is a long process which requires constant reinforcement. During the June Fourth Incident of 1989, it is a fact that some students, affected by the prevailing mood, took to the streets to protest.

*Intellectual education.* We emphasize the necessity of diligent study in order to build a firm foundation in the basics of Chinese, English and religious knowledge. At the same time students should do their utmost to read all sorts of books to broaden their knowledge. With the information explosion of today, an educated evangelist will meet with many difficult situations in the course of his or her work, and needs such knowledge in order to act as the gate to the gospel for others. Our library now offers a fair number of social-scientific publications for our

students to read. One afternoon per week is given over to a special lecture or discussion on a topic of student interest or some crucial issue, such as topics in western theology. Our Seminary benefits from the fact that nearly all Christian delegations to China also visit our campus, so that the possibility of inviting visitors to speak or to introduce church conditions in their respective countries frequently arises. Some of these visitors are themselves innovative theologians who can be invited to introduce their own viewpoints on such subjects as feminist theology, black theology and water buffalo theology. All these lectures help the students to increase their knowledge and broaden their horizons. The Student Association also holds a cultural salon and other cultural activities to increase the students' intellectual curiosity.

*Physical education.* We have always emphasized physical education as well. Every year during the spring and autumn terms a sports meet is held to promote physical training. There are also physical exercises everyday between classes, as well as taijiquan, taiji sword exercises and other martial arts. A tennis club and mountain climbing group have been formed. Last year physical education classes were held for first and second year students. We are deeply aware that without a healthy body, students cannot cope with their heavy work loads after graduation.

*Social Education.* The purpose of social education is to train the students in getting along in society. Evangelists are involved in the work of transforming people. In order to do this, one must first take an interest in people and act out of a sense of loving concern in dealing with human relationships. Thus, in addition to having students do practical work in the churches, we also encourage them to take part in a variety of activities outside the Seminary.

From all the above, we can see that the history of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary has not been an ordinary one. Twenty-some seminaries joined together in the making of this one seminary which was later closed entirely for a decade. It has now been reopened for about a decade, and around the country, a dozen or so other theological education centers have been opened. In the past we had a single seminary, created from the merger of all the denominations. After 1979, we had two limbs of one body, the Nanjing University Institute of Religious Studies and the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, now a "post-denominational seminary", fulfilling two tasks. A seminary like ours is unprecedented and unique. There is not another like it in the world. We have here God's wonderful purpose, God's special care and grace. What gives us special joy, is that over these past twelve years we have been able to greatly develop our work and now have a plan to build a new library, and an assembly hall to further enhance our educational facilities. We also plan to develop the faculty, improve teaching methods, raise the quality of teaching, establish a system of academic degrees in theology, and train more well-qualified personnel to meet all the needs of the Chinese church. We believe we can achieve all this. In the *Analects of Confucius*, we find the saying: "Established by thirty; no longer confused at forty." We are now forty. We will not doubt the three-self road which God has blessed. Our Seminary is in a period of steady development, and will certainly surpass its former glories (Hag. 2: 9).

Translated by Philip and Janice Wickeri.

### 3. Forty Years Ago at the Seminary - Cao Shengjie

Cao Shengjie (Rev.) is Associate General Secretary of the China Christian Council. She is also one of the editors of *Hymns of Universal Praise* (New Edition).

*Rev. Cao's brief reflection on her Seminary years is an example of the many offerings from alumni for the fortieth anniversary celebrations of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. She highlights how attending a union seminary has continued to influence her life and work.*

In the winter of 1991 I had to stay home in bed for three months recovering from a fractured hip. When Christmas came I was still unable to attend worship. I could not help but be a little sad at heart. Just then I received *The Nanjing Theological Review* and a school newsletter and suddenly realized that it was almost forty years since I graduated from my Alma Mater. As I recalled scenes of my student years, I jotted down some of my reflections.

In the latter half of 1952, thirteen east China seminaries united, and I, too, came to Nanjing from Shanghai's Central Anglican Seminary. Among the many students I was a very small, not very talkative, inconspicuous girl student. If I were to say I had something special, it was my skill in playing the piano, as I had a basic foundation learned in my childhood. Yet even this ability was only discovered in the piano room after a very long time by Shi Qigui, Lin Shengben and others fond of music.

I graduated after only one term in Nanjing. During this first term after the establishment of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, all was very new for those of us who had come from many different parts of China. The memory of the experiences of those months will stay with me for my whole life.

Because of the rapid changes taking place during the early days of the People's Republic of China, young theological students tended to waver in their thinking. Some, swayed by the trends of the times, abandoned their faith to join the revolution. Others, more concerned about their own future than seeking truth, also left the seminary.

Most of the students who remained after the uniting of the seminaries had the will to devote their lives to the church. Yet all of us always worried about the future of Christianity in China. At that time the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, with its principles of "self-administration, self-support and self-propagation," had already been initiated. What exactly did this mean? Could Christians in China continue to survive when their personnel, finances and social influence had all been drastically reduced? I was also very perplexed about these problems.

The most important lesson my Alma Mater taught me was to help me understand that, if the Chinese church in the new era took the right path, God would take responsibility



for its future. The question was whether or not we would work hard enough. When many of the people around us (did not understand Christianity very well, should we hide in this peaceful campus as lone souls admiring our own purity, or show our care for society by going among the people, so as to give Christianity a new image'? The seminary adopted the latter course. Some of our students did not read the newspaper, so to counter this situation the seminary held a current affairs quiz. Once on an outing to the Sun Yatsen Memorial, we visited a post-land reformation village on our way. We even had a party with the village youth and were invited to join in the collective dancing to the tune "Looking For A Friend." Even the principal, Bishop K.H. Ting, joined in. Our dance movements were not so graceful but this helped the people realize that the seminary teachers and students were human beings too.

Lectures in the seminary about the Three-Self Patriotic Movement emphasized how it was to meet the needs of the churches in new China. Through devotions, meditations and interesting lectures, we gradually came to understand that we need not dwell on the mistakes made by the church in the past, nor should we give up when the church today faces difficulties. If, relying on faith, we seek new light and new insight, God will surely guide us on a new and living path. After all, the union of the seminaries was a new thing, was it not? I remember the day Nanjing Union Theological Seminary held its opening ceremony, and Mr. Y.T. Wu (Wu Yaozong) and other church leaders came especially for the celebrations. Students performed items they had created themselves. This happy and joyful atmosphere greatly increased our determination and courage to look to the future.

At that time, although we had not yet decided on "spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical and social," as our pedagogical principles, the seminary indeed loved the students and was concerned that they be well-rounded. Great emphasis was placed on daily morning and evening prayers and devotions. At night students studied silently in the reading room. For our health we were given soybean milk to drink during breaks and asked to participate in sports during the evenings. All this had one purpose, to strengthen our will to serve, and to build up a sense of responsibility and pride in being pastors in new China. Students often talked together about how to be worthy workers in this new era.

Ever since graduation, those schoolmates of the 1950s who were assigned to work in Shanghai have always met to support, show concern for, and encourage one another. We must protect the reputation of our Alma Mater so as not to be unworthy of the expectations placed on us by the church and the training we received from our teachers.

During the period just after our Alma Mater was established, a unique feature of our situation was that the theological background of each of the participating seminaries was different. Students held different points of view on interpreting the Bible, on methods of spiritual nurture, and on the liturgy of Sunday worship services and so forth. In such a situation, the guiding principle of "mutual respect" recommended by the Three-Self Movement was most successfully applied in the seminary. For example concurrent courses were offered so students from different religious backgrounds could choose freely. (We were fortunate to have a surplus of teachers in those years.)

Anglican students met in a small room for Holy Communion on holy days. This service was held in the early morning, at 5:30 a.m., so as not to impede their fellowship with the rest of the students. In fact, through living together and sharing within fellowships, teachers and students who had not previously known one another quickly increased mutual understanding and friendship.

Last year I went to Jinan in Shandong Province and saw an old classmate, Wang Huizhen. I don't need to say how happy we were to meet again after forty years. Frankly, I had already forgotten which seminary she was from. I only remembered her as a Nanjing Union Seminary student.

One thing left a deep impression on me. In the early days of the union, students from the different seminaries often gathered together very naturally. On one occasion all of us who had come from the Anglican seminary gathered together on the lawn, but I can't quite remember with whom and regarding what affairs we were dissatisfied. Just then, by chance, Principal Ting walked by. He was principal as well as being the Anglican Bishop, but seldom did he have a heart-to-heart talk with Anglican students alone. All of us felt that here was a very good opportunity to make known our opinions. He heard us out patiently and then spoke without haste. "Your number here is not few and if you form a clique, you can cause trouble for the seminary. But if you all unite with others, you can become a constructive force." We were genuinely convinced by his words.

Another small thing worth mentioning was that so many teachers and students came at the same time that the expenses of the seminary instantly increased. At one time the water bill exceeded the budget and the seminary asked the students to pay attention to conserving water. Some students responded immediately by suggesting some measures for saving water. Right then, I and my roommate, Ms. Yu Aifeng, wrote a short note promising that we would "use well water to wash our clothes." The seminary never required us to do this, but that time of loving the seminary like a home and the supportive atmosphere is truly unforgettable.

In recent years, whenever I return to my Alma Mater and see the towering new buildings; the newly published foreign-language theological books in the library; a variety of academic magazines published in China; students listening to a high standard of theological lectures; and some students furthering their study and writing substantial theses; I envy the students of today from the bottom of my heart. Sometimes I think that if I could do it all again, I would certainly return to my Alma Mater as a student.

Recently I read an article which said: "History doomed our generation to struggle, to suffering many hardships, sacrificing ourselves, opening up ways and making progress." I think this is even truer of the Christian situation. The Cultural Revolution seized from us the most precious working period of our lives. After normal church life was restored, we were treated as the youth among the "old, middle-aged and young" pastors. There is a lot of work ahead, and we must do all that is required of us. I never in my wildest dreams expected to work in, and be a leader of, a national church organization. I learned by doing and found myself lacking in too many ways. Whenever I meet co-workers from different places and read stories of how old colleagues, loyal to God in every place, have been contributing to the church in many difficult situations, I have felt from the bottom of my heart that I could learn from their example.

Forty years have passed very quickly. We have to admit that Principal Ting and Vice-Principal Chen Zemin are not as young as they were in 1952. But they are still full of energy. I too have changed from an energetic pig-tailed young girl to a woman pastor in her sixties. With teachers still so hard at work, students can hardly be lazy!

As I lay in bed, I read the scripture about the Prophet Isaiah seeing a vision in the temple. Even without the physical strength to walk I wanted to remind graduates and students of our promise to God: "Here am I, please send me."

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 16 (1992), p. 98.*  
Translated by Gail V. Coulson.

#### **4. Forty Years of Chinese Christianity - Wang Weifan and Ji Fengwen**

Wang Weifan (Rev.) is associate professor of New Testament at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and head of its Publications Department.

Ji Fengwen is a scholar based at the Institute of Religious Studies at Nanjing University.

*The importance of a well-implemented government policy of religious freedom is strongly argued in this apologetic aimed at intellectual and official circles. Its appearance in the journal Religion, a publication of the Institute of Religious Studies of Nanjing University, whose 10,000 copies are distributed to government and Party religion-related offices at national, provincial and county level, as well as to universities and religious bodies, assures it a wide and influential audience. Its critique is set out in terms of the effectiveness of official policy and the national good, one of the ways in which Christians strive to enlarge what Bishop Ting terms the "space to carry on the worship of God, to witness to Christ to men and women in the world and to enter into dialogue as regards the policy of religious freedom" (.see p. 31 ). The authors offer a perspective on the grounds for "compatibility" between Christianity and the socialist system, and of the process of indigenization and self-definition of a characteristically Chinese Christianity.*

In Chinese Protestant Christianity, the last forty years can be calculated either from the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 to the nation's fortieth anniversary in 1989; or from the publication of the Christian "Three-Self Manifesto" in 1950 to the fortieth anniversary of that document in 1990. There is little actual difference in the two methods of calculation and both illustrate the same issue: if new China under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party had not been established, it would not have been possible for Chinese Christianity to achieve complete independence, nor would it have been possible for fundamental change to take place in Chinese Christianity. These forty years have seen the emancipation from western mission board control, great reforms in Chinese Christianity, from theological thinking to church organization, and an emerging compatibility between Christianity and socialist society in China.

### **I**

Before turning to a consideration of these forty years, we must first take a brief look at Chinese Christianity during the thirty years which preceded them - from the May Fourth Movement (1919) to the eve of the establishment of new China (1949). It would be difficult otherwise to account for the internal factors in the fundamental transformation which took place in Chinese Christianity after 1949.

The entry of Christianity into China is generally reckoned from the arrival of the English missionary Robert Morrison in 1907. In the 110 years from that date to 1919, Christian

evangelization basically went hand in hand with the aggressive imperialist colonization of China; this was its setting and its shield. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the Anti-Christian Movement of 1922 acted both positively and negatively as clarion calls to patriotic Christian intellectuals, including theologians and leaders of the church. This was a period of Chinese Christian renaissance or awakening which was manifest in 1) opposition to the unequal treaties which protected Christianity; and 2) initiation of the movement for the indigenization of Chinese Christianity. As early as 1906, the Shanghai pastor Yu Guozhen had already proposed the "abolishment of the unequal treaties protecting Christianity".<sup>1</sup> In 1926, in Guangdong, the Church of Christ in China went further in proclaiming "cessation of relationships with the signatories to the unequal treaties," and initiated the "movement to abolish the unequal treaties".

The indigenization movement which began in the 1920s and 30s, encompassed both the independence movement aimed at discarding western mission board control and at exploring theological integration with traditional Chinese culture. By 1920, the independent Chinese Jesus Church led by Yu Guozhen had spread to sixteen provinces. In 1922, the National Chinese Christian Conference chaired by Cheng Jingyi, met in Shanghai and called for the indigenization of Chinese Christianity. Following this, the church in Kaifeng also raised the slogan "strive for personhood for the nation, the church and the Christian individual," and declared its independence. Many churches, like that in Jieyang, Guangdong, in Wenzhou, Zhejiang, in Xiangtan, Hunan, in Shanghai and in Hangzhou, cast off western mission board control and declared independence as well; throughout China independent churches appeared in over 600 places.<sup>2</sup> The origins of the post-1949 Three-Self Movement are reflected in the slogans of the day: "independence, self-propagation and self-support", "self-determination, self-propagation and self-support".

1 "The Independent Chinese Jesus Church," *Yearbook of the Church of Christ in China*, No. 11, 1931.

2 "Manifesto of the Chinese Christian Movement to Abolish the Unequal Treaties," *True Light Magazine*, vol. 25, no. 4-6, 1926.

Along with the movement for independence came the unification of denominations, such as the merger of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches with the London Missionary Society into the Church of Christ in China, and the unification of various churches with a Wesleyan background into the Chinese Methodist Church. This marked the beginning of a general trend toward unification of denominations in Chinese Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

During the May Fourth period, Chinese Christianity produced its own thinkers and theologians: T.C. Chao, N.Z. Zia, Jia Yuming, Y.T. Wu, Timothy Tingfang Lew, Wu Leichuan, Xu Baogian and others. In terms of theological integration with traditional Chinese culture and the building up of Christian theological thinking with Chinese characteristics, two accomplishments stand out.

1) Joining faith, knowledge and action. The Hebrew people were a people of "faith", the Greeks were a people of "knowledge" in the western tradition, and the Chinese were a people of "action"; thus it was decided that to achieve the special character of Chinese Christianity the three must be united. Further, due to the fact that China reveres moral principles, it was decided that Chinese Christianity must be both a religion and an ethical system, reflecting

both godliness and morals, a religion in which intimacy with God was joined to service to the common life.

3 *Religious Problems in China During the Socialist Period* (1987), p. 48.

4 Yang Senfu, *History of Christianity in China*, 1968.

2) Chinese humanism enabled Chinese Christianity to break out of the confines of western theology and concentrate its reflections on the person of Jesus and his saving grace, whether for the purpose of saving the world or disciplining the self. It is worth noting that the influence of Christianity on modern Chinese writers also centered on this point. The works of Christian writers such as Xu Dishan and Lao She are imbued with Jesus' perfect human nature, his spirit of sacrifice or his "philosophy of love". In those of non-Christian writers such as Ba Jin, Guo Moro, Yu Dafu and even Lu Xun, we find illuminations from the teaching and personality of Jesus, an emotional appreciation of Jesus which arises from feelings of solitariness and remorse, or a reasoned appreciation of and self-identification with Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

During the War of Resistance against Japan, many Christians were directly or indirectly engaged in the national salvation movement. In Shanghai, the student secretary of the national association of YMCAs, Liu Liangmo, organized a mass songfest to teach the people to sing anti-Japanese-national salvation songs and in the summer of 1934 at the public athletic ground in the southern part of the city he led choral singing of "The March of the Volunteers" (which became the national anthem of the PRC-ed.). Later Liu traveled all over the U.S. with the Save China Foundation, promoting his country. The president of the Baptist-run Hujiang University, Liu Zhan'en, was assassinated in 1938 by the enemy and the puppet regime for opposing the Japanese.<sup>6</sup> In 1940, Sun Wenkai, Hong Dexi and Li Zemin, among others, participated in an international anti-imperialist intelligence organization in Dalian, remaining faithful and unyielding when arrested. Teacher Sun Wenkai was hung by the Japanese Occupation authorities; at the time he was only 31 .<sup>7</sup> In Xian, the Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Shanxi, T.K. Shen, (Shen Zigao), shielded Pu I luaren, the musician Ma Ke and a group of patriotic youths, helping them to move from Xian to northern Shanxi. <sup>8</sup>

5 See Wang Xuefu, "The Light of Jesus in Modern Chinese Literature," 1990.

6 *Christians in the National Salvation Movement* (Shanghai Religious Research Group), 1985.

7 Wang Deliang, "Christian Martyrs in the Anti Japanese Resistance," *Tian Feng*, No. 10, 1989.

After the War, the western mission boards, especially those from America, returned to China in force and renewed their control over the finances and personnel of Christianity in China. The anti-Communist views disseminated by some missionaries caused some Chinese Christians to be suspicious and even hostile toward the people's revolution and the war of liberation. But even in such circumstances, there were many Chinese Christians with lofty ideals, many zealous youths who, recognizing that only the Communist Party could save China, actively supported and engaged in the patriotic democratic movement taking place in all sectors of society in the KMT-controlled areas to oppose internecine war and persecution.

In June 1946, along with other patriotic-democratic representatives from Shanghai, Mr. Y.T. Wu went to Nanjing (the seat of government at the time-ed.) to petition for peace. The delegates were beaten by the KMT secret police. In 1947, Y.T. Wu spoke at universities, including Jiaotong in Shanghai and Zhejiang University in Hangzhou publicly supporting the students' democratic struggle, terming it "righteousness rolling down".<sup>9</sup>

During this same period the YM and YWCAs in big cities were sheltering quite a number of underground Party members engaged in the democratic movement. The "April First" case which took place on the eve of the liberation of Nanjing, involved the severe beating by the KNIT of a dozen or so students who were wounded or crippled as a result; two of these were Christians belonging to the Christian Student Union, which at the time was seen as conservative.

In 1948, Y.T. Wu published an article entitled "The Tragedy of Christianity in Our Times" in *Tian Feng*, of which he was editor-in-chief, in which he clearly stated that Chinese Christianity had become a tool of imperialist aggression in China. Because of this article, Y.T. Wu was attacked by the western missionaries, and deprived of the editorship of *Tian Feng*.

8 *Christians in the National Salvation Movement.*

9 *Religious Problems in China During the Socialist Period.*

Against this background of the utilization of Christianity by imperialist aggressors described above, we can still find in Chinese Christianity the strands of an unbroken main thread woven of national integrity, a feeling of responsibility for the nation, sympathy and support for the people's revolution. This main thread is the internal factor which enabled Chinese Christianity to undergo a fundamental transformation after liberation.

Looked at in another way, although from the May Fourth period on there was present in Chinese Christianity the aspiration and struggle to seek independence and to establish a Christian selfhood with Chinese characteristics, the image of Christianity as a "foreign religion" could not be thoroughly changed. This also illustrates why the realization and success of these aspirations and struggles had to await the final dissolution of the old semi-feudal, semi-colonial Chinese society. This is the inescapable internal factor in the fundamental transformation of Chinese Christianity.

## II

In May 1950, Premier Zhou Enlai received a Christian delegation headed by Y.T. Wu. On May 2, 6 and 13, the premier and the delegation held earnest discussions which lasted well into the night. Premier Zhou's remarks centered on several issues: 1) The influence of Christianity on Chinese culture since its introduction into the country some hundred years before was linked to imperialist aggression against China, and at present, American imperialists were still scheming to use Chinese Christian groups to carry out activities damaging to the People's Republic; 2) There had been progressives within Christianity since the May Fourth Movement who had all along been sympathetic to the Chinese revolution; 3) The greatest problem for Christianity continued to be its links to imperialism. The Chinese Christian Church must become a Chinese Church, must eliminate the influence and force of imperialism within itself, must raise its national consciousness, and restore its image as a religious group and make itself sound and whole, taking on a new appearance in the eyes of the Chinese people; 4) Religion is long-lasting and the Chinese people have freedom of religious belief. It would be impossible for anyone to attempt to eliminate religion through artificial means. Materialists and idealists could cooperate in the political sphere, could coexist and should have mutual respect. 10

Premier Zhou's remarks pointed out the connection between Christianity's entry to China and imperialist aggression against our nation and affirmed the existence of progressive Christians sympathetic to the people's revolution from May Fourth onwards; he indicated the direction for Christian efforts in new China and clarified the religious policy of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government. It was with Zhou Enlai's expressed concern that forty Christian leaders with Y.T. Wu as their head signed and published "The Path of Chinese Christians in the Construction of New China," ("The Three-Self Manifesto") on July 28 of that same year. On September 23, the People's Daily carried the manifesto in its entirety, along with an editorial entitled "A Patriotic Christian Movement". This is why Chinese Christians have set aside this date as the anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). The main points of the "Three-Self Manifesto" are: 1) The Chinese Christian church, under the leadership of the government, opposes imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism, and will struggle to construct an independent, democratic, peaceful, united and strong new China; 2) The church will help believers to recognize the fact of imperialist use of Christianity in the past, eliminate imperialist influence within the church and be on guard against imperialist plots to use religion to foster reactionary forces; 3) The self-government,



self-support and self-propagation which the Chinese Church had advocated in the past has met with some degree of success and this process should now be completed within the shortest possible time; 4) In the area of religious work, emphasis should be placed on recognition of the essence of Christianity, unification of denominations, leadership training and reform of church structure, and so on." Following this in April 1951, at the "Conference on Dealing with Christian Groups Receiving American Financing," of the Government Administration Council, the Preparatory Committee of the Chinese Christian Resist-America-Save-Korea Three-Self Renewal Movement Committee was set up with Y.T. Wu as Chair. In the latter half of July 1954, the Preparatory Committee called the first meeting of the National Chinese Christian Conference and formally established the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee.

10 "Four Discussions on the Christian Question," Zhou Enlai on *United Front Work (Selections)*.

11 See *People's Daily*, September 23, 1950.

In the four brief years from the release of the "Three-Self Manifesto" in 1950 to the establishment of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee in 1954, the achievements of the TSPM were considerable:

1) Discarding personnel, administrative and financial control by western mission boards and gradually becoming a religious group supported by Chinese Christians ourselves, realizing the hopes for an independent church of many of our predecessors in recent church history;

2) Eradicating, through the denunciation movement, the fawning and fearful attitude toward the U.S. of clergy and laity and raising their sense of national self-respect and patriotic fervor for the new China;

3) Acquiring a profound understanding of and confidence in the policy of religious freedom of the Party and people's government, through the dissemination of Zhou Enlai's remarks on Christianity;

4) Uniting the majority of church leaders and representative persons from all denominations and theological backgrounds within the Chinese church and enabling them to come together under the banner of three-self, patriotism and anti-imperialism;

5) In these ways allowing the church to play a stabilizing and controlling role in the political situation of the early years of construction;

6) Exposing and eliminating corruption and evil within the church;

7) Saving the many clergy and Christian youths who had been more deeply poisoned by imperialism and helping transform them into positive elements who love the country and love the church;

8) Administering two union seminaries, Nanjing and Yanjing, in which to train theological students who love the country and love the church and support three-self; the majority of these remain the nucleus of the Chinese Christian Church;

9) Writing a new page in the history of world Christianity in the modern era; causing many western missionaries and mission organs to rethink the western missionary enterprise;

10) Establishing a model of an independent sovereign church for those churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America still mired in a colonial or semi-colonial society.

In March 1956, at the Second Plenary (Enlarged) Meeting of the TSPM held in Beijing, Y.T. Wu gave the "Report on the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement",<sup>12</sup> a report which has come to be called in the church "Three Witnesses, Ten Tasks". The "three witnesses" held up by Y.T. Wu were the carrying out of the Chinese Christian Three-Self, participating in socialist construction and the maintenance of world peace. The "ten tasks" including furthering the consolidation and extension of unity; recommending that church organization be reinforced, strengthening leadership, establishing a church order, improving work, promoting self-support and self-propagation; promoting Christian publication and research work; all sorts of personnel training; calling upon Christians throughout the nation to actively participate in the work of national construction, safeguarding world peace and promoting patriotic study.

<sup>12</sup> Published in Tian Feng, No. 6 (March) 1956.

It was in the spirit of this report that a theological debate in progress at the grassroots was pushed to new heights. The church termed this theological debate, "theological rethinking" for Chinese Christianity. As we noted above, in the 1920s and 30s, Chinese Christianity developed its own theological reflection marked by the uniting of faith, knowledge and action, the joining together of religion and ethics, and a focus on the person and saving grace of Jesus Christ. Due to the chaos which followed the anti-Japanese war, however, the Chinese theological reflections described above could not be maintained. Quite the opposite, some western theological concepts, such as that humanity and human society were totally depraved; that good and bad could not be distinguished for non-believers; that the church was pure and without blemish; that there was no common ground between believers and non-believers and absolutely no ground for cooperation; that Christian faith had no need to refer to ethics and moral principles; and so on, were widespread in Chinese Christian churches in the late 1940s. After the establishment of new China, these theological views inevitably became obstacles to the affirmation of the new society, person and task, obstacles to the reform of Chinese Christianity, to Christians' joining with the mass of the people in the common task to establish a new China, to Christians learning to be progressive and act correctly. But these views could not be swept away just like that, a huge theological debate must necessarily ensue; and furthermore this theological debate must be initiated among Christians living in the midst of the new people, tasks and society. The urgency of their calls for theological solutions to problems far surpassed those of clergy and theology professors stuck in "two lines".

This theological debate was founded rigorously on the Bible. For sincere Christians, the only acceptable view was one based on the Bible. Another latent factor contributing to the success of this debate was the Chinese cultural tradition. The western theological views described above were simply too far removed from Chinese humanism. The conclusions of this "theological rethinking" can be summarized as follows:

1) Though human society is polluted by evil, its control and management are still in the hands of the most sacred God. In any given historical period, evil may become the main thrust of human society, but in another period, as in the new society following the establishment of the PRC, goodness and beauty may become the guiding direction for human society;

2) Humans are created in the image of God. Adam's sin gave people a sinful nature and the tendency toward sin, but humans had by no means entirely lost the goodness mercy and justice of God's image. Truth, goodness and beauty do exist outside Christianity, and this is why a new people and new tasks were born with the establishment of the PRC;

3) History is under the direction and Lordship of God, God's holy will and plan, and at times, God may make use of non-believers to carry out and bring these to completion. Christians should affirm and engage in the construction of new China, an enterprise with moral connotations;

4) A Christian's faith and moral behavior are one and thus a Christian has an unshirkable moral responsibility to his or her people, to democracy and to the nation. <sup>13</sup> These theological conclusions were deeply and significantly liberating for the thinking of the masses of Christians during the 1950s, giving them the impetus of faith and the mental ammunition to feel boldly justified in loving the people and the new society and to move quickly to work for socialist construction. In fact the above points reflect features of Christology and of traditional Chinese culture, but raising the issue to this high level, awaited Chinese Christian theological explorations in the 1980s.

<sup>13</sup> Can Yisi, "Changes in Christian theological thinking during the 1950x," *Religion*, No. 2, 1984.

Another great event for Chinese Christianity in the 1950s was the appearance of "unified worship" minus denominational distinctions, which began in 1958. Prior to this denominations proliferated in Chinese Christianity. According to statistics from the early post-1949 period, there were over seventy denominations, a situation similar to that of a splintered Christianity in the majority of the nations of the world. The coming of "unified worship" in 1958, enabled Chinese Christianity to enter a "post-denominational" era. Not only was this an innovation in world Christianity, it was unprecedented in the four hundred preceding years of religious reform. There were two reasons why this innovation should take place in socialist China: 1) National sovereignty led to Christian sovereignty. Chinese Christianity had the power to make its own decisions and did not have to take orders from western mission boards; and 2) the comprehensive

spirit of traditional Chinese culture and the collective spirit of socialism, which was inevitably expressed in Chinese Christianity as non-denominationalism or post-denominationalism.

Unfortunately, the growing influence of "leftism" in the late 1950s, followed later by the Cultural Revolution, caused Y.T. Wu's grand plan of Chinese Christian construction to vanish like a soap bubble. The Party's religious policy was trampled underfoot, religious organizations and churches were closed down, religious books were burned and clergy and believers attacked. Religious activities were forced underground. The Gang of Four's perverse acts, not only failed to eradicate Christianity and other religions from Chinese soil, but had all sorts of disastrous effects on the Party and the government as well as on Christian circles: Pastoral workers and ordinary Christians became suspicious of and lost faith in the policy of religious freedom of the Party and some remain so to this day. The image of the Party and government in international Christian circles was damaged, creating an excuse for anti-China forces to attack and infiltrate China.

### III

The Eleventh Plenum of the Third Party Central Committee gave Chinese Christianity a new lease on life. Firstly, the Party's policy of religious freedom was reimplemented and religious persons who had been falsely accused during the Cultural Revolution were completely exonerated, while those who had been wrongly labeled as rightists during the 1950s were rehabilitated. In the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference at all levels, from national down, a seat was set up for a Christian delegate, giving Christians the opportunity to take part in the political process. Churches were returned and reopened. As of the end of 1989, the national total of reopened Christian churches stood at 6,375, of which 2,683 were newly built churches. In addition to these there were 20,602 simple meeting points.

The third Chinese National Christian Conference met in the latter half of 1980 in Nanjing. In addition to retaining the TSPM, this meeting set up a church affairs organization, the China Christian Council (CCC). Both bodies are led by Bishop K.H. Ting, as chairperson of the TSPM and as president of the CCC. In the ten years from 1980 to 1990, building on the basis of self-administration, self-support and self-propagation, Chinese Christianity has put forward the task to make the church well-run, well-supported and well-propagated. The main achievements of Christianity in these years were:

- Publication of several million Bibles, including Bibles in minority languages such as Korean and Miao. In meeting the needs of the masses of Christians in this way, the Chinese church deprived anti-China forces overseas of their excuse for smuggling Bibles;
- Publication of *Hymns of Universal Praise* (New Edition) in which 100 of the 4(x1) hymns were written by Chinese Christians ourselves;

- Restoration of *Tian Feng*, *The Nanjing Theological Review* and other church publications; the publication of more than a dozen devotional works with a combined total of nearly one billion copies in print, which has not only satisfied our Christians' needs but put a stop to the smuggling of such publications from overseas;

- Operating thirteen institutions of theological education of all kinds, from seminaries to Bible schools, thirteen times those existing in the early 1950s when the only such institution in the country was Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. According to statistics current in June 1989, over a ten year period graduates of all theological institutions totaled 779, providing heirs to the Christian enterprise in China and a solution to the problem of the age-gap among clergy and church workers;

- Providing training courses for lay volunteers in all areas (these lay volunteers do not draw salaries). At the end of 1988, there had been 700 such courses held, the value of which, in terms of raising the quality of faith of the participants and through them, of Christians in general, cannot be overestimated.

In the eighties, Chinese Christian theological reflection still bears the Chinese traits formed in the twenties and thirties and has raised the Christology of the fifties to a high level, finding expression in:

*Christ's incarnation*, which means the eternal Word made manifest in the flesh, dwelling among us. This not only affirms the positive significance of the material world and of human nature, but enables Christians' religious life, spiritual life, inner piety and God's love, to be expressed in the ethical quest, in love for and service to others and even in the sublimation and purification of human nature;

*Christ's "not to be served, but to serve"* approach, which is the quest for self-sacrifice on behalf of others, a life in which no effort is spared to serve the people, a life in which the self is spent and exhausted for the well-being and comfort of others. This is a life of humility, of renouncing fame and seeking only to be a servant;

*Christ's "priesthood"*, which means identifying with one's people and nation, sharing in their joys and sorrows, bearing humanity's errors and anxieties, and pleading for them before God as well as bringing God's grace, peace and comfort to them;

*Christ's death and resurrection*. This moves us to seek a larger human spirit and overflowing love which takes others' troubles as one's own, sacrificing oneself in return for the peace and healing of humankind; it means facing human life and the future squarely on the basis of Chinese Christians' experience over the last twenty years of dying and being recalled to life with the Chinese people.

The focus of all this theological reflection is the God-man Jesus Christ, which differs from the framework of western theology. Its source lies in the social practice and history of Chinese Christianity. This differs from the general run of theological research in which theory is produced from theory. It is strongly influenced by Chinese humanism, yet supplements and adds to this; it also is colored by the Chinese spirit of pragmatism, but also elevates and sublimates it.

The reimplementaion of the religious policy gave Christians peace of mind; the increasing prosperity of the socialist enterprise following the Third Plenum of the CCP, stimulated their patriotic fervor. "Forums for the Exchange of Experience in Contributing to the Four Modernizations" were held in all areas. In Shanghai, for example, one in every hundred Christians is an advanced worker. One of these, Dr. Tang Shu of Shanghai's Xinhua Hospital, was the first to successfully trial-produce a machine to lower the temperature of liquid nitrogen, which greatly aided successful treatment and saved lives. In two consecutive years 1978 and 79, she was named advanced medical worker and for the three years 1978 to 1980 commended with the March 8 Red Banner Award. 14 There is also the example of the deputy head of the nursing department in the Mothers and Children Clinic, He Qicha, who also received an award for her work and in 1981 was commended as "Outstanding Nurse" by the Shanghai Municipal Healthcare System.<sup>15</sup> Another example is Wang Juzhen, an engineer in the Shanghai Lightbulb Factory, who for her successful trial-production of a throated tungsten electrode, was honored as the only recipient of the First Prize for invention at the 1985 national Exhibition of Chinese Inventions.<sup>16</sup> In the Xiamen Rubber Factory's testing workshop, Xu Meisheng set a national record for never having a single error in her work over an eight-year period: 4 first prizes, 4 second prizes and 5 third prizes, and was honored as "a good daughter of Shanghai, a good worker for the nation".<sup>17</sup>

In the countryside, instances of advanced Christians are equally numerous. In Xunshidao village at the mouth of the Min River, eight young Christian women, nicknamed "the eight sisters", are known for taking care of the elderly, widows and orphans in the village, bringing them charcoal, carrying water for them, washing clothes, etc. In addition, they have for many years washed and repaired quilts, mattresses, mosquito nets, clothing and shoes for soldiers-over 21,000 pieces in a seven-year period-and have frequently been commended by various party organizations at all levels.<sup>18</sup> In Zhecheng County, Henan province, twenty-one Christians formed a special construction brigade which would build homes for the farmers. The brigade adopted a special three-point approach: accept no food (banquets), no alcohol, no gifts: thus eliminating the problem of traditional evil habits which had hampered farmers in that area in getting houses built.<sup>19</sup> Zhang Guangsheng, a Christian farmer in Dahe township of the Shuicheng special region of Guizhou, finding the huge sum of 6,300 yuan, returned the entire amount to the owner. <sup>20</sup> In the summer of 1988, the Ningbo area of Zhejiang suffered severe typhoons and flooding which caused serious losses. Christians in Ningbo, Shaoxing, Hengzhou and Deqing donated 28,000 yuan in cash and grain ration tickets amounting to 20,000 cattier for relief work. <sup>21</sup>

14 *Tian Feng*, No. 2, 1981.

15 *Tian Feng*, No. 3, 1982.

16 *Religious Problems in China During the Socialist Period*, p. 130.

17 *Tian Feng*. No. 3, 1986.

18 *Tian Feng*, No. 10, 1985.

- 19 *Tian Feng*, No. I, 1986.
- 20 *Tian Feng*, No. 2, 1987.
- 21 *Tian Feng*, No. 12, 1998.

These partial examples illustrate: that the Christian masses are also part of the larger Chinese masses; that Christian workers, farmers and intellectuals contribute to developing agricultural and industrial production, raising the standard of science and technology and working for socialist construction in their workplaces just as other citizens do; that the moral content of religion serves to restrain believers and turn them toward good and that this is beneficial to the stability of society; that certain developments in theological reflection which have taken place gradually over the last forty years can play a role in motivating Christians to give their utmost for the people and for the four modernizations.

The past ten years have been a tremendously active time for relationships with Christians overseas. Chinese Christian delegations have visited almost every corner of the globe and friendly visitors from overseas have included the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, and the American evangelist Billy Graham, among other notable figures. The value of these contacts in enabling foreign friends to understand and sympathize with the three-self principle of Chinese Christianity and the religious policy of the Party and government should not be underestimated.

## IV

Finally, we would like to discuss what we see as outstanding issues facing Chinese Christianity.

1) Raising the quality of believers, including their political level as well as the quality of their faith. The number of new Christians has been great over the past ten years and most of these know nothing of the history of Christianity's entry into China, of the imperialist use of Christianity as a tool of aggression in China, or of the incursions by overseas anti-China forces during the period of reform and openness. This requires that we help our members to understand the history of Chinese Christianity through education in three-self patriotism; and through examples, educate believers to resist foreign infiltration, raising their ability to differentiate and control such outside forces. Raising the quality of faith awaits systematic education in Christian doctrine, which will raise believers' ability to resist heresy and illegal activities which run counter to doctrine.

2) We face an aging clergy and the situation grows daily more serious. How to maintain the present 13 institutions of theological education in terms of personnel and resources, as well as enabling all those trained in them to progress along the path of three-self patriotism are questions of far-reaching strategic significance for the future of Christianity. In addition, our lack of pastoral workers which is the result of past history,

necessitates that we make the training of lay volunteers in the thirty to fifty age group in towns and villages the foci of our training efforts. The faith of this group is relatively steadfast, they have concrete pastoral experience, and their training and improvement is a better means of closing the clergy gap. Those provinces and cities with the necessary facilities available should put this item on their agenda.

3) The work of Christian publication needs to be further strengthened and should not be allowed to lag behind. Ten years ago, overseas anti-China forces were smuggling Bibles; today they are smuggling Christian literature. This requires that while we continue to publish Bibles, we must strive to publish Christian literature which is healthy and useful for devotional life to meet the needs of our Christians and strive to put our publications in control of the market, in place of those smuggled from outside. This matter cannot be settled simply by banning publications from outside; the important thing is that we ourselves produce books and other publications which we can offer to Chinese Christians.

4) We must make bold use of our young people, allowing them to gradually mature and improve their competence through practical work in the churches. In certain areas there is not a young or middle aged person to be seen, but elderly pastors are in sole control. They hold back and spurn the young and middle-aged, and the situation has become unbearable. Of course there is another side to the story, in which the young and middle-aged lack humility and respect for their elders. But the gap is not unbroachable; the two sides must proceed from dedication to Chinese Christianity, mutual respect and understanding, learning from good points to offset weaknesses and together taking up the weighty historical task of building up the Chinese Christian church according to the three-self principle.

5) In the present situation of openness, we have numerous friendly overseas exchanges. Inevitably a minority of anti-China forces make use of religion to undertake activities hostile to us. Their goal is to defy the sovereignty of the Chinese church and to replace it with an anti-three-self principle, anti-Communist Party and anti-socialist group. This is something we cannot take lightly, because such activities, while undertaken under the guise of religion, are in fact political and counter-revolutionary in aim. If such a plot were to succeed in altering the nature of Chinese Christianity, the socialist system of China would also be threatened.

6) The issue of enlarging unity is one which has existed since the inception of "three-self". It is found, to a greater or lesser extent, wherever Christian gatherings are dissociated from three-self. Of course there are places which are under control of overseas anti-China forces, but these are not by any means the majority. There are many types of dissociation from the three-self principle, including lack of understanding of the three-self principle, disagreement with the actions of the local three-self organization or with those individuals responsible; a feeling that it is not necessary to be involved in three-self; suspicion of the religious policy of the Party and the government, which leads to the idea that three-self is a tool for the destruction of religion. From this it can be seen that dissociation from three-self is in most cases, perhaps in the majority of cases, a matter of understanding, and if we begin from a desire for unity and undertake our arduous tasks with care and patience, careful not to ignore them, we will eventually be able to achieve unity with these people. From one point of view, a source of power separate from three-self can be a seedbed for anti-China forces; but from another point of view, if we do not seek to



win over these groups with patience, but look upon them with disdain or hostility, they will undoubtedly be driven to the side of the enemy.

7) Building up the body of the Chinese church. As noted above, Chinese non-denominational "unification" is a momentous matter in the history of world Christianity, but there is a legacy from the process of unification which awaits further resolution and improvement. For example, concern for the special characteristics of some denominations is insufficient. In emphasizing respect for the "common ground" we have sometimes ignored respect for "small differences", and so on. But there are problems with relatively greater impact: "unified worship" eliminated the original structures, but did not succeed in setting up new structures, and this led to Chinese Christianity becoming a religious body in which each does things his or her own way. After the National Christian Conference in 1980, restoration of Christian organizations and churches basically followed the pre-Cultural Revolution pattern. When we look at the relationships of within and between such organizations at all levels, we see that these are mainly of a service nature rather than an administrative one. In fact it was very difficult for a higher-level section of an organization to realize its guiding function toward a lower-level one. This, it has to be admitted, has been an obstacle to the three-self principle of making the Chinese church well-run. How to reorder the relations among all levels of the TSPM, the churches and the CCC, and build up the body of the Chinese church, is also an issue which must be specially explored. The Chinese Christian church cannot return to any structure from the period of domination by western mission boards, for these are unavoidably marked by capitalism. But the question of which structure a Chinese Christianity in a socialist society should adopt can perhaps be one of the important questions for the next decade.

8) In addition to all the above, Chinese theological research, the collection, ordering and publication of historical sources, the work of translating two thousand years of Christian heritage; all of these require time and effort. Perhaps more elderly pastoral workers who can no longer take an active part in administration can be organized for the work of history and translation, thus providing a legacy for the next generation.

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Translated by Janice Wickeri.

## **5. Christ And Culture In China: A Sino-American Dialogue - Chen Zemin**

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*As part of a more general discussion of the relationship between Christ and culture, Prof. Chen focuses on the Chinese experience, discussing the attempts at contextualization and inculturation which have been made since Christianity first came to China. He points out the difficulties which resulted from the historical identification of evangelization with cultural invasion, a history which continues to complicate the long process of transforming Christianity from a foreign religion into one which is essentially Chinese.*

### **I The Perennial Problem**

The problem of how Christianity is related to culture has nowadays become a hotly debated issue on a worldwide scale. In China, especially during the last decade, it has attracted the attention and interest of many scholars, historians, sociologists, philosophers, political theoreticians and theologians, and is being pushed to the forefront of academic debates, overshadowing the once dominant religion as opium question. However, most Christians, who are deeply engrossed in the urgent and heavy task of building the church anew and trying to implement the newly regained freedom of religion in the best possible way, have only recently come to realize the significance of this "theoretical issue".

In fact, the problem is as old as Christianity. Jesus himself tackled it in the context of Jewish culture and Judaism. Paul and the early church fathers wrestled with this problem amid the dominant Greco Roman secular or pagan cultural environment. Up till then Christianity had been a minority religion suppressed and persecuted, and swamped by an overwhelmingly "pagan" cultural ocean. In order to survive and develop it had to take this problem seriously and find some kind of solution. From the fourth century onward, Christianity, on becoming a state religion, with all the political, military and material support of the Roman Empire, itself became an encroaching and aggressive cultural force. The problem gradually became less acute. By the tenth century all "civilized" Europe had been Christianized. To be Christian and to be civilized had become synonymous. Cultural assimilation seemed to be the natural outcome of Christianization. But even at the height of Christian hegemony in the twelfth century, with the challenges of encroaching Islam and Arabic civilization, the Schoolmen had to struggle with this problem again. Thomas Aquinas took up the challenge, and successfully worked out the Great Synthesis which laid the foundation for another long period of ecclesial and theological development. In the East Christianity had engaged in an encounter with Byzantine culture, and through a certain amount of accommodation had grown into several powerful Eastern Orthodox Churches, which culturally dominated Eastern Europe and the Russian part of Asia for almost a millennium.

In Western Europe, during the periods of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, Christianity had to grapple with this problem in a new cultural milieu amid the rising tides of secular humanism, nationalism, rationalism and natural sciences. Generally speaking, however, Christianity remained the dominant cultural power while also undergoing significant changes and developments itself.

Christianity has always been a missionary religion. Committed to the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20), and firmly affirming that Christ is the only Saviour of humanity (Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:6), from the Apostolic Age on through all the centuries Christians have made it their first priority to make Christian converts of people of all nations. In so doing they came to encounter peoples and nations of many different religious and cultural traditions. Such encounters became sharper and on ever larger scales when missionary activities were carried on with evangelical zeal beyond Europe and America, often accompanied and backed up by colonial expansion. This reached its height in the nineteenth century, when Christianity reached practically all corners of the earth. In most of the "mission fields", Christian missionaries found themselves in the minority amidst great oceans of "heathen" or "pagan" religions and cultures, some of which had much longer histories of development than Christianity. Most of these "missionary target" peoples had been quite happy with and proud of their own cultural heritages, and did not welcome interference from the new religion. This was especially obvious in Asia, such as in the Arabic countries in the Near East (Islamic), the subcontinent (Hindu), Southeast Asian countries (Buddhist or Islamic), Japan (Shinto), and China. The not-so-successful missionary enterprises in such countries have set the sending countries and churches to "rethinking mission", leading to revolutionary mission reforms in the last half century.

## II Some Solutions

All this may seem too simplistic. But it brings us back to the enduring problem of Christ (or Christianity) in relation to the multifarious non-Christian cultures. An avalanche of books and monographs have been poured out on the subject and many answers put forward. Here I can only select a few examples for comparison and as a foil for my presentation. Let me begin with H. Richard Niebuhr, whose classic work *Christ and Culture*,<sup>1</sup> (the fortieth anniversary of whose publication we now have the happy occasion to commemorate) gives a splendid summary and classification of responses. They are:

1. Christ against culture, exclusivism (Tertullian, Tolstoy).
2. Christ of (or in) culture, accommodation and inclusivism (Gnosticism, Abelard and A. Ritschl).
3. Christ above culture, synthesis, (Thomas Aquinas).
4. Christ and culture in paradox, dualism (Luther).
5. Christ the transformer of culture, conversion, (Augustine and F.D. Maurice).

But almost all the illustrations in this book are taken from the West, and Niebuhr does not seem to have the encounters of Christ with great cultures in the East much in mind. In his last chapter "A Concluding Unscientific Postscript" (a phrase borrowed from Kierkegaard) he

gives a long list of books and essays on the topic but leaves us in a state of bewilderment, although he himself seems to lean towards a not very well-defined "social existentialism", a specified model of Christ as the transformer of culture.

1 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, Harper, 1951.

A more recent scholar of the evangelical wing, Charles H. Kraft of Fuller Seminary, follows Niebuhr's classification in the main but with some modifications:'

1. God against culture (Niebuhr's 1)
2. God in culture (Niebuhr's 2)
3. Christ above culture:
  - a. Above and unconcerned (Deism);
  - b. Synthetic (Niebuhr's 3, Thomas Aquinas);
  - c. Dualistic (Niebuhr's 4, Luther);
  - d. Conversion (Niebuhr's 5, Augustine, Calvin, Wesley);
  - e. God-above-but-through culture

Kraft seems to opt for the last answer. "Though God exists totally outside of culture while humans exist totally within culture, God chooses the cultural milieu in which humans are immersed as the arena of his interaction with people." "God is absolute and infinite. Yet he has freely chosen to employ human culture and at major points to limit himself to the capacities of culture in his interaction with people." (pp. 114, 115) I would heartily recommend his book to the evangelical majority of our fellow Chinese Christians, most of whom take a rather rigid exclusivist view.

Let me give two more examples from the Catholic side, not exactly on Christ and culture, but on Christ and non-Christian religions, (which may be seen as components of culture, just as Christianity is taken as a cultural phenomenon by most Chinese scholars). First, I have in mind Paul Knitter.' Knitter has the merit of reducing all theological reflections on this subject to four patterns:

2 Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture, A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Orbis, 1979, chapter 12.

3 Paul Knitter, *No Other Names? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Orbis, 1985. CC also John Hick and Paul Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Orbis, 1987.

1. Christ against religions (culture), hostility towards "paganism", dominating in nearly all the history of Christianity, "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*";

2. Christ within religions, possibility of salvation also for non-Christians within religions, (Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx);

3. Christ above religions (culture). Other religions have an independent validity: "Even if Christ is not the exclusive cause of saving grace, yet He remains above all religions and all peoples." (Hans Kung, Claude Geffre);

4. Unitive pluralism or "the coincidence of opposites". "Each religion is unique and decisive for its followers; but it is also of universal importance." It is neither exclusive (against) or inclusive (within or above), but is "essentially related to other religions," so "perhaps ... other revealers and saviours are as important as Jesus of Nazareth."

Another Catholic theologian, Raimundo Pannikar, reaches the same conclusion by making a distinction between the Christ-Logos and the historical Jesus. There is more in the Christ-Logos than there is in the historical Jesus, so that the Logos can appear in different but real ways in other religions and historical figures outside of Jesus of Nazareth.'

Perhaps I may add here that Bishop K.H. Ting's essay "The Cosmic Christ" hints at the same thing. His "Cosmic Christ" is synonymous with "the Christ-Logos". The theological implication of the Cosmic Christ in respect to our present issue is being slowly but gradually understood and accepted by an increasing number of Christians and theological workers in China now.

This much is enough as a background of theological reflections concerning this enduring problem. Perhaps the two Catholic theologians' views cited above are too radical for most Protestant Thinkers in China to endorse.

<sup>4</sup> R. Pannikar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Orbis, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> K.H. Ting, "The Cosmic Christ," in *The Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 14/15, 1991.

### **III In China- Historical Retrospect**

In the first part of this paper I have tried to compare two different circumstances: first, Christianity as a dominant cultural factor in the building up of a Christendom of so-called "Christian civilization" (as in Europe and North America from the fourth century to the present); with secondly, Christianity's encounter with older highly developed indigenous cultures in non-Christian countries. (Here I try to draw a hazy distinction between culture and civilization, the latter denoting an advanced level of scientific, technological development,

usually with modern comforts and conveniences in urban societies.)' Whether Christianity is a *sine qua non* causal factor of the rise of modern western civilization or just a chance concomitant still remains to be settled.' The success of Christian conquests in the first circumstance led many missionaries to develop a sense of superiority or "imperialism mentality" and to launch presumptuous "cultural invasions" under the name of evangelization. The not-so-successful attempts in the second circumstance have been so frustrating and perplexing as to force western missionaries to fall back to rethinking on this perennial problem of Christ and culture. The experience in China is a case in point.

We do not have sufficient materials to judge how the Syrian Nestorian missionaries in the seventh century attempted to deal with this problem. Perhaps all we can say is that they created a hodgepodge of Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist terminologies and transliterations in rendering the Nestorian Christian tradition (scripture, doctrine and history) into the Chinese language without trying seriously to adapt to the Chinese context or to accommodate to the content or essence of the then flowering Chinese culture, leaving an impression of syncretism. Anyway Nestorian Christianity lasted only about two hundred years, disappearing in the ninth century.<sup>8</sup>

6 These two terms are often used interchangeably both in Chinese and in English. "Culture" is usually translated *wenhua* and "civilization" as *wenming* in modern Chinese. My distinction is drawn from definitions one and seven of "civilization" in *The Random House College Dictionary*, rev.ed. 1973, p. 246, b. The distinction may seem arbitrary, but I believe there are slightly different connotations.

7 See Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, Image Books, 1958, and R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science*, 1972. Chinese translations, 1989 and 1991, Sichuan People's Publishing House.

Under the Mongols in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Christianity, both in its Nestorian and Catholic forms, fared no better. With the political and military support of the Mongol rulers, who were themselves caught in the dilemma of whether to adapt the powerful *Han* culture or develop a new mixture, Christianity was not prepared to face this problem seriously. Prof. Wang Weifan has written a "Preliminary Study of Christian Thought in Ancient China".<sup>9</sup> But one wishes to see more systematic and in-depth analysis from the perspective of acculturation based on more substantial and substantiated materials.

The Jesuits in the sixteenth century approached the problem in a new light. Matteo Ricci was the first to propose and put into practice the policy of accommodation. His threefold strategy of Christianity "complying with Confucianism" (stressing the similarities and parallelisms in both), "supplementing Confucianism" and "surpassing Confucianism"

approximates a combination of the second and third answers of Niebuhr (and Kraft). His attempt to discover an "original Confucianism" (claiming that the original teaching of Confucius was monotheistic, only later distorted by the Neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi) and his followers into a metaphysical atheism)" failed to win the support of modern scholarship. But Ricci's insistence on the necessity and significance of Christianity's coming to terms with traditional Chinese culture is praiseworthy. He would have opened a new and interesting chapter in our discussion were it not for the fact that the folly and conceit of Pope Clement XII (1704) caused Emperor Kangxi to ban Christianity (1721) with a stroke of the imperial brush. Catholic Christianity in China has so far not been able to redeem the cost of this historical mistake.

8 Kenneth S. Latourette suggested that Nestorianism arrived at a time when a special need for a new religion was felt, as contrasted with the situation in the Roman Empire in the early Christian centuries. *A History of Christian Missions in China, S.P.C.K.*, 1929, p. 58. But how can one say at what time a people may feel a need for a new religion?

9 *The Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 16, 1992, Nanjing.

10 *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, published in its final form in 1604.

The story of the introduction of Protestant Christianity into China is too well known to need recounting. Most of the missionaries were too preoccupied with the saving of souls, and with their arrogant air of the superiority of western "Christian civilization" over heathenism, failed to take enough heed of the splendid Chinese traditional cultural heritage. To be fair, exceptions must be made of some missionary scholars such as James Legge and Timothy Richard. It may be too sweeping a judgment, but they were more interested in translating Chinese classics into English and introducing western scientific knowledge into China, and must be complimented for their contributions to cultural exchanges rather than real encounters. A great deal can be learned from in-depth studies of the experiences of the Catholic and Protestant missionaries and the responses of Chinese people, both positive and negative, during this period, and this can shed light on the problem of the Christ-Culture encounter.

The *Bai Shang Di Jiao* (Religion of Worshipping God) of Hong Xiuquan during the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of the mid-nineteenth century may be regarded as a real attempt at a rather radical accommodation of Christianity to Chinese traditional culture in a milieu of revolutionary upheaval. It had developed into a successful mass movement and won partial support of some missionaries at the beginning. Its eventual failure was due more to the military defeats suffered at the hands of the overwhelming Qing forces with the assistance of foreign invasive powers, in which a few western Christian missionaries were involved, rather than doctrinal deviations from "orthodoxy" or cultural incompatibility.

The real clash came in 1919 when Confucianism was criticized in the New Culture Movement, attacked as the root and bulwark of feudalism and condemned as the main cause of

China's backwardness and weakness as a nation and as a people. In the revolutionary reckoning Christianity became a target because it had been used as a "Trojan horse" of cultural invasion". It was seen as a Trojan horse for sabotaging the New Culture Movement. The anti-Christian accusations in the 1920s called forth responses from some progressive Christian intellectuals who accepted many of the criticisms while at the same time they were spurred to seek a new ground for Christianity in the Chinese cultural soil. It was at this juncture that some outstanding Christian scholars and theologians like Wang Zixing, Y.T. Wu, T.C. Chao, and N.Z. Zia, steeped in Confucian philosophy and classical literature, came to grapple with this problem. It was a time when such terms and concepts as acculturation, inculturation, and contextualization were not in much use or even available. Credit must be given to these scholars who made great contributions to accommodation by pointing out the similarities or parallelisms between Christianity and Confucianism, but they did not go much further than Ricci, and remained more elitist than popular. The church's Independence Movement (1901-1933) had more followers at the grassroots level, but was primarily aimed at self-support and self-administration in order to overturn Christianity's bad reputation as a tool of western imperialism, and did not take seriously the relation between Christ and Chinese culture. So-called indigenization was more a matter of outward forms and structure than thought content.

The 1930s and 40s were a period of political and social unrest. Civil warfare and the Japanese military invasion plunged the Chinese people into extreme poverty, instability and despair. It was in this context that a Christian religion of the American revivalistic type - one which stressed the penal substitution theory of redemption and salvation of individual souls, fleeing from this fallen, sinful and condemned world, looking towards the immediate second coming of Christ, and advocating a pietistic, sentimental and sometimes fanatical religiosity - found fertile soil. (John Sung was enjoying Billy Graham-type popularity in China at this time.) Theologically this was fundamentalist. Understandably Christianity of this type took an extreme exclusivist view toward non-Christian cultures of any kind. Church leaders of "mainline" affiliations and with more liberal theological backgrounds either took a compromising stance or were simply banned as "social gospellers" and readily lost ground. Some of them gathered under the banner of neo-orthodoxy and looked askance at secular or non-Christian cultures also. Kirkegaardian existentialism was looming on the horizon, but little understood. Hendrick Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* was found in the libraries of many a theological seminary."

This brings us to the present era.

## **IV A Period of Rapid Changes**

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed profound changes in several aspects related to our present concern. The phenomena of modernity are too well-known



to need any elaboration: great disturbances, divisions and realignments in the world socioeconomic-political arena, the rise of Third World countries with self-assertive consciousness of national and cultural identity, rocketing scientific-technological advancements and the shrinking of the world into a global village, - all these have combined to usher in a new era of modernity, pluralism and secularism. The problem of Christ and culture must be considered against this backdrop with its complexity and inter-relatedness. I shall concentrate on its relevance in the Chinese context.

The revolution of 1949 has completely changed the socio-economic-political structure in China. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government, with Marxist theory of social revolution and dialectical materialism as a guideline, a series of social, economic and ideological reforms and reconstructions were successfully carried out and eventually won the support of the people, including many religious believers. The suspicion that under communist rule all religions would be treated as reactionary and sheer superstition to be suppressed and liquidated was gradually dispelled through the implementation of policies of the "united front" and religious freedom. Some people still took a "wait and see" attitude. In any case, all religions and their adherents found themselves in the position that, willy-nilly, they had to adjust themselves to the new situation. For Protestant Christians, this took the shape of the Three-Self Movement, under the prophetic leadership of Y.T. Wu, which through persuasion and appeals, finally consolidated a large majority of Protestant church leaders and members to make the adjustment. This proved to be a decisive step in changing the image and nature of Protestant Christianity from a "foreign religion" (*yang jiao*) to an essentially Chinese one. But this was just a beginning, and much remained to be done. Now freedom of religious belief is vouchsafed by the constitution as the policy of the Party and People's Government. In practice it is being implemented with various degrees of efficiency and success, with much left to be desired. Catholic and Protestant Christianity, together with the three other major religions, i.e., Buddhism, Islam and Taoism, enjoy legal and popular recognition on a status of parity.

11 See my paper "The Task of Theological Construction in the Chinese Church," (part 2) in *The Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 14/15, 1991. English translation in *The Chinese Theological Review*: 1992.

During the last four decades Christianity in China has undergone tremendous changes. It has rid itself of the stigma of being an imported foreign religion utilized as a tool by western powers for aggression and cultural invasion. Protestant Christianity has severed the umbilical cord that once connected it with the "mother" missionary societies and gained independence and an identity of its own. Without depreciating the historical *raison d'être* and special contributions of denominations, but realizing the frailty of the fibrous roots with the main roots cut off, Protestantism in China has tried to transplant "potted flowers" (D.T. Niles' metaphor)

into Chinese soil, and to cultivate a multiflorous garden with a more or less unified pattern or design. We call this a "uniting church" of "post-denominational unity" on a conciliar basis. The soil is Chinese culture; the sunlight and rain are God's blessings and the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and the air is the modern Chinese milieu. We are fully aware of the immaturity and shortcomings of our experiments, and the many difficulties and problems before us. So far this approach has borne positive results, and reflects the desire and attempts "to build the church well in a socialist society with Chinese characteristics".<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See my paper "Post Denominational Unity of the Chinese Protestant Church," presented at the IAHR Religion Conference, Beijing, April, 1992.

A few digressive remarks on the meaning and content of the concept of "culture" and how it can be related to religion are perhaps in order. Culture is a very vague idea and not often precisely defined. H. Richard Niebuhr does not give us a concise definition, but describes some of its chief characteristics. "That culture and religion are closely related no one can dispute. It was Paul Tillich who advanced a theological theory of culture with the dictum "religion is the substance of culture, and culture the form of religion"." How these two (are there really two or just one including the other?) should be related remains a problem, especially in the Third World where indigenous religions and indigenous cultures are so intimately intertwined when they come to encounter Christianity and western culture. In the post-war era many attempts have been made to clarify this problem. C.S. Song in his article on "Culture" in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* traces the course of development through the following stages:

(1) In the 1950s and 60s *indigenization* was widely advocated, and seemed to have enabled churches in the Third World to shed their foreignness. "But the change was largely of a structural and political nature. It was assumed that the Christian gospel would remain unchanged ... Theologically, it was on the whole a matter of finding parallel indigenous religious and philosophical language and ideas and expressing the Christian truth in those terms." This was what Chinese theologians like T.C. Chao and N.Z. Zia had been doing. But again the word "indigenous" sounds hazy in a world where what was "indigenous" is being absorbed and assimilated and dissolved in modernity. Indigenization seems to leave out the "fourth dimension" of time and constant change. In the advance of time the formerly indigenous has undergone changes and become something different, though continuous with the original. Something more dynamic is missing in indigenization.

(2) In the late 1960s and early 70s, Shoki Coe, then director of the WCC Program for Theological Education, proposed the now popular idea of *contextualization*, as focusing on the relation between *text* and *context*. This approach stresses "the careful study of the fit between the Christian Bible, the gospel, and the various cultural and religious settings to which Christian faith Addresses itself".<sup>15</sup>

13 Op., cit., pp. 32-39.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, Robert C. Kimball, ed. Oxford University Press, 1959. Chinese translation, 1988.

15 Op., cit., pp. 258-9.

This implies that the *present* is emphasized. It was not until the early 1980s that this idea was introduced to Chinese church and theologians to be tried out on a more conscious basis. Many Chinese theologians seem to prefer the concept of contextualization to "plain" indigenization.

(3) From the mid-1970s onward, *acculturation* and *inculturation* came to the fore. Both seek help from social sciences like anthropology, ethnology and the history of religions to assimilate more closely indigenous cultural factors to the expressions and understanding of the Christian faith. *Acculturation* means to adapt Christian practice to local culture, like using indigenous dress, architecture, music and fine arts in worship and liturgy, while *inculturation* means the insertion of new values into one's heritage and world-view." Some open-minded Chinese church leaders were enthusiastic about experimenting with these ideas in the last decade. But many old pastors and church members are rather hesitant or resistant toward such "innovations". We find it difficult to "induce" or "seduce" second and third generation Christians (mainly in the cities) to accept and to like church music and Christian art in traditional Chinese styles. To them, to be Christian means to follow the western tradition. The indigenous has become alienated. The ghost of foreignness follows closely and refuses to be laid down. However, in rural areas and among most new converts we find less contamination by such alienation.

The distinction between indigenization, contextualization, acculturation and inculturation may be more academic than real. In fact they are very closely related and often used synonymously. But the observations of C.S. Song are helpful because they reflect the shift of emphasis in the last four decades in the Third World. In this paper I choose to use the concept contextualization to embrace the peculiarities of all four.

16 *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, p. 51)6. See also *One Faith, Many Cultures*, Boston Theological Institute, Annual Series, vol. 2, 1998 (Orbis) Ruy O. Costa, "Introduction: Inculturation, Indigenization and Contextualization" and Max L. Stackhouse, "Contextualization, Contextuality and Contextualism", pp. ix-13.

## V The Context

I have pointed out the ambiguity in the use of the concepts *culture* and *indigeneity*. When we come to talk about Chinese indigenous culture the foginess is multiplied. A library has been poured out on the subject. But one feels at a loss in trying to pinpoint the "quintessence" of *Chinese indigenous culture*. As the apt Chinese sayings go: "*ren zhe jian ren*,

*zhi zhe jian zhi,*" and "*mo zhong yi shi.*" ("The benevolent person sees benevolence while the wise one sees wisdom" and "there is no way of compromising and arriving at a consensus of right conclusion.") This is no place to quote authorities and make comparisons and selections. I choose to follow Richard Niebuhr by pointing out a few of the important characteristics of *traditional Chinese* culture with reference to their relation to religion.

(1) In the first place the Chinese mind was traditionally not accustomed to draw a line between culture and religion. The term *zongjiao* as we understand it today as religion was absent in premodern literature. A near synonym could be traced to its Buddhist origin, which defined *tong* as "what was taught by Buddha himself and *jiao* as "the teachings of his disciples". Etymologically *zong* means origin or source, and derivatively, tradition; and *jiao* means teaching, education or nurturing. Hence the idea of culture, as in *jiaolnia*, to teach, assimilate and change. (See *Ciyuan*, a standard *Etymological Dictionary of Classical Chinese Terms*, compiled and published by Commercial Press in 1915.) The present use of *zongjiao* as religion in the modern sense is an adaptation from the Japanese translation. One seeks in vain in the Confucian classics for the term *zongjiao* and the idea of religion. To try to dichotomize religion and culture and to clarify their interrelation often leads to confusion.

(2) Among the three main traditional Chinese religions, i.e., Confucianism (although many modern Chinese scholars argue that Confucianism is not a religion at all, but a system of ethical and educational philosophy), Taoism and Buddhism, there has long been a tendency to overlap, merge and interpenetrate. Confucianism is regarded almost unanimously as the dominant cultural factor. There were times when one of the other two grew stronger. But there has never been any state religion in China as there has in some other countries. The influences of these major three, supplemented by numerous *folk religions*, (which are usually combinations of heterodox or heteromorphic derivatives of the three, enjoying overwhelming popularity) are found to be in the blood and veins of traditional Chinese culture, often in a mixed way, both among the educated elite and the common people. Perhaps many people took an agnostic or indifferent attitude toward institutionalized religion. There were very few, if any, diehard, thoroughgoing rationalist atheists. But they were) not immune to such cultural influences. Therefore, when we talk about 1 traditional culture, we should bear in mind this compound nature. And when we talk about the indigenization of Christianity in China, if we', confine ourselves to just pointing out the similarities and parallels of Christianity and Confucianism and/or Taoism and/or Buddhism in juxtaposition, there is a danger of forgetting the broad masses, who are also bearers of Chinese culture. This seems to be what many scholars and theologians have done and are doing.

(3) This leads us to the third consideration: the *non-exclusiveness* of Chinese religions. In religious matters the Chinese mind in general is one of tolerance, often tending towards syncretism. Instances of interreligious warfare and controversy have been only occasional. Many people hold that all religions aim at the well-being of individuals and all are helpful to "make men and women good." Even the agnostic and the indifferent often treat religious believers with smiling understanding and condone their practice of religion. It was only when western missionaries and fundamentalist Christian preachers who held an extreme exclusivist "no-other-name" view of salvation and looked

down upon non-Christians as "pagan, heathen, fallen and condemned to hell" that enmity and resistance were aroused.

(4) Another characteristic Chinese mindset is "harmonizing opposites", such as heaven and earth, heaven and humanity, *yin* and *yang*, the cyclical series of dialectical derivations and counteractions of the *wuxing* (five elements), and so on and so forth, in a holistic cosmological and pragmatic oneness. This has already been elaborated upon by too many scholars, Chinese and foreign, to need any repetition or explanation. This characteristic can be found reflected in all Chinese religions, including the folk religions, in theology, beliefs, rituals and private practices; but is often neglected by professional theologians who excel at making minute differentiations and tracing origins.

(5) The humanistic, moralistic and practical features of traditional Chinese thought, emphasizing the value of moral cultivation and ethical duty and the heavenly (natural) law of retribution, have also been universally recognized. The Mencian doctrine of inborn goodness (cf. Christian doctrine of "original righteousness") of human nature, (as contrasted to the doctrines of "neutral nature" of Gaozi and "evil nature" of Xunzi), is generally accepted. Hence the emphasis on education and free will. Linked to this is the absence of the idea of "original sin". To the Chinese mind *sin* often carries a legalistic or moral connotation, (crimes and immoral acts) rather than a sense of spiritual, existential or religious sinfulness. The etymological meaning of the Greek *harmatia*, missing the mark or breaching of relationship, is more easily understood and acceptable. We find in classical religious literature nothing like the great "Repentance Psalms" and *Confessions* of Augustine. This is why evangelical revivalists like John Sung had to begin evangelical meetings by stressing the sinfulness and fallenness of every individual (like Johnathan Edwards), and to arouse a deep, strong sense of remorse, contrition, and "lost-ness" before they could declare the gospel of grace, pardon and salvation. Usually we find ordinary people in the street rather adverse to such an approach. To convince and convict the ordinary Chinese of his or her "original sin" and sinning against God is often difficult.

(6) We could also observe a difference in the eschatology in Chinese religions from that of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Confucianism emphasizes the this-worldly, the here and now, and tends to shun speculation on life after death and eternity. The classical idea of *datong* (the Realm of Great Harmony) is to be strived after in this world. Buddhism teaches the Western Paradise (*xitian*) but only for the devout religious few, who might attain it only after arduous and strenuous pursuit and trials, an idea more metaphorical than realistic. In vernacular satirical speech "*shang* (go up to) *xitian*" simply means "to die" or "to finish off" rather than to go to heaven. Taoism preaches a celestial, vividly anthropomorphic fairyland which is also not attainable by all the faithful, and often has very slight eschatological nuances. Hope lies in the present world, not in the far future. Popular Buddhist, Taoist and folk religions believe in transmigration and/or immediate judgment and punishment in hells (commonly believed to have eighteen layers, like limbo or purgatory), rather than eternal damnation. Taken all in all the Chinese mind puts great emphasis on the mundane life, the here and now, and cares very little about the end of history and the cosmos. The idea of eternity is often conceived more in terms of endless generations in this world, and lacks the dimension of transcendence.

(7) I might add another cultural characteristic related to religious life in China. I mean the irenic, gentle temperament and ethos of religious expression. One of the Confucian virtues is to keep to the mean, i.e., to try to maintain the "Golden Mean": everything in the appropriate order, relationship and proportion; avoiding excesses and extremes. Both Buddhism and Taoism place a high value on peace of mind and quietness in spiritual exercises. With the exception of some folk religions, Chinese people often look askance at religious fanaticism. Chinese mysticism in general is of the meditative, not the ecstatic, obsessive or fantastic type. So in Chinese history one does not find so many frenetic religious movements comparable to the Crusades and witch-hunting in Europe, except for those connected with tribal or political causes, like peasants' revolts and uprisings. We also observe that modern religious charismatic movements have found only mild response in China.

I could continue with further observations, but these are enough to sketch a general profile of the *indigenous* Chinese cultural temperament or ethos with regard to religion. Again I want to stress that when we think of the *context* we have to use this just as a background and to look into what at present exercises the strongest influence on the entire population of China. Perhaps the Chinese people are not so traditional and indigenous in their way of thinking and feeling nowadays after all. I have mentioned the radical political, ideological and social changes of the last four decades. Now Confucianism is more often the target of criticism than an object of adulation. The current revival of interest in the study of Confucianism in mainland China (not as a religion) and of Neo-Confucianism (or more correctly "contemporary Neo-Confucianism") outside China seems confined to academic circles. The above-mentioned characteristics of indigenous Chinese culture still linger and can never be completely erased. Chinese still remain Chinese in a very real, general and subtle way, perhaps in what Jung calls the collective subconscious. But times have changed and so has the environment. Attitudes toward religion in general and Christianity in particular are undergoing significant modifications. Time and space do not allow me to dwell on this. I need only highlight some important changes in the present context, focusing on the last twelve years.

(1) We are in a new type of socialist society. People who are wont to gauge the present Chinese situation with the old meter used for socialism of the Soviet and Eastern European type often find themselves puzzled. For instance, the once heated controversy over the Marxist dictum of religion as the opiate of the people is abating. The famous Party Document No. 19 (1982), which is "the starting point and the landing point of the religious policy of the Chinese Communist Party", does not mention the word "opium" at all. An increasing number of scholars are discussing how religion can be adjusted so as to become compatible with socialism." In many books on religious studies published in the last few years we find that overtones of dogmatic Marxist anti-religious clamor have been remarkably soft-pedaled.

(2) After a long underground hibernation during the Cultural Revolution, religion began to surface again. All five major religions, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholic and Protestant Christianity (counted as two different religions in China) are recording marked increases in their adherents. Protestantism is making the fastest advance, totaling over seven million, at a speed of about eight times the pre-liberation total in a decade. (This is a rather conservative estimate, yet large enough to trigger alarm in some government functionaries!) But counted together with the 3.5 million Catholics, Christians still constitute less than one percent of the whole population, a tiny drop in an ocean of 1.2 billion. The general increase of religious

believers after the Cultural Revolution calls for an explanation and has led many social scientists to theorize. This is no place to compare and evaluate the various answers advanced. All of these theories only explain the phenomenon in part. This is a rather complicated issue and we need more comprehensive investigation and scientific, unbiased analysis to substantiate the various answers. But to me the return of religious popularity is not very astonishing, but rather normalization of the abnormal. The "liquidation of religion" during the years of Cultural Revolution was itself an abnormality in an abnormal historical situation. The pent up religiosity of the populace, (here I mean the "natural" or "inborn" religious or spiritual aptitude or yearning of the masses), tends to burst with extraordinary force when pressure is suddenly released. In a certain sense and to some extent this is "overdoing in correcting a wrong", as the Chinese saying goes. 18

17 See *Religious Problems in China During the Socialist Period*, Luo Zhufeng, ed. Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Publishing House, 1984.

18 A group of scholars gathered in Beijing in the winters of 1990 and 1991 to study the phenomena of religious growth and concluded that the so-called "religious heat" had been much exaggerated.

(3) Since most Protestants have come together under the China Christian Council (CCC) in a post-denominational unity, interdenominational dialogue is no longer necessary and attracts little interest. But there are several exclusivist "established sects" (like the Christian Assembly, usually known as the "Little Flock", the Seventh Day Adventists and the True Jesus Church, estimated to have a total of about four hundred thousand adherents) which prefer to stand aloof from the CCC. It seems impracticable to have any kind of dialogue with these groups, at least for the time being. By being sectarian and exclusivist they tend to confine themselves to minority groups, in spite of their proselytizing endeavors. This has caused grave concern on the part of many church leaders in China. The policy of the CCC is to adhere to the principle of mutual respect and render all possible service to these groups, with more love and patience, without prejudice or discrimination. The recent emergence and proliferation of a number of cults that bear little resemblance to Christianity, especially in the rural areas among the uneducated masses, have caused some alarm and bewilderment. (These pseudo/quasi-"Christian" groups should not be confused with the "meeting points", about twenty thousand in number. Most of the latter are under the pastoral care of, and maintain good relations with, the CCC.) This phenomenon of cult-breeding as a sub-culture requires separate study and cannot be treated in this paper. But to me it seems less startling and bewildering than what American "cult-watchers" see in California. New sects and cults and various sorts of deviations may emerge, merge, undergo changes and eventually disappear, as we often see in the history of all religions. So in my opinion they pose no grave threat to Protestant church unity today.<sup>19</sup>

Only a few Protestant theologians in China have shown interest in inter-faith dialogue. In practice it seems the time is not yet ripe. One of the reasons is that many evangelical church

leaders who hold an exclusivist view are afraid of losing the "uniqueness" of Christ and Christianity. Leaders of other religions so far have shown little interest either. Academic discussions among non-believing scholars can hardly be considered as inter-faith dialogue.

(4) Believers in all religions are encouraged and admonished to live out their faiths in everyday life and do good works and make contributions to socialist construction as witnesses to their faiths and proof of their religious loyalty and their love for the country and the people. (May we think of these as a kind of Chinese "civil religion"?) The Christian slogan is "glorify God and benefit humanity." But we find many fundamentalist-pietists, though not openly opposed to such admonitions, still take a skeptical attitude toward this as a "religion of good works". They seem to forget or ignore the biblical teachings on social justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and regard them as "social gospel", too mundane and irrelevant to the salvation of the soul. As many foreign observers have pointed out, the majority of Chinese Christians are tending toward a type of pietistic, otherworldly "evangelicalism", and are more concerned with individual salvation and spiritual exercises, paying rather little attention to social issues.

(5) In academic circles we find a different picture. Many are being "liberated" from former rigid Marxist anti-religious views and are adopting a more objective, unbiased, scientific approach in their studies of religion. The study of religion, once taboo in China, is advancing by leaps and bounds. In the last ten years hundreds of books by foreign writers on religion, both general and specialized, have been introduced and translated into Chinese. Books on religion are often best sellers. An increasing number of scholars now take a more open and sympathetic attitude toward religion in general and Christianity in particular. There has emerged a sizable group of "culture Christians", who for some reason or other are not ready to be affiliated with the church and be known openly as committed Christians. But in private discussions and open forums they usually show unmistakable sympathy towards Christianity, and have become quite influential with readers.

(6) Last but not least, the global context must be taken into consideration. Under the present national policy of opening-up and reform, the Chinese church, having achieved her identity and independence, has developed many international contacts and relationships, and become a member of the family of world Christianity. We are widening our horizons to include more abundant and multifarious cross-cultural exchanges.

With the foregoing considerations as the cultural background and context, and keeping in mind the solutions described in section 11 of this paper, what actions shall we propose and what prospect can we visualize for the future of Christianity in China?

19 See my paper (note 7).

## **VI Theological Reorientation**

If Jesus Christ were born in China and lived and taught, died and was resurrected about five centuries before the common era, when Confucius and Lao Tzu had already exerted their



strong influence on the Chinese people, what would Christianity and its subsequent developments be like today? J.A.T. Robinson has somewhere raised a similar question. This may seem an absurd and sacrilegious "if". Was it not God's decree that Jesus be born a Jew in Palestine at the appointed *Kairos* under the specific circumstances? By the same line of reasoning one would say that all subsequent developments of Christianity and Christian theologies were also decreed by God and could not be otherwise. The inference is absurd, and one would fall into a rigid mechanical historical determinism. No place would be left for human freedom and contingency. Creativity and variations would be ruled out. There would be no such thing as culture. *Incarnation* would be rid of its rich significance, meaning and value. But Christ came into the world and took on humanity, embracing all humankind, not just the Jews. If the Gospel is for all the world, to spread and reach all nations, contextualization and inculturation are inevitable. There should not be just one theology, but theologies of peoples and times. Theological reorientation and reconstruction have always been going on (Paul Tillich and Gordon Kaufmann). The question is rather how this can and should be done in China.

I have found two books focusing on this problem very helpful. These are *Unfinished Encounter* by Bob Whyte and *Seeking the Common Ground* by Philip L. Wicker.<sup>20</sup> Hans Kung's "Christian Theology's Responses" are also very illuminating and suggestive." But it should fall upon Chinese Christians of today to undertake theological reorientation and response. So far we have not been able to face this challenge in a very conscious and systematic way. In the early 1950s one could observe a mass movement of very lively theological discussions in sermons and articles, as published in *Tian Feng*. I tried to summarize the general trends of theological reorientation and reconstruction during that period in a paper published in the *Nanjing Theological Review*' (No. 11). These efforts were interrupted by a period of peril from the "anti-rightist movement" to the end of the Cultural Revolution (1957-79). During this difficult time theological thinking seemed on the surface to be at a stand-still. However the painful experience did set many Christians to deep reflection and prepared the ground and material for further theological reconstruction. The last decade has witnessed the resurfacing and rapid development of church activities and theological florescence. As Dr. Gotthard Oblau, after studying hundreds of sermons preached and published in China in the last decade, notes:

"With my review of (mainly recent) sermons from China I hope to show basically two things. First: the theological orientation in today's Chinese churches is still very deeply shaped by the overwhelmingly evangelical or pietistic legacy of the western mission era. And second: despite the fact that most sermons appear to be orthodox and pietistic in style, and hence somewhat other-worldly and detached from public life in society, *they do sometimes, at least implicitly, grapple with challenges from the surrounding world, thereby providing a more or less unique Christian witness in China's present day context.*" (emphasis mine)<sup>22</sup>

Bishop K. H. Ting, confirming the preponderance of evangelicalism and fundamentalism in China today, also stresses the "need to take into account that somehow the Chinese context makes certain theological affirmations and accommodations unavoidable.

In the following I shall give in a very general way some salient shifts of emphases in theological reflections in China today.

In the doctrine of God, emphasis is put on love (agape) as God's essential nature, not just as one of God's many "attributes". Love is manifested in God's work of creation, providence, redemption and sanctification which runs through in an overlapping continuum, not as separable "stages", and all in relation to humankind and the whole universe. Without belittling God's transcendence, the stress is put on immanence. All that is true and good and beautiful comes from God as its ultimate source and reflects God's goodness and love and glory. God loves and cares for all humankind irrespective of their various religious traditions and disbelief. We are learning not to condemn but to appreciate and respect all the good works of people outside the Christian Church, and to regard them as also coming from God and out of God's all-encompassing Love through the Holy Spirit.

In Christology more attention is focused on the idea of the Cosmic Christ as taught by Paul in his Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. "Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15-17). "He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ is God incarnate in the union of God's perfect deity with perfect humanity so that through Him and in Him humankind can aspire to salvation and renewal in Him. His vicarious and exemplary suffering and sacrifice on the cross is the perfect manifestation of God's love, so that by accepting Christ as our Saviour we may be reconciled to God. The doctrines of incarnation and reconciliation should be understood in light of the doctrine of the Cosmic Christ. (K.H. Ting, see note (5))

20 Bob Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter: China and Christianity* (Collins, 1988); and Philip I. Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement and China's United Front* (Orbis, 1988).

21 Julia Ching and Hans Kung, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (Doubleday, 1988). Chinese translation, Shanlian Xudian, 1990.zz

22 Gotthard Oblau, "Between Western Legacy and Contextual Challenges: Ordinary Theology in Chinese Protestant Sermons," unpublished paper presented at Chungchi College, Hong Kong, 1991.

23 K.H. Ting, "Chinese Christians' Approach to the Bible," *Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 13, 1990.

The Holy Spirit is conceived to be the all-pervading, all encompassing and all-powerful Spirit of God, acting from the very beginning of creation, down through all universal and human history until the final consummation. As the Spirit of God and the Cosmic Christ the Holy Spirit is not confined to the *visible Church*, but is ever present and working as universal "Life-Breeding Spirit" in the cosmos.

In anthropology the doctrine of *imago dei*, marred but not entirely lost through the Fall, is often preached and taught. Emphasis is put on the absolute necessity and conditional possibility of redemption for its restoration. Humankind has been created as children of the loving God, and though fallen and sinful, are still worth saving. The doctrine of sin as preached from the pulpit still carries overtones of American revival meetings, and thus often fails to stir the hearts and souls of many young people brought up in a cultural tradition too humanistic, moralistic and pragmatic to grasp the depth of *sinfulness* in the religious and spiritual sense. The original meaning of *harmatia*, (missing the target) perhaps is more acceptable to the Chinese mind. We need a more convincing interpretation of the doctrine of "original sin", or might just relegate it to the realm of theological myth!

Christians are exhorted to practice spiritual exercises and piety. Faith is emphasized, but not in contradiction to Christian virtues and good works. In stressing the doctrine of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* care is taken to warn against the danger of antinomianism. The slogan "Glorify God and benefit humanity" has become a guiding principle. Conscientious attempts are being made to reconcile the seeming contradictions between faith and good works found in the teachings of Paul and James. Devotional life should be integrated with Christian love and righteousness.

We are rather weak in the doctrine of the Church. One of the reasons is, as Bishop Ting points out, that when China was a mission field, "Western missionary work put its emphasis mainly on extension and not so much on the building up of the church as the *Body of Christ*." Another reason is that under the present condition of postdenominational unity, the former ecclesiological concepts and polities of various denominations have petered out and lost their hold among the congregations. We need to develop anew a Biblically valid and practicable ecclesiology, including the doctrine of sacraments. The newly adopted document *Church Order (For Trial Use)* is an attempt towards establishing a new doctrine of the church, though it appears to be practical rather than theological.

<sup>24</sup> Wang Weifan, "The Life-Breeding Spirit," *Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 7/8, 1987.

In eschatology many believers at the grass-roots level still cling to various premillennial "prophecies", and some even fall prey to fanatical aberrations. Yet we also observe that some fundamentalists who formerly took a staunch premillennial stance are

conscientiously trying to shift to post-millennialism in order to make room for social improvements and development. Most liberal-minded Christians show no specific zeal in speculating on "the last things". Some theological students seem to be interested in Teilhard's "Omega point," Jurgen Moltmann's theology of hope and Pannenberg's theology of history.

As we have torn down the "bamboo-screens" of isolation and come into contact with the wider world and learned more about contemporary theological trends outside of China, many students are opening their eyes and beginning to take an interest in social issues such as world peace, justice, the integrity of creation, etc. In Nanjing we offer courses on contemporary western theologies, Asian theologies, ecumenical theology, Chinese theology, and contextualization of theology, as well as series of lectures on liberation theology, feminist theology, process theology, theology of ecology, inter-faith dialogue, etc., in order to help students see the need for theological reorientation in the larger context of the global village of today.

The process of theological reorientation and reconstruction as sketched above has been gradual, and perhaps can only be observed among some theological-minded Christians. There have also been resistance and controversies. But that there are definite shifts of emphasis can be unmistakably detected in the sermons and articles appearing in *Tian Feng*, the *Nanjing Theological Review* and other publications.

25 "Chinese Christians' Approach to the Bible."

## VII The Future

A recent article written by a Chinese scholar of religion<sup>26</sup> has come to my attention. At the end of the article the author raised the question of the Future of Christianity in China, and speculated on three possibilities: He thinks it impossible that Christianity could win over the nation and convert the whole of China. Secondly, he thinks it unlikely that Christianity would entirely disappear like Nestorianism in the Tang Dynasty. With these two predictions I entirely agree. His third alternative, which he thinks most probable, that Christianity will for the foreseeable future remain a minority sub-culture, having little or negligible influence on the nation as a whole, needs further analysis. Admittedly Christianity in China is a very small, young and weak religion (only one percent of the whole population now), compared with Buddhism and Islam. It has a short history on Chinese soil: about four hundred years of Catholicism and less than two hundred years of Protestantism. Compared with two and a half millennia of Confucianism and Taoism, two thousand years of Buddhism, and thirteen hundred years of Islam, Christianity is just a teenager. Both Buddhism and Islam were also imported

from the West, but both have been well acculturized and are no longer regarded as "foreign religions" by the Chinese people. It has only been since about four decades ago that Christianity has been able to rid itself of the stigma of "foreignness" and to take up in a more conscious way the challenge of contextualization. Yet the phenomenally rapid growth in the last decade, much faster than that of the other four religions, cannot be denied. I cannot go into the many explanations that have been advanced. Nor can I be content to say that this is because Christianity is superior to other religions, or is the *only true* religion, in a simplistic and taken-for-granted way.

Perhaps we could say that one of the reasons lies in the fact that Christianity is comparatively more flexible and liable (and viable) to accommodate itself to the changing cultures of a modern pluralistic and secular world. Just think of the rise of many denominations of Protestantism after the Reformation, their divergence and convergence, and of the many new "schools" of theology, and of the *aggiornamento* of post-conciliar Roman Catholicism! The Darwinian dictum of "survival of the fittest" also applies to religion. Protestantism in China has changed and is changing - making adjustments, accommodating, contextualizing, and inculturating, and trying to keep pace with the modern changing culture. Yet it remains Christian by remaining true to the unchanged "text", the Biblical Gospel of Jesus Christ. (I do not mean the other religions have not attempted to accommodate and keep up with cultural changes. That Buddhism has been thoroughly Sinicized and become "Chinese Buddhism" in the course of history and has become the most popular and influential religion is something we Christians should take note of.) But we are thinking of the future of Christianity in China. This brings us back to our central theme of Christ and culture.

Returning to the solutions of the problem of the relation of Christ to Culture in Section II of this paper, from what I have tried to argue above I would say that any type of extreme exclusivism (Christ against culture) is untenable and has no future. If Christianity is going to gain any hearing in the Chinese context today it has to forsake its traditional, "orthodox", "no-other-name" dogmatism. All exclusivisms in this pluralistic world will inevitably lead to self-isolation and shut themselves off in small, negligible enclaves of "minority sub-culture".

26 Tang Yi, "Chinese Christianity in Development," *China Study Journal* (China Study Program, CCBI) August, 1991. I will not here comment on certain observations made in the article with which I do not agree.

Therefore to most evangelical Chinese Christians I would highly recommend Charles Kraft's book as a mind-opener and corrective for their exclusivism. This is surely no easy task.

The position of inclusivism, as propounded by Karl Rahner, with his "anonymous Christians", may be welcome by many liberal-minded Christians. But it still carries a tone of imperialism and makes it difficult to win the support or acquiescence of adherents of other religions. Why not "anonymous Buddhists or Muslims or Taoists"? The same may be said about the "Christ above culture" alternative. The self-claimed "uniqueness" of a religion is no proof of its "essential superiority" over others. "Each religion is unique and decisive for its followers" (Paul Knitter and John Hick, see note 4). But this does not necessarily lead to an "essential" or axiological relativism of religious truths. Christianity is unique to me and my own choice for personal commitment, but not necessarily for others who for various reasons prefer other choices. As a committed Christian I believe in and have chosen Christ as Saviour and Lord, not only for my individual self but also for the human community. Christ saves by transforming. The salvific efficacy of the Christian Gospel lies in its dynamic power to transform the lives of individuals and the community, in *and through culture*, because no one lives in a "cultureless" vacuum, not even the solitary hermit, and culture cannot be abstracted from its human and societal reality. The future of Christianity in China therefore depends upon whether it is able to show in practice its dynamic transforming power in the present pluralistic, secular and changing cultural context. This transformation must be through contextualization. And contextualization requires necessary accommodation or changes in the church herself, in the presentation of the Gospel, and in its theological structure and outward forms (rituals and organizations). In other words, Christianity itself must also be transformed if it is to play the role of transmitter of "Christ the transformer of culture". I have mentioned some of the structural changes of the Chinese church and its theological orientation and reconstruction. Perhaps these may partially account for the phenomena of rapid church growth and its increasing influence and attractiveness to educated and academic circles. The emergence of a growing number of "culture Christians", (or shall I say "cultured sympathizers and admirers of Christianity", the reverse of Schleiermacher's "cultured despisers" in nineteenth century Germany), in an atheistic society and overwhelming non-Christian religious environment, seems to me both encouraging and challenging indeed. The mandate to "run the church well", adopted last January in Beijing by the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference will give a strong impetus to our fellow Chinese Christians. But we need to look beyond the boundary of the church and see Christianity in a wider perspective as a dynamic transforming force in the ever-changing culture of today's China.

Therefore, in response to Prof. Tan Yi's speculation about the future of Christianity in China I would like to quote with hearty agreement Dr. Philip Wickeri's forecast in the excerpt of his article he has kindly shared with me: "Christianity will gain wider acceptance as a cultural and intellectual phenomenon in China, but this will not be accompanied by spiraling church growth." "As we come to realize the significance of the Biblical idea of *incarnation* "as a principle that *animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation*,"<sup>Z</sup> and try to apply this principle by spelling out and living out the Christian message (text) in the particular Chinese cultural context of today (contextualization or incarnation in culture = inculturation). This optimistic prediction of Dr. Wickeri's may not just be utopian wishful thinking, but can serve as a dynamic challenge to us Christians in China. This is how I understand Prof. Wang Weifan's paper "*Ve rbo carp hic factum est*". The *here* (hic) is of utmost importance. It means not just a locality, but has a rich connotation embracing place, time, culture, depth and momentum. Forty years after the

publication of Richard Niebuhr's monumental book on this subject, may I present this paper as an illustration supporting his fifth alternative, i.e., "Christ the transformer of culture," by a Chinese Christian from the Chinese point of view.

27 Philip L. Wickeri, "Making Connections: Christianity and Culture in the Sino-American Dialogue," presented at the "Christianity and Culture: A Sino-American Dialogue," conference, Columbia Theological Seminary, Oct., 1992.

28 I am using P. Arrupe's definition of *inculturation* as quoted by Nicholas Standaert in his article in *Ching Fen*, 34/4 Dec. 1991. This seems to be an excellent commentary on "Christ the transformer of culture".

## 6. The Word Was Here Made Flesh - Wang Weifan

A paper presented at the conference "Christianity and Chinese Culture: A Sino-American Dialogue,"  
Columbia Theological Seminary, Oct., 1992.

*In this very personal account, Rev. Wang describes the experiences which led him to become a Christian and discusses ways in which Christianity has entered into and become flesh in Chinese society and culture, as well as possible negative influences of that culture upon Christianity. His comments on the phenomenon of "culture Christians" are particularly interesting.*

The place where the angel Gabriel announced the good news to Mary is today the crypt of a church. On the marble facing of the altar, these words are carved:

*Verbum taro hic factum est* (The word was here made flesh)

In this context "here," refers to the small Galilean town of Nazareth. But as we confront the unbounded space-time continuum, we discover that this "here" could refer to countless places which make up our world. And each one of these places, through its unique culture, allows Christ to be made flesh, flesh which can be sensed and touched. "In the beginning was the Word." Though the Word existed in eternity before all beginnings, and could not be bound by time or space, yet it revealed itself to human beings firmly situated in place and time, including those places which did not yet know the Word.

Allow me to say what this has meant to me personally.

My mother received a traditional Chinese upbringing; she had studied some of the ancient books and was a devout Buddhist. My father was employed as a clerk in another province in the interior and received a very low salary. Our family of three depended mainly on a wealthy aunt, my father's elder sister, for our livelihood. My father died when I was seven, and the realization of the hardships involved in living as a widow with an orphan son under someone else's roof nearly drove my mother to take raw opium as poison to end both our lives. If the three of us could not live together, then we would die together. However, for the sake of her seven-year-old son - for my sake - mother chose her path: a life of hardship and humiliation.

In 1944, one of my stepbrothers, (we had the same father but different mothers) who lived in Luoyang in Henan province, contracted tuberculosis, and his wife died while giving birth to their second child. He wrote my mother, asking her to come to Henan and bring them all back



with her to the family home in northern Jiangsu. In those days, the two places were under different governments, one under the Guomindang (KMT) and the other under Japanese occupation; it was extremely dangerous to enter those areas behind the lines. But my mother said, "If he were my own son, I wouldn't have to go; but since he is not my own, I must go." And so it was that mother left home early one spring morning. When she returned with my brother and his two children later that summer, mother had already become a silent invalid. She was often to be found standing mute in the garden in the middle of the night. In the early hours of that year's Mid-Autumn Festival, she parted forever from her two sons and her grandchildren.

For her own son's sake, she chose the hardships of life, and for a son not her own, she was willing to risk danger and die. These facts had a profound impact on the person I became in life, especially later when I came to know the truth of the cross. When I recall my mother's love, and read again the passage "by his bruises we are healed" (Is. 53: 5), I cannot but say that the shadow of the cross is reflected in that mother love which is shaped by traditional Chinese culture.

The *Book of Poetry* contains the following poem:

Father, from whose loins I sprung,  
Mother, on whose breast I hung,  
Tender were ye, and ye fed,  
Now upheld, now gently led.

Eyes untiring watched my way;  
Often in your arms I lay.  
How could I repay your love,  
Vast as arch of heaven above?

(*The Book of Poetry. VIII Liao O/4*  
translated by James Legge)

My mother has been dead for nearly half a century, and I can never repay the blessing of the upbringing she gave me. However, it was precisely this mother love with its reflection of Christ which led me three years after her death to a Christ who seemed already familiar and which further led me to dedicate myself to repaying the Lord's grace as a pastoral worker.

During the Cultural Revolution, when thousands of China's sons and daughters, including government cadres, intellectuals and religious believers were detained, struggled against and persecuted, thousands of mothers held thousands of crumbling homes together, holding the whole collapsing people together as they did so. The nation's catastrophe, the home's tribulations, the end of the end, all weighed down upon China's mothers' shoulders. Because of me, my wife, taking our three children with her, was sent down to the countryside, where they stayed for eight years. I had to stay behind in Nanjing alone, where I was subjected to investigation. Political and

economic pressure, the responsibility for the children's' education, all devolved upon my wife. Today, our children are all grown; their peace and well-being all due to the suffering their mother endured on their behalf. And this is why I know that the reflection of Christ is to be found in mother love. For Christ by his suffering brought peace to humankind: "upon him was the punishment that made us whole" (Is. 53: 11).

In 1970, in the latter years of the Cultural Revolution, when my mother-in-law died, only three of her six children came to pay their respects. Only my wife, myself and one other daughter-in-law accompanied her shrunken body to the crematorium. There was no funeral music, no funeral service, no flowers. We simply said farewell to this elderly woman who had toiled a lifetime for her children through our tears. Her ashes remain in the yellow earth; the families of her six children are all doing very well, but my mother-in-law never demanded a thank-you from any of us. This is because a mother's comfort and satisfaction lie in her children's well-being, not in repayment of favors or financial compensation, just like Christ who "out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge" (Is. 53: 11). Christ emptied himself in suffering for humankind, but never sought any recompense. As long as his suffering bore fruit in others, he was satisfied.

Perhaps we can see culture as a mirror, different cultures being different mirrors. But in each mirror alike we find some aspect of Christ reflected. Just as in Mary's womb the incarnate Christ was conceived, so in mother love is contained a reflection of Christ. When we read "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), we will ask, what did Christ use to make visible that image of the father? He painted it with nothing other than the most beautiful colors of human nature, of which mother love is a part. This is why, in simple peasants, in working people, in Chinese intellectuals who ask for so little, we can find sufficient color, enough bits and pieces, with which to paint the image of God.

## 2

Perhaps we can also see culture as a prism from which light is refracted out into a seven-color spectrum. The tones and shades of the seven colors always differ because prisms differ. And this is why the true light of the one Christ, refracted through different cultures, will often appear to have small differences within the greater unity. Even within a single country there will be variations in the refraction due to differences in characteristics and composition.

If we look at the history of Chinese Christianity, there have been basically two forms of Chinese Christian culture. One is that of the eastern rite, the Nestorians, which encountered the *Book of Changes*, Taoism, and "the theory of the Five Elements" in the vastness of northwestern China during the Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties (seventh to thirteenth centuries). Ancient Christians in China called their God "Ever-generating God." This was a God who created, sustained and enriched life, a God who ceaselessly generated and regenerated life. They saw Jesus as the "Holy One," whose saving grace fulfilled the life created by God and brought it to completion. From this they gained a view of human life which responded straightforwardly to heaven, a life which continued to strengthen them by borrowing strength from heaven, a life which took the safeguarding of life (guarding the life which God

had created) as the highest good and greatest virtue. This "borrowing strength from heaven" may explain how the founder of the Yuan dynasty, Ghenghis Khan (1162-1227) who after a solitary boyhood came to call himself "the scourge of God," was able to overrun Asia and Europe. The fierce strength of character of the people of northwest China, still evident today, may also have something to do with this ancient Christian culture of the northwest.

The second pattern of Christian culture in China took shape in the late Ming and early Qing periods when western churches (both Catholic and Protestant) encountered Confucianism in the central plain and along the coasts of China. From the sixteenth century on down to the present, in their emphasis on theory and practice, Confucian thinking and Christian culture share many points in common. But What Ccx1lucianism seeks is "inner transcendence" of the ego as a way to perfection or sanctification. It remains for the God of Christianity and Christ's salvation and redemption to make it whole. It is necessary for Christian "outward transcendence" to complete it. This became a fundamental issue for Chinese Christian theology. The Chinese theologians who appeared around the time of the "New Culture Movement" of the May Fourth era (1919), and right up to and including theological reflection of the Chinese Protestant Church following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, are basically still concerned with this issue. It centers around the relationship between faith and works, mysticism and service, inner merit and sacred virtue, history and eternity and explorations of how theological categories may be unified. <sup>1</sup>

Because Confucian thinking has been the mainstay of traditional Chinese culture since the Ming and Qing dynasties, Chinese Christianity has frequently been confronted with dangers on several fronts. Among these are the following:

- (1) the danger of allowing the status of Christianity to be lowered to that of an ordinary ethical system, ignoring its transcendent aspects;
- (2) the danger of emphasizing the "uses" of Christianity (its role or function), ignoring the building up of its "substance" (the thing-in itself, its nature or essence);
- (3) the danger of finding self-comfort in "making amends for one's faults through good deeds," and thus the absence of any sense of repentance; and
- (4) the danger of believing too strongly in "self-salvation," ignoring that salvation which must come from outside oneself through the grace of God in Christ.

These dangers represent areas in which Chinese Confucianism and Christianity are incompatible.

At the same time, we must not overlook the fact that the Confucian spirit of forbearance and its doctrine of the mean provide deep-seated cultural reasons why Chinese Christianity was able to enter a postdenominational period. In the four hundred years since Martin Luther, China is among the very few places where almost no new Protestant denominations have appeared.

<sup>1</sup> See my essay, "The Pattern and Pilgrimage of Chinese Theology," in *The Chinese Theological Review: 1990*, pp. 30-54.

### 3

Another point worthy of attention are the challenges to the Chinese church which accompany what might be termed "cultural drift," on the one hand, and "cultural parasitism" on the other.

As early as the May Fourth period, there appeared in China intellectuals who entertained varying degrees of respect and admiration for Jesus Christ. One of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, Chen Duxiu (1880-1942) said, "We must foster within our very blood the great and noble personality of Jesus, his profound and ardent feelings, to save us from the abyss of cruelty, darkness and filth into which we have fallen," and our great writer Lu Xun (1881-1936) also said, "A cart is on the point of overturning. Jesus says, put out a hand to stay it. Nietzsche says, give it a push." What most appealed to the dramatist Tian Han (1898-1968) as a youth was the famous painting of Jesus looking to the heavens and praying in the garden of Gethsamane. Such admiration and respect for Christ on the part of Chinese intellectuals persists to this day.

Among Chinese university students today, many are in the process of seeking a "spiritual home," and of these, many have come, through various intermediaries, to Jesus Christ. Among young scholars and artists are those who have come to know Christ by the various paths of literature, philosophy, ethics, music and painting. A young critic has observed, "What is most lacking in Chinese culture is the spirit of a larger humanity which is found in Christian cultures." A young painter has written, "In this day and age when the 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." This group has come to be called "culture Christians," or unbaptized Christians. At the same time, they are unnamed Christians who "drift" outside the church. Thus, they present at least two challenges to the Chinese church: 1) how can our clergy and church workers and even our theological students raise their own cultural level, in order to find a basis for dialogue; 2) how can we bring these "Chinese Nicodemuses" who drift outside the church into the fold and back to the shepherd.<sup>2</sup>

The great majority of Chinese Christians are in the countryside. The hands of the peasants, which in the days of the Boxer Rebellion tore down the churches, are today employed in building them one after another. The simplicity, sincerity and goodness of the farmers have prepared fertile soil for the spread of the gospel and the building up of the church. But at the same time, certain superstitious and absurd aspects of Chinese folk religion have been brought in and have become parasites which feed off the body of Christianity. The challenges presented to the Chinese church by this phenomenon of "cultural parasitism" are at least two in number: 1) how to peel away such vulgar things from Christian faith and doctrine; 2) how to raise the cultural level of the peasants' quality of faith and of their spiritual world so that it transcends folk religion.

2 For a fuller discussion of "culture Christians," see Bao Zhimin, "China's Nicodemuses;," *The Chinese Theological Review: 1991*, pp. 112-116.

## 4

The Cultural Revolution involved the Chinese church and its pastoral workers in the same disaster that the whole Chinese people were experiencing. But following this nearly unbearable suffering, we felt that what we had gained was greater than that which was lost. First of all there was a return to our own people, for we found ourselves in the same boat throughout the tempest of those ten years. The second was that after the heat of the fiery furnace of those ten years, many of our own imperfections were burned away. Of course, we were not refined to gold, and other imperfections still remain. All of these experiences, in which we "had to become like (our) brothers and sisters in every respect", enabled the Chinese church to enter into the role of "a merciful and faithful high priest" for our own nation and people (Heb. 2: 17).

"The word was *here* made flesh." "Here" in China we are a people with thousands of years of cultural tradition, a people who have also experienced all the difficulties and vicissitudes of life. And the body of Christ made flesh here is the tiny church of China, which has identified with its people in suffering and in suffering has built itself up.

Translated by Janice and Philip Wickeri.

## 7. The Bible in Chinese - Wang Weifan

This article was written for the *Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* and appeared in the *Nanjing Theological Review* by permission.

*The history of Chinese Bible translation is reviewed here, from the earliest attempts by Nestorians during the Tang dynasty (635) to the most recent versions produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The fact that this essay was written primarily for a non-Christian readership indicates the interest in Christianity among non-Christian intellectuals, as well as the type of opportunities Christians have for dialogue with those outside the faith. The bibliography reflects the growing number of 'Chinese books available in the field of religious studies, both original works and translations.*

The Christian Bible, including both Old and New Testaments, is recognized as Scripture by all three branches of Christianity (Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism). The Old Testament, written in Hebrew, was originally the Scripture of the Jewish faith. It consists of three parts: Law, Prophets, and Sacred Writings. The canon recognized by the Christian Church is divided into four parts: Law, History, Wisdom (or Poetry), and Prophets, altogether thirty-nine books. The New Testament was written in Greek by the disciples of Jesus (or their disciples), and consists of twenty-seven books. To the Old Testament, the Roman Catholic Church appended the apocryphal writings or the second canon, altogether fifteen books. These writings had a lesser value than the canon, and were not accepted by the Protestant Church as part of its Bible.

When did the Bible come to China? When was it translated into Chinese? What Chinese languages was it translated into? When was it published? This article is divided into three historical eras: 1) the Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties (to the beginning of the Qing dynasty), approximately one thousand years; 2) the Qing dynasty to the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), about 150 years; and 3) from the establishment of the PRC to the present, about forty years.

"During the Han period Jewish people had already arrived in China." Whether they brought the Jewish Scripture (Old Testament Bible) is not known.

It is certain that when the Luminous Religion (the Chinese name for what is called Nestorian Christianity in the West) of Dayin (the Eastern Roman Empire, inclusive of Syria) entered China, a Syrian missionary, Alopen, in 635 (the ninth year of Emperor Zhenguan of the Tang dynasty) came to Changan (presently Xian) via India. "He brought the true Scriptures, ... and bringing the Scriptures and images from afar, he came and presented them at the high capital." The "true Scriptures" or "Scriptures," refers to the Bible, at that time written in the Syriac language, together with other theological and doctrinal writings. The "images" refer to portraits of Bible characters. The Bible brought by Alopen was comprised of "twenty-four holy ones who spoke the former law" and "new

doctrines, beyond words, of the purifying force of the Trinity." The "twenty-four holy ones" refer to the Old Testament in which Moses is the first of twenty-four prophets. The "former law" signifies the Old Testament or Old Testament law. The latter phrase refers to the New Testament or to New Testament doctrines revealed by the Holy Spirit ("purifying force") of the Triune God. It consists of twenty-seven books, which were made into one book after the death of Jesus, what in earlier times was referred to as the twenty-seven part Scripture. This is how the Syriac Bible was introduced to China.

Later "the Scriptures were translated in the library," i.e. the Bible and other Christian books were translated in the royal library of Emperor Taizong. In 1908 among the documents from the Luminous Religion discovered in the Dunhuang caves, the "Revered Scripture" was in reality a listing of books. "Presented is a listing of all writings, the writings of the Dayin religion, numbering 53() volumes, containing all kinds of writings ... Jing Jing already translated over thirty volumes, most of the rest were kept in leather holders, and still have not been translated." This means that of the 530 sacred books brought by Alopen, Jing Jing had translated upwards of thirty books, including the Book of the Origin of Origins (Genesis), The Book of the King of the Law, Moses (Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, though perhaps only the one book of Exodus is meant), The Book of the Holy King David (David's Psalms), The Book of the Four Gates (Four Gospels). The first four "kings of the law," esteemed by the "Revered Scripture" are the authors of the four Gospels (John, Luke, Mark and Matthew), Book of Records (Acts of the Apostles), Book of the King of the Law, Paul (Pauline Epistles), etc. The authors of this Bible, aside from referring to David as the great king, also called the prophets and apostles "kings of the law." This is the first Chinese translation of the Bible, and may still lie buried in another of the Dunhuang caves.

In addition to the "Revered Scripture," another book discovered and listed in the catalog of books, is the Book of Jesus the Messiah, in actuality the book of Jesus Christ, a biography of Jesus Christ based on the Four Gospels. Xucong is the Tang expression for "Jesus", "Messiah", or "Christ." Another book (Monotheism) is actually a collection of the preaching of the Lord Jesus. The illustrated Scripture that Alopen gave to Emperor Taizong was preserved until at least the end of the Tang dynasty. In the ninth century, when Ibn Wahab, an old Christian from Arabia, met the emperor, the emperor opened the precious box that held the illustrations, and asked him to explain them. ,Wahab said, "This is Noah in the ark, ...The one holding the rod is Moses, and the people of Israel ...This is Jesus sitting on the donkey, land around him are His disciples." The emperor replied, "He did not live long, (given that) the things he did were completed within slightly over thirty months."

In Turfan two kinds of Bibles of the Luminous Religion have been discovered: the Sute language Bible, and a Bible in the mid-ancient Persian languages used by the Turfan people. Both Bibles were translated from the Syriac language.

Toward the final years of the Song Emperor Gaozong, upwards of seventy Jewish families passed through Tianzhu (India), "presented fabric from the West to the Song emperor," and brought one "True Bible", consisting of fifty-three books, which was preserved in the Israelite synagogue constructed during the "reign of the Song Emperor Xiaozong (1163)." The True Bible here is surely the Hebrew Torah (the Book of the Law or the

Pentateuch). This marks the introduction of the Hebrew Bible to China. But the Israelite religion referred to here is not the Jewish religion. The Israelite religion recognized only the Torah to the exclusion of other Old Testament books, and their Torah was divided into fifty-three books; the divisions differed from the fifty-four books of the Jewish people. This indicates that these Jewish people of Kaifeng were perhaps descendants of the Israelites of the northern kingdom (Samaritans) who were taken into captivity by the Assyrians, rather than descendants of the Jewish people of the southern Kingdom. The True Bible, also called the Book of the Way (*Daojing*), was expanded by later Jewish immigrants to China and finally grew to thirteen sections.

The Early Persians called Christians "Terra", which means "the blessed," a term perhaps originally from the Syriac language. Very possibly the Uighurs (called the *Huihe* or Huihu during the Tang dynasty) who entered China via the Silk Road and must first have passed through Hetian, sometime around the thirteenth century, gradually came to be called the "Terra nation." Christianity was introduced to Chinese areas under the name "Luminous" (which means blessed, auspicious, propitious, peaceful, harmonious), the sense of "Terra" in Chinese. When it was introduced to the Mongolian tribes, it was called *Diexie*, which is a transliteration, and was later called *Yelikewen*, which is the Mongolian translation of "Terra". According to a precise Chinese transliteration, *Yelikewen* should be *Yilulekun* ("blessed one"). Christianity came to the Mongolian tribes long before the founder of the Yuan dynasty, Kublai Khan, assumed the throne, establishing that dynasty (1271), and long before Genghis Khan became emperor (1206). Genghis Khan, self-proclaimed "Scourge of God", swept across Asia and Europe. Kublai Khan once sent a letter to the pope in Rome by the hand of the father and uncle of Marco Polo, requesting that he "send one hundred scholars of the Christian religion" to come and expound its teaching. This is because, though the Mongolian people of that day had the "Old and New Testament, church fathers, and biographies of the hermits," yet "those books were in the Syriac language, and could not be read, for both the grammar and the meaning were unknown."

It may be difficult to determine whether Marco Polo (1254-1324), in mentioning the Bible three times in his Travels, is referring to the Syriac version or to the Jing Jing Chinese version, but one thing is certain, namely that by the founding of the Yuan dynasty, the New Testament and the Psalms at the very least were widely circulated among both royalty and common people. In one reference, he mentions that at Easter: "The Great Yuan Emperor called together all Christians before him, and asked that they bring the book which contained the four Gospels. Then he ordered them to carry out a solemn ceremony of offering incense. He kissed the book, and called on the court officials to offer similar reverence." The book to which incense was offered and which was kissed without being read is in all likelihood the Syriac (Bible). It would not be understood by ordinary Mongolians. The second reference says "Christian astronomers have a book of Psalms, and often chant certain psalms, considering that to be effective for exorcism." These Christian astronomers were in all likelihood Arabians who would naturally have a Syriac (or Arabic) Bible. The third reference, particularly worthy of note, refers to a Christian church in Hangzhou, a group of Christians, a book (Psalms), and a Christian faith kept for seven hundred years:



"Maffeo and Mark, two masters who went daily to that place, got to know them well. They inquired about their matters, and thus came to know that they were Christian believers. Because they had a book with them, these two masters, Maffeo and Mark, read and translated the book word for word, and came to find out that this book was The Psalms.... They said that this faith has been preserved among us seven hundred years, but there has been no preaching for a long time, and thus they did not know the chief things."

Marco Polo would have been able to read either the Syriac language Bible or the Jing Jing Chinese translation. For ordinary believers, the Bible would have to have been in Chinese. Since they could not read what they had brought with them, that Bible must have been written in Syriac. Counting backward 700 years takes one to precisely the time when the Luminous Religion of Daqin came to China; these must have been descendants of the Syrians who in the course of those 700 years had long since been Sinicized.

In 1294, when Emperor Chengzong Timur assumed the throne, an Italian Franciscan monk, John of Montecorvino (1274-1328), the legate of the Roman church, brought Greek and Latin Bibles to the great Yuan capital (*Jingcheng*, now Beijing). Later, over a period of some ten years, he translated the New Testament and Psalms into Mongolian: "The Tatar language is the language most commonly used by the people, and is widely understood. The New Testament and the 150 chapters of The Prayers (an early title for the Psalter or Psalms) have already been translated into that language." This was the first Mongolian translation of the Bible in China (New Testament and Psalms).

The Roman Catholic Church has consistently recognized only the Latin Bible (Vulgate), the "vernacular translation" by Jerome, and has not emphasized Bible translation. This can be seen clearly in the careers of the Roman Catholic missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. They preferred to write Chinese catechisms, Scripture explanations, the life and words of Jesus, etc. These contained Bible passages, but were not full translations of any books.

Xu Guangqi (Paul Xu, 1562-1633) once mentioned translating the Bible, though without result. According to the textual research of Alexander Wylie, "the whole Bible may have already been translated, but not yet published," as suggested by the comments of an Italian scholar, Dr. Careri upon his return from Beijing: "After translating the writings of St. Thomas and the Bible, they printed 500 copies of what had taken them almost a century to do, under the title *Law Qf God*. The words of Dr. J. Wherry also substantiate Wylie's hypothesis: "There is at present one manuscript of a Chinese New Testament in the Roman library, altogether in seven parts. This can be classified as part of the writings of this time (early Qing)." ("writing" here means "translation.")

As we look back on the thousand years comprising the Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties, representing four periods when the Bible was introduced to China, we note Syriac, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin Bibles, a translation into Chinese, and a translation of the Tang and Ming Bibles into Mongolian during the Yuan dynasty. But there is no trace, even today, of any of the Bibles from these four dynasties anywhere in China - some may lie buried in the caves, others were destroyed by fire or water, and still others stolen and sold to foreign countries.

From the late Qing era to the early days of the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the work of translating the Bible into Chinese was actively pursued. The three branches of the Christian church (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) all have Chinese translations of the Bible, though the most recent are the Protestant versions.

Russian orthodoxy and the Christian church of the Tang and Yuan dynasties share common origins in the eastern church and the eastern Roman church. However, Christianity entered Russia in 988, some 350 years later than it entered the flourishing China of the Tang dynasty. Eastern Orthodoxy came to China in the late seventeenth century. In 1864 Bishop Gowry Karpoff (served 1858-1864), one of the Russian missionaries living in Beijing, translated the New Testament Scriptures from Greek to Chinese, and published them in Beijing. In his translation the term for "God" is *Tianzhu*, the same term used by the Roman Catholic church. Later Bishop Pallady Kaffaroff (served 1849-1859 and 1864-1878) translated but did not publish the Psalms. In claiming that the New Testament was Pallady's work, Mu Weikang was surely mistaken. The French Jesuit N. Trigault was summoned back to Rome in 1601, where he petitioned the pope for permission for the missionaries in China to translate the Bible into Chinese. Pope Innocent X (1574-1655) had already approved this, but the pronouncement had never been formally sent to Beijing. This is also the main reason why Matteo Ricci, Giulio Aleni, and others did not dare translate the Bible or to publish translations already completed. Even so, however, some missionaries did have their own views, and ca. 1701, La Comte wrote to King Louis XIV (1638-1715): "on the basis of papal approval ... we planned to make an accurate translation of the Bible ... and yet for many important reasons we clearly were not able to rush toward making the translation of the complete Bible available to the general population." The same reason undoubtedly explains why the Chinese translation of the New Testament that J. Wherry refers to as stored in the Roman library was never published.

However, the missionary work of translating the Bible into Chinese in reality continued apace. The New Testament portion stored in the British Museum contained a harmony of the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, and the first chapter of Hebrews. This is the manuscript of J. Basset (1662-1707) of the Society for Foreign Missions of Paris, translated ca. 1700, which in turn was discovered in Hong Kong in 1739 by Hodgson of the East India Company, and given to Sir Hans Sloane who donated it to the British Museum. Thus, the Basset manuscript is also called the Sloane manuscript. The English Baptist missionary Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) along with Robert Morrison (1782-1834) of the London Missionary Society translated the entire Bible at about the same time, and both consulted the Basset manuscript when turning to the New Testament. Toward the end of the eighteenth century the Jesuit Louis De Poirot translated the entire Old Testament and a large part of the New Testament from the Vulgate into vernacular Chinese, but this was not published. These versions rendered "God" as *Tianzhu* rather than *Shangdi* or *Tian*, terms which had been proscribed by the papal edict of 1704.

The third time the Roman Catholicism came to China, at the end of the nineteenth century, J. Dejean translated the New Testament into literary Chinese, but only the four Gospels were published (1892). Ly Laurent also translated the New Testament into literary Chinese. This was printed in 1897. At this time, Roman Catholic Chinese scholars also began the work of translating the Bible. In 1875 Thomas Wang translated the Four Gospels into colloquial Mandarin. In 1883 he also translated the Acts of the Apostles into Mandarin. Xin

Shenfu translated the Four Gospels into literary Chinese. None of these three versions were published. The Chinese Roman Catholic patriot Ma Xiangbo (1840-1939) translated a harmony of the Gospels in 1923, and in 1937 translated the Gospels, both into literary Chinese. The Ma translation of the Gospels was published in 1948. In 1946 and 1949 the former Chinese ambassador to the Vatican, Wu Jingxiong, basing his version on English and French translations, rendered the Psalms and New Testament with the titles Sacred Poetry and Complete New Testament. Wu Jingxiong used a very literary style of translation, ) articulately in translating the Psalms into an ancient poetic style.

In 1945 in Beiping (presently Beijing) a Si Gao Bible Society was established, which moved to Hong Kong in 1949. Biblical scholars of that society, both Chinese and foreign, worked for sixteen years (1945-1961) to translate the Bible from the original languages into modern Chinese, providing introductory sections for each book, explanatory notes and appendices. After five years (1962-1968) of revision, this translation was published in Hong Kong in eleven volumes. In addition to using *Tianzhu* for God, this version translated Yahweh as *Shangzhu*. In the New Testament Kurios ("Holy One") was translated as *Zhu*. In 1985 the Shanghai diocese of the Catholic Church, under the special guidance of Bishop Jin Luxian, published volume I of the New Bible, (Four Gospels), based on the English Jerusalem Bible. This project is still in progress.

Protestant Bible translations can be divided into five types: High Wenli, Easy Wenli, Mandarin, regional dialects, and minority nationality languages. Versions published include individual books as well as various combinations: the New Testament, the New Testament with Psalms, the Complete Bible, English-Chinese bilingual version, etc., altogether over a thousand versions, as well as a Braille Bible.

High Wenli refers to a somewhat difficult literary style. The first to translate the Bible into High Wenh was Joshua Marshman, a missionary working among Chinese in India, and Robert Morrison in Guangzhou. Marshman, assisted by J. Lassar, translated the Old and New Testaments, publishing them in 1822. In this translation the term *izho* was used for "testament"; though this is usually translated as *yue*, it may also be translated as *yizhu*, *yiming*, or *vizhao*, although *yue* is most appropriate. Translations since 1850 no longer use *yizhao*. Robert Morrison, assisted by William Milne, translated the Complete Bible and published it in Malacca in 1823 under the title The Holy Bible of the Old and New Testaments. Both versions translated "God" as *Shun* and "Holy Spirit" as *Sheng feng* ("Holy Wind"). Marshman translated "baptism" as *zhan* ("*dip*"), while Morrison translated it as *xi* ("wash"). These are the two Chinese Protestant translations known historically as the M & M (literally, Two Ma) versions. Robert Morrison's translation underwent revision by K. F. A. Gutzlaff, W. H. Medhurst, E. C. Bridgman, and Morrison's son, J. R. Morrison, and a portion of the New Testament was retranslated, primarily through the efforts of W. H. Medhurst. In 1840 this revised version was published as "Holy Bible of the Old and New Testaments." In the same year Gutzlaff revised Medhurst's revision of the New Testament, and published it under the title "New Testament of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the World." This is the Bible that was used by the Taipings and Scripture references in many documents of the "Heavenly Dynasty" are taken from this translation.

The First United Mission Board Meeting was held in Hong Kong in 1843. It appointed a number of missionaries to a Delegates' Translation Committee to translate the Bible anew, and appointed all missionaries in China to its "General Committee." Among the twelve delegate committee members were E. C. Bridgman, W. Lowrie, W. J. Boone, J. Stronach, Medhurst, and W. C. Milne (the son of William Milne). Because of differences in the translation of certain key words, the committee was divided, resulting in three different versions. J. Goddard, from the American Baptist Church, withdrew from the committee just as work was starting, because "baptism" was translated as *xi*. His plan was to revise the Marshman translation, retaining the translation of "baptism" as *zhan*. When he fell ill, his work was assumed and completed by E. C. Lord and W. Dean, and published in 1868 under the title "The Complete Bible of New and Old Testaments." Another key word concerned translating "God" as *Shen* or *Shangdi*. The American members favored *Shen*, while the British members favored *Shangdi*. When the New Testament was published in 1852, the American Bible Society published a *Shen* version, while the English Bible Society published a *Shangdi* version. Later W. H. Medhurst and others of the British members withdrew, but with the help of J. Legge (who translated the *Thirteen Classics* into English) and the Suzhou scholar Wang Tao, they translated and in 1854 published the Old Testament in a *Shangdi* version. They combined this edition with the New Testament of the Delegates' Committee to publish in 1867 a Complete Bible, which they termed the Delegates' Version. E. C. Bridgman, assisted by M. S. Culbertson, continued the work on the *Shen* Old Testament, and in 1864 they published their Complete Bible. This was the origin of the Protestant phenomenon of *Shangdi* and *Shen* versions of the Bible. There were also differences concerning the name of the Holy Spirit. As has been noted above, the M & M translations rendered "Holy Spirit" as *Shenfeng* ("Holy Wind"). Medhurst and Gutzlaff opted for *Shengshen*, while certain American missionaries preferred *Shengling*. It was finally decided that each Bible society would make its own choices when it came to publishing the Bible.

John Chalmers and Martin Schaub, who had participated in the work of the Delegates' Version, revised and reprinted the New Testament in 1897. The first four chapters of the Gospel of Mark came from the hand of Yan Fu, a renowned Chinese translator.

These, then, are the main versions of the High Wenli Bible, which by 1925 numbered some 230 versions, including first editions and reprints.

Easy Wenli is a somewhat popular, half literary, half colloquial form of Chinese. The first Easy Wenli translation to appear was a portion of the Psalms (1880), translated by S. I. J. Schereschewsky (1831-?). The first Easy Wenli complete New Testament and virtually complete Old Testament (missing only the Song of Songs), was published in 1905 by Griffith John (1831-1912) in Hankou. In 1889 an Easy Wenli translation of the New Testament, done jointly by John Burdon and Henry Blodet, appeared. The complete Bible in Easy Wenli was the work of Schereschewsky, who came to China in 1859, was involved in translating the Bible into Beijing Mandarin, and himself translated the Old Testament in Mandarin. In 1881 he began to suffer paralysis, and while recuperating in the United States in 1886, he revised his Mandarin Bible. Using the one functioning finger remaining on each hand, he worked for seven years, typing word for romanized word his Easy Wenli translation of the complete Bible. In 1895 he returned to Shanghai, and hired people to copy out his romanized translation in Chinese characters. This took two years and the Bible was eventually published in 1902.

Schereschewsky himself termed this translation the "Two-finger Edition." By 1928 the Easy Wenli translations numbered some fifty versions.

"Mandarin" signifies the vernacular, and can be divided into southern (Nanjing) Mandarin and northern (Beijing) Mandarin. The first New Testament translated into Nanjing Mandarin was published in 1857 by W. H. Medhurst and J. Stronach. The first Beijing Mandarin New Testament, published in 1866, was translated by John Burdon, J. Edkins, S. I. J. Schereschewsky, H. Blodget, and W. A. P. Martin over a period of eight years. The question of the proper translation for "God" resulted in yet another division. While John Burdon rendered "God" as *Tianzhu*, the rest chose *Shangdi* or *Shen*. When the revision was published in 1872, it came out in three different versions. The British and Foreign Bible Society published *Shangdi* and *Tianzhu* versions, and the American Bible Society published the *Shen* version. In 1875 Schereschewsky completed and published his translation of the Old Testament in Beijing Mandarin. In 1878 the British and Foreign Bible Society combined the Old and New Testaments into one Beijing Mandarin complete Bible. In addition, Griffith John published his Hankou Mandarin translation of the New Testament.

In 1890 Bible Societies involved in Bible publication from all parts of Great Britain and the United States sent representatives to meet in Shanghai. They resolved "to invite people of ability to translate the Bible, and to cooperate in translating one version that all denominations can use in common." The requirements for this translation work were that it have a smooth written style, be faithful to the original languages, and communicate clearly to the ordinary person. In addition, it was decided that translation would reflect the English Revised Version. In response to concrete needs, the meeting resolved to produce "one Bible in three versions," namely High Wenli, Easy Wenh, and Mandarin, each resulting in a version to be recognized as a union version. The three major Bible Societies (American Bible Society, British and Foreign Bible Society, and National Bible Society of Scotland) agreed to divide the expenses according to their relative sizes. The meeting elected three committees of five persons each to pursue the translations separately. The High Wenli group consisted of J. Chalmers, J. Edkins, J. Wherry, E. Sheffield, and M. Schaub. In 1906 they published the High Wenli Union Version of the New Testament. Those selected for the Easy Wenli version included H. Blodget and J. C. Gibson, among others. In 1904 they published the Easy Wenli Union Version of the New Testament. The Complete Bible Werth Union Version was published in 1919, only one month later than the Mandarin Union Version.

The Mandarin Union Version was the work of C. W. Mateer, C. Goodrich, F. W. Bailer, G. Owen, and S. Lewis, and was published in Shanghai in 1919. "Holy Spirit" was translated as *Shengling*, and "God" as *Shangdi* and *Shen* - and printed in two editions. Until two weeks before he died of dysentery in 1908, C.W. Mateer, a man of meticulous scholarship, never missed a single meeting. After Mateer died, C. Goodrich assumed the chair of the executive committee. He was the only one to witness the publication of the Mandarin Union Version Bible, the others all died at various times during the twenty-seven year translation process. This translation of the Bible was the culmination of seventy-two years of effort devoted to Bible translation by the Protestant church. During the eighty-plus years from 1862 to 1949, some 3W different Mandarin versions of the Bible were produced.

Concerning the influence of the vernacular translation of the Bible on the new literature of China, Zhou Zuoren, the brother of Lu Xun, once said, "I recall that at one time there were people who opposed new trends in Chinese literature, and said that this form of writing was not new, but came from the Gospel of Matthew. At the time I thought this criticism was a joke, but now I am quite amazed at the insight of these critics. The Gospel of Matthew is actually the first piece of Mandarin literature to receive influence from the West. I dare predict that its influence on our new literature will surely be great and deep." Cheng Jingyi (1881-1939), who took part in the revision of the Mandarin Union Version and later chaired the National Christian Conference, once said to Marshall Broomhall, "The answer to your question, whether the widely used Mandarin Bible did or did not help the Mandarin language become used by the people as a form of written communication is that I strongly believe it did. ... Though it cannot be said that the Mandarin Bible is the vehicle for introducing new writing to China, it certainly did play an important role."

Because (spoken) Chinese has many different regional dialects the Bible was naturally translated into those dialects. The four major groups are the Wu, Min, Hakka, and Cantonese languages. Some translations used Chinese characters, while others used romanized scripts devised by missionaries or Chinese. These systems of romanization were the forerunners of the Chinese pinyin romanization presently in use.

Groups using the Wu language have three publications in the Hangzhou dialect (including one edition of New Testament portions), one Gospel of John in the Jinhua dialect, thirty-seven publications in the Ningbo dialect, twenty-one publications in the Taizhou dialect (today referred to as Linghai), four publications in the Wenzhou dialect, forty nine publications in the Shanghai dialect, and seven publications in the Suzhou dialect, including three New Testaments and one Old Testament. Most of the Ningbo publications are individual books of the Bible. Among the more important works are the New Testament (1868, 1874, 1906) and the Old Testament (1923) versions used by most Protestant denominations, as well as the New Testament (1898) and Old Testament (1901) used by the joint Baptist churches. Of twenty-one Taizhou publications, twenty used romanization, including three New Testaments and one Old Testament. All four Wenzhou versions used romanization, including the 19(0)2 edition of the New Testament. The majority of the Shanghai dialect publications were written in Chinese characters, though there were four romanized versions. Of seven Shanghai dialect New Testament publications, one was romanized and titled *The New Testament, Matthew through Revelation*. In 1908 a Shanghai dialect version of the Old Testament was published in Chinese characters.

Among the Min dialects, there are fifty-six Fuzhou dialect publications, including eleven New Testaments, of which two were romanized (1900 and 1905) and one Old Testament, also romanized (1906). However, the two Fuzhou dialect Complete Bibles of 1891 and 1909 were published in Chinese characters. The Amoy dialect is also called South Min dialect, and is widespread throughout southern Fujian and in Taiwan. There have been some thirty-two publications, of which thirty-one were romanized. These included seven romanized New Testaments (including also a New Testament with Psalms published in Taiwan in 1965, and three Old Testaments). The full Bible in Amoy romanization was published in 1908, and another published in Hong Kong in 1959. In addition, there were nine publications in the

Tianxing dialect, divided between Chinese character editions and romanized editions. Two of the Xinghua dialect New Testaments are in Chinese characters and one Xinghua Complete Bible in romanization. There were eight publications of the West Min Jianning dialect, all romanized, two in the Jianyang dialect, and one in the Shaowu dialect (romanized).

The Shantou dialect of Guangdong (Chaozhou dialect) is actually part of the South Min dialect Of the Min group. From 1875 to 1922 fifty-five publications appeared in the Chaozhou dialect, of which thirty-six were in romanization and the rest in Chinese characters. These included a New Testament in Chinese characters in 1898, a romanized New Testament in 1905 (titled "New Testament Bible"), and a complete Bible in Chinese characters in 1922. There is one unique feature of the Shantou dialect Bible, namely that whenever a large character version is published, a small character version with cross-references must also be published. "Cross-references" means the gathering of related Scripture references and explanations for a given Biblical word.

The Hakka dialect is very unique. According to tradition, at the end of the Western Jin, Tang, and Southern Song dynasties, people from the central plains, where the Yellow River flows, migrated south, and took up residence in Jiangxi, Fujian, and eastern and northern Guangdong. They gathered in the Meixian, Xingning, Tapu, Wuhua, and Huiyang counties of Guangdong, and were called Hakka (guests). The traditional Hakka dialect preserves many elements of ancient Chinese intonation. There were thirty-four editions of the Hakka Bible from 1860 to 1933, including five New Testaments and one Complete Bible (1916). Those Hakka publications were equally divided between romanized script and Chinese script, though later editions tended to use Chinese characters, as did all publications after 1897. This may be due to the fact that the Hakka dialect derived from the central plains, where long ago Chinese characters were used to write the Hakka dialect - which is in any case simpler than using romanization. In 1958 a Chinese character edition of the Gospel of Luke for the Hakka-speaking Chinese of West Malaysia was published in Hong Kong. In 1965 a parallel romanization-Chinese character edition of the Gospel of John in the Hakka language was published in Taiwan. The Tingzhou dialect of Fujian is a combination of the Hakka and Mandarin dialects, and in 1919 the Gospel of Matthew was published in this dialect, using the romanization system of the South Min dialect.

Cantonese is spoken not only in Guangdong, but by large numbers of people in the eastern part of Guangxi and in Hong Kong. From 1862 to 1937, some sixty editions of the Cantonese Bible were published, mostly in Chinese characters, though there were also a few in romanization, including six New Testaments and two complete Bibles. The Cantonese Bible was the first in all of China to be printed using moveable type. Since 1886 there have been many English-Cantonese bilingual versions-something not often seen elsewhere. In 1959 a Cantonese Complete Bible (with maps attached), based on the Beijing dialect Bible published in 1913 was printed in Hong Kong. There have been fourteen Bible publications in the Hainan dialect, all in romanization. Twelve of these were individual books of the Bible, and the other two multiple portions (Habakkuk to Malachi, as well as Galatians to Philemon plus James to Jude). There were no complete Bibles in the Hainan dialect. In addition, there were four publications in the Lianzhou Sanjiang dialect of northern Guangxi, namely the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all in Chinese characters. Sanjiang is today the autonomous

county of the Yao nationality of South Lian. The old Sanjiang dialect publications are perhaps the Yao dialect publications.

Among northern dialects, there is the Jiaodong dialect (a 1918 publication of the Gospel of Mark) and the Zhilu dialect (a 1925 publication of the Gospel of Luke), both of which used Wang Zhao's phonetic system.

Protestant minority nationality language translations can be divided into two major groups: 1) areas of the northeast, north, northwest, Tibet, etc., including Manchurian, Korean, Mongolian, Xinjiang, Kazakhstan Turkish, and Tibetan languages, and 2) the minority nationality languages of the three southwest provinces (Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan). Before the Bible was translated into these languages, most of these nationalities had only a spoken language. The Bible translations offered these nationalities written languages, some of which are used to the present day. In addition to the two language groups mentioned above, there is also the language of the Ryukyu Islands east of the East China Sea. In 1858 a Ryukyu-Chinese bilingual version of the Gospel of Luke was published.

The Gospel of Matthew was published in Manchurian in 1822 and the whole New Testament in 1835, both printed in St. Petersburg. Publications in Korean include the Four Gospels and Acts in 1884 (printed in Yokohama), a New Testament in 1897 (printed in Fengtian), and a Complete Bible in 1911 (printed in Yokohama). The Mongolian Bible can be divided into four kinds: in Mongolian literary language (the Pentateuch in 1836 and Old Testament in 1840, printed in the Russian Empire, and the New Testament printed in London in 1846), the Kangshu language (the Gospel of Matthew in 1815, the New Testament in 1827<sup>1</sup>), and the Buliya language (the Gospel of Matthew printed in the Russian Empire in 1909); in addition the Khaklha language Gospel of Matthew was printed in Beijing in 1872. Perhaps the Mongolian language publications listed above should be included as part of the history of the Eastern Orthodox translations of the Bible, and not listed separately here. The same may also apply to the six versions of the Xinjiang Kazakhstan Turkish Bible, including the 1914 New Testament, but not necessarily, because only one edition was published in Tomsk in Russian script; the others were all printed in Arabic. The nine Bible publications which came from the six Tibetan languages surely belong to the Protestant church, because they were printed in India (1883-1935). Those six Tibetan languages are Tibetan, Ladakhi, Bunan, Manchad, Tinan, and Abor Miri (on the Tibetan borderlands). None of the nine were complete Bibles. Only one Bible selection was published in the Bunan language (1905). These (oral but not written) languages used the Tibetan script. t)only the two publications from the Tibetan borderlands used romanization.

Among the southwestern Chinese nationalities belonging to the Thai language group are Zhongjia language (today called the Buyi language of Guizhou) in which a Gospel of Matthew in romanization was produced in 1904, and the Dai language (in the Yuanjiang District of mid-southern Yunnan) for which a Gospel of Matthew was produced in 1922 in Lao script. Also included in the Thai language family is the Shan language (originally from Burma), with three publications (Gospels) between 1871 and 1931, printed in Rangoon, Burma. In addition, there is Luke, John, and Acts in the Jingbo language of north Yunnan - printed in romanized form in 1907.



Among the Zangmian (Tibetan-Burmese) nationality languages is the Yi language (the Gospel of Luke in 1923, Acts in 1926, and New Testament in 1948, which made use of the script of S. Pollard), and the Kado language (the Gospel of Luke translated in 1939 by Chi Mo, a Christian from the Lisu nationality). The Lisu language is divided into Eastern Lisu and Western Lisu (Flower Lisu). The Eastern Lisu Bible includes four individual portions (1912-1936) as well as the

New Testament (1951), all printed in the Pollard script. The Western Lisu Bible had four individual portions (1921-1932). one New Testament (1938), and a New Testament with Psalms (195()); half of these were printed in the Burmese script. In 1968 Rangoon published a Lisu complete Bible in the Burmese script. The Lahu language had a romanized Gospel of Mark in 1924, printed in Rangoon. The Naxi nationality in northern Yunnan speak the Naxi language, and have one Gospel of Mark published in the Pollard script in 1932. In the north mountain district there is one Gospel of Mark in the Keba language printed in the Pollard script in 1913. The Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John were translated into the Lajia dialect written in the Pollard script in 1912 for the Miao of northern Yunnan. The Wawa language Bible is still being investigated.

Miao translations of the Bible are divided into five groups. The Gospel of Mark printed in the Pollard script in 1922, exists in the Chunmiao language of southern Sichuan near Guizhou. This was later revised and republished in 1938 by a Flower Miao evangelist. The Black Miao language Bible of eastern Guizhou appeared in seven separate publications from 1928 to 1935, and one New Testament of 1934, all printed in Chinese characters. The Flower Miao language Bible of Yunnan and Guizhou has ten individual portions or combined portions (1907-1915), the New Testament (1917), and a revised edition (1936); most of these were printed in the Vietnamese script, though a few (printed later) appear in the Pollard script. The Miao nationality Ked-deo language Bible has the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John published in 1937 in Mandarin script. Before the establishment of the PRC, the White Miao near Laos and Thailand had no Bible translation. From 1955 to 1971, however, sixteen different publications have been published in Thailand and Laos in the language of the White Miao, though no complete Bible has yet been published. Before 1967 only the Lao script was used, though since then both Thai and Lao scripts have been used. The Gospel of Luke was published in the Kada language of the Hani nationality in south Yunnan in 1939. Before this there were two Vietnamese (Annan language) Bibles in Chinese characters (the Gospel of Mark in 19(10 and the Gospel of John in 1918) published in Shanghai. Some of the minority nationalities in southwestern China who originally had no written languages later utilized the script of the Bible translations as their written language, and for some that is true to the present day.

In China the main organizations publishing and selling various Bible translations and publications were the British Bible Society, the American Bible Society, and the National Bible Society of Scotland. In the twenty-five years from 1904 to 1928, those organizations sold 44,976, 160 copies, 64, 192,295 copies, and 40,463,983 copies respectively, for a total of 149,632,932; almost 150 million copies. The total from 1814 through 1934 would be 225 million copies.

According to figures compiled by the Chinese researcher, Tang Yin, during the 136 years (1814 through 1950) of Bible sales by the Bible Societies of the U.S. and Great Britain, there were a total of 279,357,752 Bibles (from 1814-1940 there were 2,003,231 copies of the complete Bible and 6,610,794 copies of the New Testament). From 1941 through 1950, the China Bible Society sold a total of 14,070,614 copies, including 544,012 complete Bibles and 618,491 New Testaments. If those two numbers are added together, there is a total of 293,442,360 copies, almost 300 million copies, including 2,547,243 complete Bibles and 7,229,285 New Testaments.

### III

Chinese Protestant scholars have translated the Bible individually as well as cooperatively, beginning with Zhu Baohuei of Jinling Seminary in Nanjing, who initially translated the New Testament together with A. Sydenstrilker (published in 1929). Later, he revised the New Testament on his own, translated the Old Testament, and in 1939 published the "Bible of the Old and New Testaments Newly Translated from the Original Languages, with Cross-references and Annotations." In 1933 a second New Testament version, from the hand of Professor Wang Yuande of Cheeloo University was published in Qingdao. The Mandarin Treasury of the Bible (New Testament), published in Beijing in 1939, was a joint effort by Zheng Shoulin and H. Ruck; they translated "baptism" as *jinli* ("immerse"), and "church" as *zhuohui* ("assembly"). In 1958 the Mandarin Treasury of the Bible was reprinted in Hong Kong with the addition of the Psalms. In 1946 the College of Religion at Yanjing University in Beijing published Lu Zhenzhong's new translation of the New Testament. This translation was revised in 1949 and published in 1952 in Hong Kong under the title of Revised New Translation of the New Testament. The translation of the Old Testament took over ten years, and was published in 1970 after its completion in Hong Kong as the Complete Bible of Old and New Testaments. This version translated "Yahweh" as "Eternal Lord" (*Yongheng zhu*). Xiao Tiedi set his hand to the translation of the New Testament in 1959 and his rendition was published in Hong Kong in 1964 under the title "New Translation of the Complete New Testament."

In 1971 Xu Mushi, Zhou Lianhua, Luo Weiren, and others, using the Today's English Version as their model, translated the Bible from the original languages into Chinese. The Bible Societies of Hong Kong and Taiwan published in order the Good News (the Four Gospels), the Good News for Today's People (the New Testament, 1975), Today's Chinese Version (Old and New Testament, 1979), and a bilingual Today's Chinese Version/Today's English Version, 1989. The principle of translation for this Bible was "dynamic equivalence." After this New Testament version was published, a Roman Catholic version appeared. These two versions varied by only two words: "God" was changed from *Shangdi* to *Tianzhu* and "Holy Spirit" from *Shengling* to *Shengshen*. Archbishop Luo Guang of the Taiwan Roman Catholic Church provided a preface for this edition. In addition to these translations, the Living Bible published The Living Gospel, a 1974 paraphrase of the New Testament, patterned after

the English Living Bible paraphrase. In 1979 it also published the entire Bible as The Living Bible. The Living Gospel was also published in simplified characters in 1981. All these were published in Hong Kong. In 1976 Hong Kong also published the New Translation of the New Testament, which is a slightly revised version of the Mandarin Union Version of the New Testament. The United Bible Societies of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and elsewhere began work on a new Revised Union Version in 1986. To date, they have printed their revised Gospel of Matthew, and have invited responses.

A romanized Taiwan Xingang language Gospel of Matthew had appeared in 1661, some 146 years before Protestantism entered the mainland. In 1888 this version of the Gospel of Matthew was reprinted. It was further published in a Xingang-Dutch bilingual version, with English footnotes.

In 1967 a romanized Taiwanese version of the four Gospels, translated and prepared by Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars, was published in Taiwan. From the early 1950s to the early 1970s there appeared a succession of publications of the New Testament in the five mountain nationality languages and the Yami language. There are seven publications of the Ami Bible translation, including one New Testament (1972), which used either Chinese characters or romanization or both. In the Bunnun language there are five publications, including one New Testament (1973), in the same script as the Ami Bible. There are seven Paiwan publications, including one New Testament (1976?), five Taroko publications including one New Testament in 1963, and three Tayal publications, including one New Testament (1976?). In 1970 the Gospel of Mark was published in the Yami language, as was a New Testament portion in 1977.

In the 1950s, during the early years of the People's Republic of China, when policy implementation on the mainland was fairly effective, Christianity, including both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, developed normally. The availability of the Bible continued normally. When the Cultural Revolution set out to eradicate the "Four Olds," the Bible and other religious scriptures, and even many ancient books of the nation as a whole were, within a short period of time, completely destroyed by burning. Many Christians copied the Bible by hand. Presently on display in the offices of the China Christian Council in Nanjing, there are two copies of hand-written New Testaments, one from Shantou and one from Wenzhou. They serve as historical proof of mimeographed Bibles from the time of the Cultural Revolution.

In the summer of 1979, the present chair of the China Christian Council, Bishop K.H. Ting, organized Wang Shenyin, Chen Zemin, Luo Jenfang, and other Protestant scholars to work toward a revision of the Mandarin Union Version of the New Testament and Psalms. They produced a draft of the Psalms, the Four Gospels, Acts, and the Pauline Epistles. Later, with the flurry of activity surrounding the resurgence of Christianity throughout the country, which began in 1980, and the reopening of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in' early 1981, this Bible revision work could not be pursued. In 1981, the Protestant Church produced its first post-Cultural-Revolution edition of the New Testament (Mandarin Union Version) in Fuzhou.

In 1985 the Amity Foundation was established in Nanjing and shortly thereafter the Amity Printing Company began operations. In the ten years since, through the Amity Printing Press and other printing companies, the Protestant Church in China has published many translations and versions of the Bible, totaling 5,510,000 copies (as of the end of 1990). This includes 50,000 copies of the New Testament; 850,000 copies of the New Testament and Psalms; 690,000 copies of the complete Bible, *Shen* edition, and 1,000,000 copies of the complete Bible, *Shangdi* edition; 930,000 copies of the New Testament and Psalms in simplified characters (horizontal format), 1,350,000 copies of the complete Bible in simplified characters (horizontal format); 300,000 copies of a reference Bible; and 240,000 Bibles in various minority nationality languages, including Korean, Miao, Lisu, Yi, Jingbo, Wawa, and Lahu.

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Translated by Sheryl L. Rowold and Henry L. Rowold

*Rev. Wang's copious footnotes have not been translated, but his Bibliography is appended here for reference. Please note that for Chinese names, the surname is conventionally given first.*

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## **8. Religious Liberty: A Chinese Perspective - Shen Yifan**

Shen Yilan (Bishop) is General Secretary and Vice-President of the China Christian Council.

*Bishop Shen presented this paper at the Pacific Congress on Religious Liberty in Fiji, June, 1993. He presents the background, cultural and political, which has shaped the way religious liberty is viewed in China. Following a discussion of the problems in religious work which complicate the lives of believers today, he sets out two conditions for the realization of religious liberty: protection under the law and the improvement of relationships with other sectors of society.*

I am very delighted to have this opportunity to participate in this Pacific Region Congress on Religious Liberty. When I was going through the documents of the International Religious Liberty Association that had been sent me, I was struck by a passage at the end of the Declaration of Principles of this Association where it says: "We believe that the spirit of true religious liberty is epitomized in the Golden Rule -do unto others as you would have others do unto you." This is genuine Christian ethics, but how strikingly similar it is with the teaching of Confucius on mutual respect: "What you do not want for yourselves, do not offer to others." I believe this is where the Christian doctrine of love and the Confucian doctrine of virtue meet, and both underlie the principle of religious liberty which is the basic and inherent right of all human beings.

### **Religious Tolerance: a Chinese Tradition**

China is a land where for centuries Confucianism has been the dominant ideology. The teaching of Confucius with regard to religion is characterized by the following features:

a) Confucius, like other ancient Chinese philosophers, held rather vague ideas about religious faith. Heaven is sometimes regarded as a personal God, sometimes simply as Mother Nature. Human beings can live in harmony with Heaven, and divine governance is often minimized in favor of natural law.

b) The humanistic tendency of Confucian teaching resulted in a more or less agnostic attitude towards the supernatural. Confucius mentioned ghosts and gods a few times and even

prayed and offered sacrifices to them. The focus of his teaching, however, is on human relationships in this world.

c) The ethical emphasis of Confucianism has encouraged order in all human relationships and promoted a principle of good will and harmony. Much stress is laid on the virtues of modesty, magnanimity and propriety.

Hence, the lack of strong religious fervor or fanaticism among the Chinese people. Organized religion has never attracted the majority of the Chinese population. On the other hand, such a Confucian tradition has fostered an open and tolerant mentality towards all religions. Buddhism was first introduced to China in the first century AD and Islam, Zoroastrianism, Manicheism and other Asian religions found their way to China along the famous Silk Road from the seventh century onward. They could freely spread their doctrines and establish their temples and mosques. Some of them have flourished and survived until today, while others have been assimilated into some indigenous folk beliefs. The rulers of past dynasties, with a few exceptions, advocated a policy of tolerance towards various religious beliefs and practices. The masses of people usually look upon religion as an institution that "teaches people about good conduct", a view very consistent with Confucian thinking. There has never been a religious war in Chinese history, nor has any religion become integrated with state power, thereby putting other religions at a disadvantage. All this guaranteed the co-existence of various religions and due respect was given to different religious convictions.

### **The Introduction of Christianity: Two Missionary Approaches**

Christianity was introduced into China four different times. The Nestorian missionaries first came to China via the Silk Road in the seventh century during the Tang Dynasty, and then again in the twelfth century when the Mongolians were in power. Roman Catholic missionaries also arrived for the first time then. In both periods, for various reasons, Christianity did not last long. The Roman Catholics came to China again in the late sixteenth century, and they made great efforts to adapt Christianity to Chinese customs and cultural traditions. However, the Christian cause was greatly disrupted by a bitter controversy within the church about whether the observance of certain Chinese rites could be integrated with Christian practice. In the early nineteenth century, Christianity came to China for the fourth time, with the new arrival of Protestant missionaries and the return of Roman Catholic missionaries. Since then, the Christian Church in China has survived all the vicissitudes of the last two centuries and is still looking for ways to put down roots in Chinese soil.

The Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries clearly had two different missionary approaches with regard to how to deal with Chinese cultural and religious tradition. One approach was to give adequate recognition to the value of the Chinese cultural heritage, to seek similarities between Christian doctrine and the teaching of Confucius and other ancient sages, and to try to find appropriate Chinese philosophical concepts to express the Christian faith. Those who followed this approach were no less committed to their evangelistic task,

yet they tried to appreciate the spirituality of other religions and refrained from hurting the religious feeling of believers of other faiths.

However, there were other missionaries who adopted another approach that ignored the wisdom of Chinese sages and repudiated all other religions as mere idolatry. China was regarded as a heathen country and it was the duty of Christian missionaries to enlighten this dark land. Some of them even spoke militantly about "conquering China for Christ's sake" or the "Christian occupation of China". As a result, there was friction and frequent clashes between the evangelists and the Chinese people, which were called "Christian cases" in recent Chinese history. Under foreign pressure, those cases often ended with punishment and the payment of indemnity on the part of Chinese people involved. To the minds of those missionaries, any resistance to this aggressive missionary strategy was looked upon as an intrusion on religious liberty.

Thus in old China you could find Christian preachers carrying out evangelistic campaigns in Buddhist or Taoist temples during their festivals. You could also find some Christians smashing the divine images of other faiths in people's homes, accusing these images of having brought sickness or ill fortune to the family. Improper methods and depreciatory language were often employed against other religions in order to spread the Christian Gospel. To many a Christian, the liberty to believe in the Christian faith often meant the disregard or even denial of similar liberty to other faiths.

### **Religious Liberty in a Socialist Society**

A people's revolution led by the Chinese Communist Party was victorious in 1949, and the People's Republic was born. Since the Communists openly professed an atheistic philosophy, many Christians at first greatly feared that religious liberty might not be guaranteed in new China. But such fears were soon dispelled. Religious liberty was not only stipulated in our National Constitution and relevant laws, but was truly protected and respected. The principles of religious liberty as advocated by the Chinese Marxists can be summarized as follows:

a) Any citizen is free to believe in or not to believe in any religion, free to accept or to give up any religious faith, free to choose this or that religious faith and free to choose between denominational convictions within a religion.

b) All religions are equal in status. No religion is to be discriminated against in its rights, nor is it to enjoy special privileges over others.

c) State and church are to be separate. The state should not interfere with the internal affairs of the church, neither should the church interfere with the proper exercise of state authority.



d) Like any civil right, religious liberty is also bound with social obligations and is to be enjoyed within the limits of law. No one is allowed to utilize religion for criminal purposes.

All these are quite consistent with universal principles of religious liberty. Some people wonder how the Communists as atheists can formulate and execute such a policy of religious freedom. The answer to this is simply that this is the combination of Marxist philosophy with Chinese practical wisdom. The Chinese Communists do not endorse any religion, but they believe that in order to build up new China, everyone, including those people with religious beliefs, should be mobilized and united; hence the right of religious freedom must be respected.

The principles of religious liberty advocated in new China thus have a humbling effect on many a Christian. We have come to see that in order that everyone may enjoy the freedom of religious faith, we must give up our arrogance and superiority complex. We must accept the equal rights of all religions. In order to win the sympathy of Chinese people, we must also forfeit the special privileges which were acquired by the Chinese Christians during a time of western colonialist expansion.

### **The Nightmare of the Cultural Revolution**

Unfortunately a sinister faction within the Chinese Communist Party, whom we call ultra-leftists, gradually came to power and brought a great disaster upon the Chinese people in the so-called Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966 to 1976. All churches, mosques and temples were forced to close, and no public religious activities were allowed. Religious scriptures, vestments and furniture were mostly destroyed. The ultra-leftists looked upon religion as something reactionary and deceptive, and they believed that religion could be eliminated using administrative measures. The Cultural Revolution was a time when not only religious people suffered, but many people in other parts of society as well. People began to revolt against such a reign of terror and the ultra-leftist leaders were finally overthrown.

### **Reaffirmation of the Civil Right to Religious Liberty**

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, ultra-leftism has been severely criticized and proper policies, including the policy of religious freedom, have been restored and carried out even better than before. The right of religious liberty is reaffirmed in our new Constitution and stipulated in our Penal Law. With the reimplementation of the policy of religious freedom, most of our churches, mosques and temples have been reopened and religious activities resumed. As far as Protestant Christianity is concerned, more than 7,000 churches are active across the country. This means that over the past fourteen years two churches have reopened every three days. These churches are again linked with about 20,000 house meetings, mostly in the countryside. Church membership is on the increase. We estimate that there are about six million Protestant Christians, which is an eight-fold increase compared to the 700,000 Protestants at the founding of the People's Republic more than forty years ago. Even more

encouraging is the fact that an increasing number of youths and intellectuals are keen to learn about the Christian faith. There had been heavy losses of Bibles, hymnbooks and other Christian literature during the Cultural Revolution, and all theological seminaries were closed. Now in the last twelve years, more than seven million copies of the Bible, and four million copies of a new hymnal, together with other Christian publications, have been produced and distributed. By now thirteen theological seminaries have been either reinstated or newly established. As China is now adopting a policy of reform and opening to the outside, it is possible for the church in China to develop relations with churches and church friends overseas. We are very pleased that the China Christian Council was formally accepted as a member of the World Council of Churches at its Seventh Assembly in Canberra, 1991. All these facts show that Christians in China now enjoy a large measure of religious liberty, which could hardly have been imagined (during the Cultural Revolution).

## **Problems and Prospects**

Although the ultra-leftist line has been decidedly reversed and a new era of civil liberty is open to all Chinese citizens, the imprint of ultra-leftism still remains in the minds of some local cadres. Here and there we are still faced with problems, such as restrictions on religious activities, interference in the internal affairs of religious bodies, discrimination against religious believers, banning of local meeting places and even some unwarranted detentions and arrests. Religious leaders are very concerned about these cases, and air our criticisms and present our proposals to higher authorities, asking that all these cases be redressed.

Despite these difficulties, we have many good reasons to believe that religious liberty can be better enjoyed in China in the days to come.

a) In the process of China's modernization, there is now an emphasis on the strengthening of socialist legality and bringing socialist democracy into full play. Administrative measures are to be applied only according to law, not the personal will of local cadres. The masses of people should have greater power to supervise government officials. With regard to the right of religious liberty, the general principle is contained in the Constitution, but there is still need for more concrete legal stipulations. Preparations are under way to formulate laws and regulations concerning religious matters. The drafting of such laws and regulations is to be done in consultation with religious leaders, so that religious liberty can be more adequately guaranteed. We are looking forward to greater legal protection of religious liberty in the future.

b) The changing attitude of social scientists has brought about a new openness towards religion. In China, social scientists play an important part in providing the theoretical basis for policy making and law enactment. In the past, most Marxists held a very dogmatic view of religion, seeing it merely as the opiate of the people. Few theoreticians today persist in this extreme position. Having assessed the matter on the basis of historical experience and present reality, some theoreticians now speak about the various positive roles religion has played in the cultural, ethical and social aspects of human society. Some of them even affirm that religion has

a contribution to make towards the building up of spiritual and ethical culture in a socialist society.

c) Closer identification of religious believers with the Chinese people has helped to pave the way for better implementation of the policy of religious freedom. The enjoyment of religious liberty does not depend only on legal protection, but also on the good will of the people. This is specially true for Christianity, which used to be looked upon as foreign religion. Trying to change the foreign image of the Church in China, Christians have been making efforts to achieve the autonomy and indigenization of the Chinese church. Many Christians have also been taking an active part in our nation-building. Quite a few Christians have made outstanding achievements in their work and have been elected by their colleagues as model workers, outstanding teachers and doctors, and so on. In this way, Christians have won the sympathy of many people from all walks of life, helping to create a more favorable atmosphere in which the right of religious liberty can be better respected and protected.

To conclude, for Christians in China religious liberty is not only a civil right by which we can have free exercise of our faith in worship and in witness, but also a prerequisite for us to be better related in harmony and in common efforts for nation-building with people of other faiths or those without religious faith. So we endorse the theme of this Congress: religious liberty as a basis for peace and national development. We will join with all people in the Pacific region, and indeed with all peoples in the world to strive for the realization of this liberty.

## SERMONS

### 9. Encountering God in Quietness - Li Yading

Li Yading is a graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary where he now teaches.

He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street ... he will faithfully bring forth justice (Is. 42: 2-3).

There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth (Ps. 19: 3-4).

... to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands ... (1 Thess. 4: 11-12).

The common experience of the prophet, the psalmist and the apostle demonstrate for us an important message: in terms of the spiritual discipline of Christians, the lesson of "quietness" is an essential one, for it is only in quietness that we can see God.

Quietness is a gift God has given to the natural world of his creation. It is a virtue which Christians ought to possess. The word quietness has many meanings; it is both a kind of rest and fulfillment, a kind of reverence and humility, as well as a kind of obedience and tranquility. Having created heaven and earth, all the creatures and humanity within six days, our God "saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1: 31). And thus God's heart was filled with contentment and on the seventh day he stopped his labors, and rested. In this eternal rest of God, heaven and earth and all that is in them began to follow the courses of their lives in quietness according to his commands. Psalm 19 says: "The heavens are telling the story of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard." This is why we raise our eyes to the heavens which God made and see the sun, moon and stars rising each day in the east and setting in the west. The wind blows toward the south and shifts to the north; rivers and lakes flow to the sea, but the sea does not overflow the limits God has set upon it. The cosmos and all creation follow the commands God has given, silently, faithfully, unfailingly following their courses. Though they have no speech, no words, or voices, there is not one of them which does not show forth the wonder of God, the almighty power of God, the reality of God and the love of God. People are often amazed at the precision of the works of human hands - the accuracy of a clock, for example. The vastness of the cosmic system in God's control, which has continued without cease through countless ages, on the other hand, is something they simply have no way to imagine.

I met an American astronaut who had walked on the moon. He once visited Nanjing and showed slides of his moon walk to a large audience and witnessed to meeting God in the quietness. This left a profound and wonderful impression on me. He said that in that instant when he stepped onto the moon's surface, he had the feeling that he had stepped into an

illusion, a world of wonder. The surface of the moon was suffused with a clear bright silver light. Our globe has a blue aureole and is translucent as a crystal, like a large blue ball hanging on the limitless horizon that could be shattered at the touch of a finger. All around him it was extremely quiet, without the slightest sound, but he sensed that everything was so harmonious that it was nearly perfect. He had the clear sense that the Lord Jesus was by his side, so much so that he turned several times, to see whether he really was right there beside him. He was filled with complete admiration for God's creation and completely one with it. At that moment, he said, he realized how limited human language truly was, for no matter what language he might use there was no way to express the circumstances of that moment nor his state of mind. He could only praise, with his whole body and mind, giving glory to the Lord of creation, our God.

As Paul said in Romans, 1: 20: "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse..." But it has always been the case that people have not proceeded to know God as they know these things. People know how to be grateful for the smallest human gift or favor, but they cannot spare even a glance for the God who gave them life and light. They do not return to God the glory that is his, they do not thank him. This is incredible. When we look at the universe and all creation, when we take care to pay attention in our everyday lives, we will discover there that God is with us. The grass and the flowers have no words, but they show forth God's beauty. Spring trees and leaves do not speak, but they announce the news of the resurrection.

Quietness is a type of veneration, a kind of humility. When we enter God's temple or go into our room and close the door, when we come before God to revere him, to draw near to him, to open our hearts to him, we will deeply sense God's majesty and holiness as well as our own uncleanness as sinners. If not through God's son, our Lord Jesus Christ who shed his precious blood for us on the cross, not one among us could stand before God, even less would we be fit to see him face to face, to speak with and pray to him. At the same time we know that God is kind and merciful and that the expression and revelation of this love is often a long look, a gentle remark, a soft embrace. And we can only truly experience the sweetness of these when we are quiet in God's bosom. When we think of this, our steps grow light and we must bow down in God's presence and wait. Only as we grow quieter can we release ourselves from all earthly matters and anxieties and with one heart orient ourselves toward God, concentrating on his voice. And it is only then that God will speak to us. For what pleases God is "a grieved and contrite heart," "clean hands and pure hearts."

In the Bible, God sometimes speaks to people in the thunder, or as a voice from heaven, but even more often he speaks in the stillness, in a small voice to his servants and those who serve him with faithful hearts. Following a mighty storm, a landslide, an earthquake and fire, Elijah heard the still small voice of God asking him: "What are you doing here?" The reason Samuel was able to hear the voice of Yahweh calling to him was because he had a child's heart, and it was in the still of the night, when all were sleeping. In Bethany Mary sat quietly before the Lord, listening to the Word, and gained the Lord's "better part". Our Lord Jesus Christ also says to us: "But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Mt. 6:6). All these examples demonstrate that it is only behind closed doors that we can personally experience what

it means to say "the beloved is mine and I am the beloved's." It is only in darkness on the precipice that we can see the beauty of God's face, hear his gentle voice.

In recent years, there have been reports of Christians in some rural churches who don't uphold the Biblical teaching and cannot keep silence before God. When they pray or gather together, they yell and shout, sing and stamp, in the mistaken belief that they must shout more and more loudly, more and more often, in order to be heard by God; that they must leap about more and more wildly, even to the point that they insult the name of God and sully the body of Christ, in order to be filled with the Spirit. Seeing these chaotic phenomena, seeing these brothers and sisters, who though they love the Lord are confused in spirit, upsets us greatly because the Lord Jesus clearly tells us: "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words"(Mt. 6: 7). In I Corinthians 14: 33, Paul says: "for God is a God not of disorder but of peace." And Proverbs says: "A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh."

We can see how important tranquility before God is for Christians. Quiet is an essential "selah" in the Christian life. In the Psalms of David, we often come across the word "selah", which was originally a musical term indicating a pause or rest, a moment of silence as one tune comes to a close and before another builds to its climax. Many saints of old and devout sisters and brothers who love the Lord, experienced "selah", all their lives. Before Moses received God's call, he lived in the wilderness for forty years; our Lord Jesus Christ, before beginning his ministry, spent forty days in the wilderness; after Paul turned to Christ, he too retired into the Arabian desert for three years. The reason David's Psalms enjoy such popularity and have been chanted through the ages, is because all were written following one "selah" after another in God's presence. These many "selahs" were essential for their lives. We have among us many devout, zealous brothers and sisters who have had similar experiences. During the Cultural Revolution, when the policy of religious freedom was so wantonly obstructed by the Gang of Four, churches were closed and Bibles and all religious books destroyed. To believe in or to worship God was considered a crime or a counter-revolutionary act and many Christians were persecuted to varying degrees. When the churches reopened and even more today when they are flourishing, many overjoyed brothers and sisters, even as they express their gratitude to God, like to refer to the Cultural Revolution period as a "selah" in the life of the church and in the spiritual life of the individual. We have seen that after experiencing this "selah", the Chinese churches have been even more abundantly blessed by God, are flourishing and developing even more, witnessing more - the changes are greater than we ever imagined. And we often hear brothers and sisters tell how during this time in the wilderness they went into their rooms and closed the door, how there they drew near to God and witnessed to God's glory. Stories of such moving witness are many, and we cannot help but offer praise and thanksgiving because of them.

It is said that no matter how turbulent the ocean surface, in its depths it is always still. And people say that as the grinding wheel turns its circles at high speed, no matter how quickly it turns, at its absolute center point, it is always still. This is what our Christian life should be like. No matter how stressful or busy our daily work, we should have time and opportunity for quiet, whether in the morning or evening. When this happens, our hearts will truly be filled with sweetness. In quiet meditation we can hear God speaking to us, receive each day's new grace from him, so that each day we are able to "run and not be weary ... walk and not faint." At the same time, in quietness we can also perceive a kind of submission and tranquility. We

have seen small babies fussing and crying, but once asleep in mother's arms, all is peaceful sweetness. St Augustine once said from his heart: O God, our hearts are restless until we rest in thee." This sentence expresses a common Christian experience. Because the world is too much with us, or our work is not going well, because of setbacks in love, hardships in life, upsets in the family, children's disobedience or unfulfillment of our goals, and even more because of our own ignorance, we tend to fall into a kind of childish agitation, distracted and worked up. We might be discouraged, disappointed, doubtful, wavering, complaining, we might even lose control. At times like these, there is nothing we can do except to cast ourselves upon the bosom of the Lord in order to gain true, perfect tranquility.

In this quietness we can pour out all that is in our hearts to God and he will comfort us and release us from our troubles. And we can personally feel his touch and comfort. At the same time, we can reflect ceaselessly on ourselves in this quietness, and ask God to examine us, each time receiving from God joy and fulfillment.

We see around us many brothers and sisters who not only humble themselves before the Lord, but work quietly and lead tranquil lives. They go about their tasks quietly, serving those around them earnestly and wholeheartedly. They do not seek fame or profit, but only follow God's will. On the basis of Christian insight they do what they should, glorifying God through their good actions, as a way of telling others that they are disciples of Christ, so that others may see the light of truth through them, recover the inner image of God which humankind has lost and thus acknowledge Jesus Christ as Saviour, Son of the eternal God. We can see the attraction that these Christians' profound constancy and quiet holds.

We can also glean the following principle from quietness: action regulated by quietness will often lead to results we could not dream of; with both action and quietness results are even better. In the rising of the sun and in its setting, we may learn many principles of knowledge of God and humankind and at the same time we can understand the beauty of action and quietness joined together, at which we never cease to marvel. A soft low voice often carries farther than a loud harsh one. Tragedy is more moving and has a greater ability to shake us, than farce. Our Lord Jesus Christ was only on this earth a brief thirty-odd years and only two or three of that comprised his ministry. He had none of the splendors and arrogance of the kings of this world. Quite the opposite, his origins were humble, he was not physically attractive, he did not draw attention to himself, nor raise up his voice - his voice was not heard in the street. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, like a sheep being shorn, he was silent. But this is the Lord who brought to completion God's great plan of salvation, and who, down through the ages, has had so many followers. His existence, his appearance, have not been in the least sullied by human denial, attacks or curses, for if creation praises him, that is only what he deserves, while if creation despises him, his glory shines forth all the more. No earthly king can match his merit and virtue. The ancient saying goes: "The Yangtze flows east and the great of history disappear with its waves." Only our Lord will not be washed away by the tides of history, because he is Lord of history, king of human hearts. His kingdom is without end, forever and ever.

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians (a Nanjing Theological Review publication, 19x8), p. 83.*

Translated by Janice Wickeri.

## **10. God's Wishes - Zhang Junhua**

Zhang Junhua is a 1988 graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, now serving the Shanxi Road Church in Nanjing.

Text: Jer. 7: 27-27; 29: 11-13; Rom. 8: 32; Rev. 21: 3

When they read the Old Testament many people are puzzled: Why is "Yahweh God" so severe, so harsh? Why does he send pestilence to strike down and kill people as punishment? It really seems too cruel. But after all, the God we believe in is the God of justice, and even more the God of love. In the time of the Old Testament the Law stated that whoever turned against God would be punished, as a way of clearly expressing God's justice and holiness. Thanks be to God, he set up the cross and made a new covenant so that we can find salvation through Jesus Christ's saving grace. This reveals God's love. God's justice and his love are interwoven, but his love is really the core of his nature. Even as we live under the grace of the new covenant, by looking back to the Old Testament we can discover the yearnings of God's love, his desire for people to repent, his desire to grant peace, his ardent wish to be together with people. Once we recognize God's wishes, our love for him will grow stronger.

### **Repentance**

Friends new to the church ought to hear the call: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mt. 4: 17). Those who did not believe have now turned to God, those who sinned have now repented and believe in Jesus. But those who already believe in the Lord also need to repent: They need to turn away from weakness and failure, from disobeying and contradicting God. As God spoke through the mouth of the prophet: "Return, faithless Israel, says the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, says the Lord. I will not be angry forever" (Jer. 3: 12). Three times God calls out, asking the people who have disobeyed and left him to repent anew and turn back to him. Only if we determinedly repent and turn to God, leaving behind evil and listening to God's word - only then will God in his love accept us anew. We can see God's kindly feelings towards us: He does not deal with us according to our past sins, and he does not punish us according to our wrongdoing. Again and again he is lenient, again and again he is patient, giving us another chance to repent. God wants people to repent and be saved, he does not want anyone to be lost. God is lenient with us and he forgives us. Again and again he gives us his plentiful grace so that we will return to him. How often we are weak, how often we stumble and make our Father sad, but God still sustains us. Sometimes we fail, and fail again, so that we are ashamed to face God, but God does not give up on us. We only need to repent, and God will save us. We only need to turn back, and God will surely accept us. God



will indeed not break the bruised reed nor quench the dimly burning wick. Day after day, time after time, he waits for sinners to repent and return to him.

That God is so lenient and so patient does not mean he tolerates sin. But he wants to give people the chance to repent, a time to turn back. We can learn from the Israelites that we cannot take grace for granted, indulging ourselves in it. Time and again they sinned, and God forgave them time and again-even seventy-times-seven times! But even then Israel did not really repent and turn back to the Lord. The people turned their backs on the true God and venerated idols. So morality disappeared throughout their nation, justice withered away, people cared for nothing except their own desires and evil piled up to the sky - but still they would not repent. As a result they came under God's just judgement, their country was defeated, their home lost, and ten tribes were eliminated. After the northern kingdom had been destroyed. Judea was later captured and Jerusalem reduced to ruins. That Israel ended in such a tragic way should serve as a warning to us. But despite all of this, God's promise remains, because if Israel had only repented, if it had only turned back to him, God would still have accepted and saved its people.

### **How, then, do we repent?**

*Repentance has to be concrete:* We need to repent of the very things that made us stumble. In the seven letters to the seven churches, the Lord Jesus Christ says to the Ephesian church, after praising her: "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love that you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first ..." (Rev. 2: 4-5). This church has failed in its love, so now it needs to repent through love "and do the works that you did at first." We could say that if you have sinned through your words, you need to repent through your words; if you have sinned in your heart you need to repent through your heart. Repentance should be concrete.

*We need to walk on the road of righteousness.* Before, we were not righteous; we were sinners. But now that we believe in the Lord, we recognize our past sins and are distressed. We feel sad. Now this is remorse, but if it does not lead us to mend our ways it has no meaning. "Repent, repent" means to change, from past unrighteousness to present righteousness. We used to walk the road of sin, now we walk the road of righteousness. This puts us in the right direction, on the right road, into the right attitude. God says: "If you return, oh Israel, if you return to me, if you remove your abominations from my presence, and do not waver, and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives!' in truth, in justice, and in uprightness, the nations shall be blessed by him, and by him they shall boast" (Jer. 4: 1-2). True repentance must come from the heart, but in action we must discard evil and embrace goodness, forsake darkness for light, abandon falsehood and return to truth.

*Our hearts and minds need to be renewed.* Spoken repentance is good, as is repentance in action -both come out of a repenting heart. And a repenting heart is a renewed heart, all its thoughts and ideas have been reformed, so it is called a "renewed heart." If there are still the old sin-loving intentions, if it is still an arrogant heart, a heart full of unclean longings, then it is impossible to bring forth from it the good actions of repentance. So God asks people to repent, and even more importantly, to renew their hearts. God says: "Circumcise yourselves to

the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or else my wrath will go forth like fire, and burn with no one to quench it, because of the evil of your doings" (Jer. 4: 4). "Circumcision" originally meant to cut off and leave behind sexual passion and to turn to God for sanctification. But while their bodies were circumcised, the Israelites did not circumcise their hearts and minds. In the same old way, they sinned, they were unclean, they venerated idols, and their hearts were full of all kinds of injustice and evil. God asked them to circumcise themselves because the key is to receive the circumcision of the heart, ridding it of all sins, injustice, and disobedience, and to allow it to change into a repenting, renewed heart. Actually, people cannot achieve this by themselves, as God has said through the prophet: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (Ez. 36: 25-27). Only if God gives us a new heart and a new spirit can we really repent and change. God wants people to repent.

## **Peace**

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer. 29: 11). We can clearly see what God's desire is: To give people peace. God wants people to be well, he does not want them to experience disaster. God wants a reconciled relationship between himself and the people, and he also wants reconciled relationships between people. Only in this way can people have peace. But why is peace so often lacking in our daily lives? Because we do not listen to God's voice. The result of our sins is that we do not have peace. In the beginning, the prophet Jeremiah didn't quite understand this. He said: "Ah, Lord God, how utterly you have deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying 'It shall be well with you' even while the sword is at the throat" (Jer. 4: 10). God said that all would be well but there was the sword, warfare, and danger, and people could not even protect their lives. There was no peace in Jerusalem. How could this have happened? The prophet received God's explanation that the Israelites had lost peace through sin. It really is so: Where there is evil, there is no peace; whoever sins loses peace. This has been true since our first ancestors: When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost the peace in their hearts, they started to fear God, they felt ashamed and hid themselves from God. And after Cain had killed his brother Abel, he fled and became a drifter, afraid that someone might kill him. He lost his peace, too. When the Israelites turned their backs on the true God and sinned against him by venerating idols, they also lost their peace. They brought disaster upon themselves and were struck by God. But God's wish for people is still peace, not to inflict calamity. God may allow disaster to overtake and destroy them, but his aim is to plant and to build. The tactic may be to strike down, but to give peace is still his wish. As God guides and teaches us, he strikes us down, but this all happens so that we may return to him. God is the source of peace, so when we leave him, we have no peace. Whatever our circumstances at the moment, whatever our plight, we must understand that God wants to give people peace, and that God never changes. And if we don't have peace, we must carefully examine ourselves:

(1) Are we perhaps like the Israelites, half-hearted towards God, not searching for God with our whole heart, sincerely and in good faith? God hates the double-minded (see Ps. 119: 113), such people will not receive anything from him. God hates the one who can both love God and enjoy the pleasures of sin; God has a jealous heart. The Bible says: "My child, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways" (Prov. 23: 26).

(2) Do we perhaps not listen to the Lord, do we not walk the Lord's way? For rebellion is no less a sin than divination (see I Sam. 15: 23). Some people say: Before I venerated idols and practiced divination, but now I don't do it anymore. This is the first step, but if you believe in Jesus and still don't listen to the Lord, you cannot have peace. Only with God's word can we withstand Satan and win victory over sin, and only by listening to God's word we can ensure that our hearts do not incline towards evil. Walking in the Lord's word we will have peace.

(3) But if we have not sinned and still cannot find peace, though we seek with all our heart, then we should ask ourselves whether God is not in this way seeking to form us, whether this is not a God-given tribulation, because God forms us so that we may become more pure and complete. If this is God's way of forming us, a God-given tribulation, then we should be joyful even in our misery, because once the time has come, God will give us even richer peace. The peace that he gives has come through Jesus Christ's cross. The Lord says: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (Jn. 14: 27). The peace of worldly people changes with the circumstances, they only feel peace if they are lucky and in good times; if they are in a little bit of trouble they don't have peace. But the peace that we have received from the Lord means that we have hope and calm steadfastness even in misery, even in danger, for God is the source of all peace. "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Is. 54: 10). Where God is present, there is peace.

## **God with Us**

God created humanity because he wanted to be together with people. Even in paradise, God often visited his people, and they lived in the light of his love. But because humanity sinned, evil has cut off the relationship between God and the people. They were driven out of 'paradise, and they also turned away from God. But God still had the desire to be with people, so he established ways by which people could draw close to him once more: Through Abraham's sacrificial altar, God was with people, and through the holy tent created by Moses, he was even closer. When Moses led the people from Egypt, God especially instructed him to construct this holy tent, saying: "And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25: R). The Israelites could enter the tent, bring their offerings and be close to God; and by being present in the tent, God lived among the people. But the tent was a pre-figuration of Jesus Christ, because only in Christ could God and the people truly meet and be together. The Bible predicted that "the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (Is. 7: 14). The meaning of "Immanuel" is just this: "God is with us." How can holy God be together with sinners? How can the righteous God have a relationship with people who do evil? Only through Jesus Christ can God be with people. Without belief in Jesus, without acceptance of him, people have no way to know God or to

come close to him. A lot of people have gone to search for God on their own, and they have found a false God, an idol, and as a result they have fallen into the trap of the devil. Only by believing in Jesus, by relying on Jesus, can one find the true God, and only through Jesus can God be close to us and with us. God's desire in sending Jesus was that everyone should believe in him, so that God could be together with all people. For this togetherness God paid a great price: He sent Jesus to be crucified, to serve as a sacrifice to ransom and redeem us. God made him carry everybody's evil, bitterness, punishment, so that in reverse, he could give Jesus' life to those who believe in him. Through Jesus' representation, God's angry heart was turned around, and God once again accepted humanity, made peace with people. Through Jesus, God lives in our hearts, and we live with God, and in the future we will be together in glory. God does not only want people to repent and be saved, even more he wants people to believe in Jesus so that he can be with them. So today when we rely on the Lord Jesus while we pray and look up (to God), God is with us. We only need to believe in the name of the Lord, assemble and work with one heart and one mind, then God is in our midst. Whatever happens, God has already prepared a place for us, and when the time comes, the Lord will come back and welcome us. Wherever God is, he wants us there, too (see J n. 14: 1-3).

When the Lord has come back, we will forever be together with him in the new heaven and the new earth. When we think of this firm promise, this glorious hope, then we will not mind too much the difficulties we are facing now. God wants to be with us, his people whom he has sought. God says: "When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart ..." (Jer. 29: 13). May we sufficiently know God's love, may we understand his desire, may we not be discouraged by misery, may we repent when we have failed, and seek God, believe in him, and truly wait for him to lead us into the heavenly city where we will be with him forever. May the grace of our Heavenly Father be with us always. Amen.

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians (a Nanjing Theological Review publication, 1988), p. 44.*

Translated by Claudia Wahrlich-Oblau.

## 11. Profound Experiences of Life - Wang Jianguo

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Text: 2 Corinthians 12:1-4

### I

Around 55-57 AD, the apostle Paul wrote the Second Letter to the Corinthians, in which he mentions that approximately fourteen years previously he had a profound life experience, his experience of the third heaven. If we consider the vision which Paul had on the road to Damascus the turning point in his life, then this mysterious experience deepened his recognition of Jesus, increased his understanding of his own mission, and made him more resolutely "offer his body as a living sacrifice." Why was it that in his thirteen epistles Paul was able to exhaustively expound the saving grace of Christ? How was he able to resolutely set off into the Gentile nations, sowing the seed of the Gospel in Europe? Why was he able to look on all worldly things as dirt, willing risking his life daily? Was this simply because of the combined influence of Greek and Hebrew culture on him? Was this only stubborn enthusiasm? The result of a strong personal will? Perhaps these had an impact on him, but we must not forget the profound experiences of Paul's life. From First and Second Corinthians, Romans, and Galatians we can see that Paul did not follow Jewish legalism; from Philippians, Colossians and the Pastoral Letters we can see that Paul did not blindly follow the foolishness of the Gnostic school. His faith was founded on a deep personal experience of the risen Christ. Although language cannot convey the experience of the third heaven, this was the most precious part of Paul's life. This experience was an anchor of his faith, which kept him moored to the person of Jesus.

In general, the servants used by almighty God all had deep life experiences. In the Old Testament we find Abraham leaving Chaldea, Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, the priests making sacrifices for the people, the prophets crying out to their people for God; none lacked a deep experience of God. Paul was not the only one who had an experience like that of the third heaven in New Testament times. Peter also had an out of body experience, and John his experience of the island of Patmos. These kinds of profound life experiences were what filled Abraham with faith, filled Moses with ability, and caused the prophets to put aside their former lives in order to prophesy for God and their people. It was just such experiences that caused God's servants throughout history to bravely face the beasts of the arena and the rack, and to bravely advocate "returning to the Bible" and "making the church the church."

### 3

The ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi said: "The Tao which can be heard is not the true Tao; the Tao which can be seen is not the true Tao; the Tao which can be spoken is not the true Tao." The only way to comprehend the Tao is through "a pure heart." This "pure heart" is a heart which is empty and undisturbed, a kind of assurance which transcends rationality and the physical senses. Paul's deep experience was exactly the kind of contact with God which transcended mind and body. He had an experience of life which language cannot express. Just as the Christian existentialist Marcel said: "A mysterious experience is a mysterious power and is very hard to name." This is primarily because words are too dry and lifeless, and unable to carry such a burden.

Perhaps some would see this "life experience" as self-deception or superstition, but history shows us that this is not self-deception but "experience." The modern symbolist playwright Maeterlinck advocated communion with the mysterious in the midst of absolute emptiness. In this world and in the universe there are many unseen patterns, but when life enters a series of still moments, meditation can lead to enlightenment, and we can see or hear these patterns. The dramatist Eugene O'Neill, the abstract expressionist Mondrian, and others all had experiences like this.

The work of an artist who lacks deep experience of life will be shallow. Likewise, if the spiritual life of a Christian is devoid of experience, then this "spiritual life" will also be shallow. If Christians, especially those who have devoted their lives to God's work, do not seek this kind of accord with God, it is hard to imagine how they can persist on the long hard road of service. On what will they rest their sense of peace and purpose? If Paul had not had the experiences he did, it is hard to imagine how he would have been able to cope with "danger from rivers, danger from bandits; danger from his own countrymen, danger from Gentiles; danger in the city, and danger in the country" without becoming discouraged. Would he have been able to withstand toil and labor, go without food and sleep, and endure cold and nakedness while still being constantly concerned for the church'?

### 4

However, it is always hard for superstitious people to achieve deep life experience, and many times man-made gods have led people toward superstition, becoming obstacles to the human spiritual search and affecting our church. In our churches, we often hear people talking about strange dreams they have had, about speaking in tongues, seeing visions, or joining in spiritual dances; when you hear such things you don't know whether to laugh or cry. I don't mean that I totally reject such claims; rather that the superstitious component of the faith of many people is too great, and that their God is an objectification of their own subjectivity. Brothers and sisters, we must respect those who are strong in their spiritual search, but we must not forget that the "spiritual experiences" of some of these people do not necessarily come from God. This means that while we respect, we must also guide. Put another way, this means that we must have our own life experiences. A child of God must have an experience of

faith, but should not make it superstitious or overly subjective; otherwise, it becomes idol worship, a man-made god.

## 5

A person with a deep experience of life has a heart that is pure and clean; such a person will experience God and life behind all things; even a flower or a blade of grass can enlighten his or her spirit. But those whose faith is superstitious will look at a flower or blade of grass without really seeing it; they may even complain of the flower's short life or the lowliness of the grass. One who has a deep experience of life will see God's creation in the flowers and grass, and come to love the Lord even more. Consider the hymn "God's Wondrous Brush": "The still beach, the setting sun, and the gently flying geese" all move the author to praise God's creation. William Blake wrote: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand,/ And Heaven in a Wild Flower,/ Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,/ And Eternity in an hour." As the Bible says: "The spiritual man can judge the value of all things." This is true; a spiritual person - that is a person with a deep experience of life-can feel the presence of God and life behind even a flower or blade of grass, just as Paul was able to see the hand of God behind his "thorn in the flesh," and see God's eternal power and divine nature in creation (Rom. 1: 19).

## 6

A Christian who has had a deep experience of life will certainly not be limited by self; his heart will not be filled with personal considerations-personal gain or loss, honor or humiliation. Instead, his heart will be filled with the Lord's church, children, and creation. Paul had this kind of experience, so he daily risked death, yet daily concerned himself with the affairs of the church; Moses had the experience of seeing God face to face, so he was willing to blot his name from the book of life for the sake of his people. However, for some reason I don't know, some Chinese Christians today feel that a spiritual person should not be concerned with events around him, but rather confine himself to a narrow kingdom of what he or she considers righteous. In fact, this kind of "personal piety" spirituality or "indulgence in self-admiration" is not God's desire for us, and it does not correspond with the Bible's guidance as to how we should seek a spiritual life.

In the Middle Ages, the mystic Meister Eckhart said: "When I enter the wonderful state of mystical union with God, but suddenly hear the voice of my brother calling for help, I will unhesitatingly leave that state to help my brother." Going further, Saint Francis showered the love of God for all God's creatures. He not only kept company with lepers, but in Hymn 14, "Hymn to the Sun," he even called the sun his brother, the moon his sister, the wind his younger brother, water his aunt, fire his friend, and the earth his mother. His heart was filled with all of God's creation and with love. A person who has a deep experience of spiritual life should, like our Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul, not always retreat into the wilderness to be cut off from others, but rather ardently love God's kingdom even more and feel more deeply his or her people's pain and difficulties. To use today's terms, this means that such a person should love

country and church even more. A person with a deep experience of life will stick closer to the heart of our Lord, have a deeper understanding of what spirituality is, share the Lord's burden, and enter into His sufferings. For a Christian who has the life of Christ has a new life which not only overflows from his burning eyes but is transformed into a shower of love for humankind.

Brothers and sisters, servants of God must have the desire for an experience of life that will daily move our hearts a step closer to God and cause our hearts to become purer. In the business of each day, let us take a little time, kneel before our Lord, and open our hearts, not to say anything or make any requests, but to silently enjoy and seek a deeper experience of life!

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians* (a *Nanjing Theological Review* publication, 1988), p. 97.

Translated by Don Snow.



## **12. A Wilderness Spirit - Li Xinnong**

Li Xinnong is a graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary where he now serves on the editorial staff of the Publications Department.

Text: Ex. 3: 1-6; Mt. 4: 1-4; Mk. 1: 2-8, 35-38

There are more than thirty books in the Old and the New Testaments where the term "wilderness" is explicitly used, and even more which touch on the idea of wilderness. Whenever the Bible refers to the wilderness, the word has a profound spiritual significance. Surely, in considering this text today, we will receive a rich spiritual lesson.

### **The Many Meanings of Wilderness**

Away from the noise of city-life, the wilderness is bright, clean and silent. We can shake off our distractions there, think calmly of God and receive illumination and enlightenment. The wilderness is plain and spacious, we gaze into the boundless distance. There we can bare our breast, expand our mind and strengthen our belief. But vegetation is sparse in the wilderness, and people are few. It is necessary to live simply and without extravagant desires. To overcome the hardships and gain victory, we must open a path in the wilderness.

### **A Wilderness Spirit Tempers Us**

What spiritual meaning lies in the wilderness spirit possessed by the saints and the prophets?

*A wilderness spirit is one which is obedient to God's intention.* Moses tended sheep in the wilderness for forty years. In Exodus 3: 1-6 a very special spiritual experience is recorded, when God appeared to Moses: "Moses was minding the flock ... He led the flock along the edge of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flame of a burning bush ..." By tempering himself, leaving the palace, living in the wilderness and tending sheep, Moses was able to become a steadfast man with courage and knowledge. Only Moses had developed these spiritual and physical qualifications; he possessed the spirit of the wilderness. Only then did God appear to him and entrust him with a mission. Moses' wilderness spirit is the caring and pastoral spirit of the shepherd. To watch over and care well for the sheep, the shepherd must prevent the flock from dispersing and getting lost. He must lead them to a green pasture beside water where they can rest. He must prevent attacks from wild beasts and harassment from enemies. It is thus clear that the spirit of a shepherd is very similar to the heart of a loving mother. The shepherd must have a spirit which can bear hardship and endure hard work. He must always be alert and watchful. Only because the holy man Moses had a shepherd's mind, spirit and courage,

that is, a mind of obedience to God, did God entrust him with the important task of leading millions of Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness. Moses' tempering in the wilderness formed in him a spirit of obedience to God, a tender spirit to nurture and lead thousands of people through the Dead Sea to accomplish God's purpose.

*A wilderness spirit is one in communication with God.* In the Gospel of Mark 1: 35-38, it is recorded how, after a whole day of healing, driving out devils and spreading the Good News, "very early next morning Jesus got up and went out. He went away to a lonely spot and remained in prayer. But Simon and his companions searched him out ..." We can imagine the situation. The disciples were exhausted and fast asleep. The whole city, the whole village, the whole earth was still in the land of dreams, but Jesus was fully awake. He yearned for the bright and silent wilderness in the morning light, yearned to go in the silence of the daybreak to a spot in the wilderness to pray. Thus a wilderness spirit is an awakened spirit: it is a spirit which overcomes physical tiredness, a spirit alert to see God, a spirit which yearns for a tacit understanding with God in tranquillity, a spirit in touch with God.

*A wilderness spirit is a spirit which vanquishes temptation.* In Matthew 4: 1-4 it is recorded: "Jesus was then led away by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil. For forty days and nights he fasted, and by the end of them he was famished. The tempter approached him and said, 'If you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'Scripture says: Man cannot live on bread alone, he lives on every word that God utters.' "

We see that Jesus' wilderness spirit was one which vanquished the needs of the body and the lure of material benefit, a spirit of fasting and prayer, of meditation on the word of God, relying on that word to vanquish temptation. The foundation of such a spirit is God's word revealed to Jesus in Scripture. A spirit such as this is a weapon with which to conquer temptation. Today we can be greatly encouraged and consoled by these words. Despite all the various kinds of temptation around us, Jesus is the redeemer: "For since he himself has passed through the test of suffering, he is able to help those who are meeting their test now" (Heb. 2: 18). The key lies in following the Lord in that spirit of the wilderness which can win out over temptation.

*A wilderness spirit is the spirit of Elijah and John the Baptist, a spirit which opens the way for the Gospel.* In Matthew 1: 1-9 it is recorded how John the Baptist "appeared as a preacher in the Judson wilderness;... John's clothing was a rough coat of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey..." In the wilderness the sound of a breath would carry for miles; John the Baptist traversed its length and breadth, eating and sleeping in the open air. Overcoming loneliness and desolation, he gained a simplicity and frugality of body and mind, and a spirit devoted to seeing only God and obeying God. He overcame the monotony of his material life, eating locusts and wearing rough clothes. His was an awakened spirit which had cast off the things of this world. He appeared like a flash of lightning and thunder sent out of dark clouds. What he taught came from Heaven above and his attire closely resembled that of Elijah. His mission was to open a way for the

Messiah, whom so many people had anticipated for so long. His was a spirit which would not disgrace his mission; because of it he devoted his life to the word (see Mk. 6: 14-29).

### **Emulate the Wilderness Spirit of Saints and Prophet**

Although our standard of living has risen, this must not hinder Moses' spirit of tending sheep in the wilderness and obeying Heave commands from forming in us. We should have the spirit of the Lord Jesus to pray with a clear mind, to rely on the holy words, to succeed over temptation, to fight and conquer the body, to call the body) follow the self, a spirit to open a way for the Lord's Gospel, for are all servants of the Lord, entrusted to spread the Good News.

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians* (a Nanjing Theological Rev publication, 1988), p. 247.

Translated by Dirk Skiba.

### **13. Seeking Jesus - Liu Yajun**

Liu Yajun is a 1992 graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary who is now on the staff of Anhui Seminary.

Text: Luke 2: 41-50

I am always moved when I read Luke 2: 41-50. Its depiction of Jesus' parents searching for the twelve-year-old Jesus makes me realize how slow of heart we humans are to know and understand God. We always feel close to God when we are in the church or in other places related to the work of the gospel, but as soon as we leave, we forget to fellowship and walk with the Lord. This illuminating passage acts as a mirror to show even those of us who seek to be near God that we may sometimes lose him. Let us read the text carefully and consider its spiritual application for our lives.

#### **Desiring Fellowship with God, But Unable to Stay in Step**

It was a tenet of Jewish teaching that Jesus could become a member of the synagogue when he was twelve years old. Accordingly, his parents took him to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Having begun the long journey home, it was only after a full day that they discovered Jesus was no longer by their side.

We know that Joseph was a righteous man who, needless to say, loved God, and Mary is renowned for her obedience. Yet it is possible for even this sort of person to lose the Lord.

We all want to be with God and we desire even more to walk with him. Whenever we enter deeply into prayer, worship, or Bible study, we experience the sweet intimacy of communion with our Lord. As soon as we leave these conventions, however, we find ourselves out of step with him. Traveling, working, studying quietly, or taking an hour's walk - if we maintained an attitude of worship during times like these, how great our joy and blessing would be!

I remember someone who was quite good at prayer, who had a gift for persuading and advising others, and whose heart was truly filled with love for God. One day as she was helping to move chairs in the church, she accidentally whacked her knee against one of them. Forgetting her usual "gentility" in the midst of the pain, she grabbed her knee, and then kicked the chair completely over yelling, "who put that chair here?!" Incidents like this are numerous. I once heard of an itinerant preacher who used physical force to get others to listen to his sermons; Martin Luther, depressed and anxious in the midst of adverse circumstances, might never have realized without a scolding from his wife that our Lord is the God of eternal life, and that although he was doing the Lord's work, the Lord was not in his heart; the Bible shows

that Mary was also like this-the resurrected Lord was standing right in front of her and yet she continued to weep beside the empty tomb. These illustrations help us see that even though someone may love the Lord, it is possible to fall out of step with him.

### **Seeking the Lord at Once**

As soon as Jesus' parents realized he was gone they immediately began to search for him. In much the same way, we only seek the Lord when we are in urgent need. Having already gone a full day's journey, we can imagine how anxious and utterly distraught they must have felt. Unfortunately, they only looked for him among their "relatives and acquaintances" - and did they find him? The answer is "no." While we live in the flesh, our spirits are often sluggish and dull, making us rely too easily on other people's convictions about how we should seek for the Lord. We forget about the Bible, we forget about prayer, and when we do encounter difficulty, instead of making any personal effort to worship, our first impulse is to run and find someone who has helped us in the past. When we fail to seek according to God's will, the result is that we wander further and further away.

Here is a testimony: A Christian brother lost a government bond worth one hundred Chinese dollars. (In some areas of China this could be worth nearly a month's wages!) He asked his wife hoping she had seen it, but when she said she hadn't, he literally broke into a sweat. Frantically, he shook out the heavy cotton quilt on the bed and even turned over the sofa, but all to no avail. In the midst of all the panic, his wife said, "Pray!" Until that moment, he had not thought of going to the Lord for help, but after he stopped to pray, he felt more at peace. He opened his Bible and just as he was about to start reading, "Aiya!" - there was the government bond tucked between the pages.

We needn't wait until we are far away from God to seek him, and we needn't seek him according to the will of other people. Instead we should seek for God at once in the place that pleases him the most. Beloved brothers and sisters, it was "three days" (Lk. 2: 46) before Joseph and Mary found Jesus. To avoid wasting valuable time, it is best if we walk with the Lord at all times, and take care not to lose him.

### **Seeking with a Distressed and Grumbling Spirit**

When they finally found Jesus in the temple, Mary said, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you?" Jesus replied, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

We lose fellowship with God in the same way Mary and Joseph lost Jesus. Moreover, having found him we are too quick to point the finger of blame, "Lord, why have you treated me like this and caused me so much distress...?" In fact, the fault is ours. What right do we have to lodge a complaint against him? Just like Jacob feeling desolate in the wilderness, or Elisha begging to be allowed to die (1 Kings 19: 3-4), or Peter weeping after his denial of Jesus - we are the cause of our own suffering.

Jesus said, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Indeed, there are times when we ought to feel deeply ashamed. If we were always conscious of God and faithful to keep fellowship with him, how could we sink into such distress? If Jesus had truly been the center of Mary's and Joseph's attention and if they had really understood his heart, how would it have been possible for him to leave without their knowledge? They would have known what he was doing and when, so that even if he did leave, they could have waited for him in glad serenity of heart. At the time, however, Mary and Joseph did not know, so Jesus answered their anxious queries with a pointed question of his own. When we read stories of Elijah pleading to die, or Moses grumbling against God (Num. 11: 11 -I 5), we realize that they and others like them lost sight of the Lord's fellowship as well as the strength that fellowship provides. Jesus' response was not meant to wound his parents nor show them disrespect, but rather it was prompted by the Holy Spirit. Despite the appearance of angels at Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph still "did not understand" what the Lord was saying (Lk. 2: 50).

Fellow members of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, while it is true that Mary and Joseph were slow to understand, they did desire to be in fellowship with Jesus. It is true that they sought him in a spirit of anxiety and reproach, but despite the smallness of their faith, it broke their hearts (Ps. 51: 17) to be separated from him, and sparing no pains in their search, in the end they found him. We should learn from their example. If we pay greater attention to whether or not Jesus is by our side, we can avoid causing unnecessary grief and prevent the loss of precious time. As soon as we realize that the Lord is not by our side, we should feel sorrow, but there is no need to complain. Just take a look at Jeremiah 29: 13-14, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Amen.

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians (a Nanjing Theological Review publication, 1988), p. 252.*

Translated by Kim Dickey.

## **14. Pressing On And Striving - Li Dawei**

Li Dawei, a 1992 graduate of Nanjing Theological Seminary, now works in the offices of the China Christian Council and Three-Self Movement in Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

Text: Phil. 3: 12-14

The Bible passage we have just heard is from Paul. We know that throughout his life, Paul cast all else aside for the Lord and committed himself to preaching the gospel. During the writing of the letter to the Philippians, he was in prison for the sake of the gospel. After he had received the call, he led a restless and hardworking life, striving to preach the gospel everywhere. For this, he underwent innumerable trials and tribulations, suffering in body and spirit. Just for this great goal. At one point he said of himself, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26: 19).

But why doesn't Paul say this here in our passage? Why doesn't he boast of what he has achieved. Why not say that he has accomplished his goal? In other words, why does he still want to press on? Why does he keep striving with all his might? Because Paul is deeply convinced that faith is boundless and human knowledge seeks unceasing progress. Only through continuous striving and seeking can we deepen our faith, and our understanding of God become ever more profound and lofty.

### **Faith Requires That We Press On**

As the saying goes, one offering does not equal life-long dedication; one ray of light does not illuminate the whole world; a price paid once does not mean eternal possession. Successes, once achieved, are inevitably past successes. Progress can only be maintained through never ending efforts; the alternative is stagnation.

In 1 Kings 18 we read about the most glorious moment in the life of the great Old Testament prophet Elijah. On Mount Carmel, he confronted 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Ashera. This was while the empress Jezebel was massacring the Lord's prophets. In these appalling circumstances, as his own were being slaughtered and he was outnumbered, Elijah showed enormous courage and unshakable faith.

Let us think about it for a while. Without his extraordinary courage and confidence, he would surely not have dared challenge 850 enemies all by himself, he would not have instigated the prophets of Baal to try to invoke their god from morning till night, and he would definitely not have made a laughing stock of them. All of Elijah's actions prove his courage and faith with absolute certainty. And as we know, later God accomplished his purpose through Elijah's faith.

And yet, right after the courageous, heroic Elijah saw the evidence of God's great power, something unexpected happened: Overwhelmed with fear, Elijah fled for his life and

sat down under a broom tree, quarreling with God and asking to die. All of a sudden, nothing was left of his great fighting spirit and trust in the Lord. Contrasted with his glorious victory on Mount Carmel, this failure and cowardice seem all the more pitiful.

Let me give you another example. As a young man, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was a very enthusiastic evangelist. But little came of all his efforts. With undiminished zeal, he crossed the Atlantic Ocean to carry on in the New World. After failing again, he returned to England demoralized. But later, as we know, he had a life-changing experience. In an evening meeting on May 24, 1738, while listening to the Introduction to Martin Luther's commentary on Romans, he was born again. From then on, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and preached with great power. Methodist Christians believe that Wesley's conversion is comparable to Paul's experience on the road to Damascus.

But does this mean that later on John Wesley was always strong and successful, and never again suffered from weakness? His diary tells us a different story. The experience of that particular evening did not guarantee him full and everlasting victory. In the following six months he apparently suffered from a spiritual ebb and burnout. To feel reborn and gifted with the Holy Spirit is truly a high point in our faith experience. But this does not mean that we will never again suffer or meet defeat.

From these two examples we can see that if one is always wallowing in past achievements and boasting of former victories, he or she may at best stay as they were or even lose ground. This is true for both our human knowledge and our spiritual maturity. Although Paul had a lot to boast of, he still expressed his desire to keep striving, to forget what lay behind, to strain forward to what lay ahead, and to press on toward the goal. Let us reach out for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ; let us build a spiritual house from precious stones, not from grass, wood or straw. In this way, let us press on and conscientiously forge ahead.

### **Our Changing World Requires Us to Keep Striving**

The world we live in is constantly and rapidly changing, and so is our society. The pace of the times has quickened and people seek constant fulfillment and amusement. All of this requires constant striving. But we know that this situation leads to a spiritual vacuum and crisis of faith for many. And then they come to church in search of a solution. How can we offer them spiritual fulfillment and meet their religious expectations if we don't strive ourselves? A good evangelist stands on the watch tower of his time, passing on messages to the age.

Of course, the educational level among Christians varies a lot. But if we want to talk about our faith with highly educated intellectuals, we must combine our religious insights with social-scientific knowledge. At such times, knowledge adds flavor to evangelism. This requires from us a heart striving for such knowledge. We should do our best to improve our



knowledge of other areas in addition to theology. Our ministry can only improve if we are well-read and broadly educated.

During Moses' forty years in Pharaoh's palace, he studied the entire body of Egyptian knowledge and this stood him in good stead when he later led the people of Israel out of Egypt. Those of us who have done field work in churches may have realized how familiar with the Bible some of the older believers are, they know many key verses by heart. This is a challenge to us students, which requires us not only to be able to explain the Scriptures, but to know them inside and out in order to be good pastors.

Therefore each one of us seminarians should foster a sense of crisis and urgency; this is crucial. It is a precondition for our self-cultivation as people who are always alert and prepared, never complacent, and constantly striving. We know that Jacob was always alert and prepared; he kept striving throughout his life. God did certainly not spoil or pamper him, but in the end Jacob received God's blessing and love. This gift can certainly not be separated from Jacob's constant striving. Jacob's striving heart gives us a lot to think about.

For our own encouragement, let me close with another verse from Paul (Phil. I : 9): "And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight."

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians* (a *Nanjing Theological Review* publication, 1988), p. 275.

Translated by Gotthard Oblau.

## 15. No Salvation In Any Other - Peng Zhaodeng

Peng Zhaodeng is a graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and now teaches at Fujian Seminary.

Acts 4: 12

My favorite Bible verse is "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn. 3: 16). In this same chapter, verse 36 says: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John wants those standing at the crossroads to choose between the sharply contrasting life of blessings or calamity. Peter had already worked out his answer and he, moreover, felt that there was only one possible answer: "There is salvation in no one else (meaning the Lord Jesus); for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12).

At first glance, Peter's words are fairly weighty, even arbitrary. We can't help asking: Can it be that in a world as large and great as ours there is, to use an old saying, "only a one-plank bridge" leading to salvation?

Let us look more closely at scripture. What is the instrument of our salvation?

**Eden?** In the middle of the Garden of Eden there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the fruit of which was a delight to the eyes, moreover to eat of the fruit of that tree made one wise. Yahweh promised Adam and Eve they could eat from any tree in the garden, but the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they could not eat. But, they could not overcome or block out the temptation of the snake, they were not prepared for the tempter's onslaught and they became captives of the lust of the eyes, desires of the flesh and the arrogance of this life, refusing to heed Yahweh's command not to eat the fruit. As soon as they saw they were naked they wanted to flee from God's presence, but it was too late for regrets. From then on, Eden had bid farewell to humankind. Though they covered themselves with fig leaves, it was to no avail. For skirts of leaves and clothes of animal skin might cover their shame but there was no way to reverse the course of events

**An "Ark"?** By Noah's day the whole world was wicked, violence was everywhere. One may well say sin prevailed over all. God saw that Noah was a righteous man and told him to build an ark. Quite possibly Noah's neighbors made fun of him: "Building a boat in this desert"? This guy Noah, has he gone mad?" The carpenters worked away on the ark but did not believe a flood was coming. When the work was finished they still would not listen to Noah's urging to repent but continued to sin.

The result was that only Noah, his wife and three daughters-in-law and sons boarded the ark. The ark did not transport everyone to the heavenly shores. Rather, the flood took them to a watery grave.

**The Law?** The laws of Moses are famous, but law can only make people aware of sin, of what is and is not sin, what people can do, and what they should not do. People cannot rely

on obedience to the law for salvation. The reason is simple: that which is born of flesh cannot observe the law one hundred percent. If a person leads a life of sin, will one or two good deeds save him? Or, if a person commits a sin, which is neither very serious nor very minor, can she rely on her good deeds to enter heaven? According to the view that a person who diligently keeps the law may enter heaven (see Deut. 27: 26), both of them are bound for hell. For Paul wrote, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3: 20) and "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Eph. 2: 8, 9).

**"Sacrifice"?** Sacrifices cannot take the place of genuine repentance. During the days of the prophets people believed sacrifice took away sin. A lamb could be sacrificed for the people's sin. If they sinned again, another sacrifice could be offered. Constant sin meant constant sacrifice. Would not such sinner's sacrifices make men better? Yahweh says, "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me'?" The prophet Micah also says, "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?" (Micah 6: 7). Obviously sacrifices cannot save people from sin, they serve only to keep the priest occupied.

There is nothing unique about this; during the Middle Ages indulgences were sold to redeem sins. John Tetzel preached that the gifts to the building of St. Peter's Church in Rome could bring complete remission of sin for those in purgatory. He sold indulgences and in his sermon he said:

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,  
The soul from purgatory springs.

Martin Luther wrote: "Why doesn't the pope build the basilica of St. Peter out of his own money'? He is richer than Croesus. The penalties of purgatory the pope cannot reduce ... and the pope does not have at his disposal a treasury of credits available for transfer." Therefore to trust indulgences to redeem sin is futile.

**Idols of our own making?** The Bible speaks many times about the worship of idols. In Isaiah 42: 17 it says, "They shall be turned back and be utterly put to shame, who trust in idols, who say to molten images, you are our gods." The prophet Isaiah tells how a man cuts down a tree and with part of it he makes a fire and cooks his meal and with part of it he carves a god to worship. The thing he created becomes his god. The prophet proclaims loudly, "Behold, all of them are false; their works are worthless, their molten images are wind and emptiness" (Is. 41: 29). In rural areas of China, the country folk bring a pig's head, a chicken or a duck to the foot of a large tree or stone on the first and fifteenth days of the month. They kowtow and worship, mouthing - what'? "Peace, peace! Save us, save us!" Can the stone save? Can the tree bring peace? This is really whistling in the dark.

**Virtue?** Virtue is good, but it cannot replace salvation. Though many people today do not worship gods of stone or wood, they also have no interest in Jesus Christ. They say that society has made progress and the world is in a more civilized and cultured state. True, society today has made progress. Moral standards have improved a great deal. This is good, but can we say that people who live in good conditions in a relatively ideal society do need Jesus Christ?

Do not need faith, hope and love? Can people be saved by relying on good conditions or on society? Of course not. I recall Bishop Ting's illustration of an experience he had with a driver and a car. Driving on a hill can be a very difficult matter. The winding road was uneven, from time to time the car veered to the left and then to the right, now uphill, now down. If one is not a careful driver, this can be a dangerous situation. If the road were as smooth as glass and straight as a pencil the driver might be able to doze off, or read a book, one hand on the wheel, glancing at the road from time to time.

But this is not the way things are. The driver must still be careful and cautious, because the action of the tires is not uniform. As the old saying goes "an error the breadth of a single hair can lead you a thousand miles astray."

The same applies even when conditions are excellent and society enlightened. People are still people, weak and imperfect. St. Paul wrote "All have sinned" (Rom. 3: 27), and "the penalty for sin is death" (Rom. 6: 23). Death brings separation: when the body dies we are separated from loved ones. In spiritual death we are separated from God. But, thanks be to God, the Lord Jesus on the cross has already overcome death, assuring all who believe in him that they will be made right with God and will receive eternal life.

**Money?** In our society today, as the standard of living rises, the idea that money reigns supreme has found a willing audience. The idea that everything has its price seems to be more and more popular. Many people believe that to have money is to have everything. But still, in everyday life, money is no better than dung for many people. Many benevolent and righteous people set themselves the high standards of the ancients: "Riches cannot corrupt nor want cause [them] to abandon [their] integrity ..." Even Satan, who traded in the glories of ten thousand kingdoms, went down in defeat to Jesus.

The Bible tells of a young rich man who sought advice from Jesus on how to gain eternal life. (Mt. 19: 16-24; Mk. 10: 17-25). When Jesus asked him to give all he had to the poor, he could not because he loved his wealth more. He could not accept Jesus' teaching. "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt. 16: 26). So the rich young man went on his way with sadness, unwilling and unable to receive the joys of heaven.

To sum up, we can clearly see that from ancient times to the present, people have sought, by all possible means, the path to eternal life and bliss, but there is only one gate to eternal life. This Jesus himself said clearly, "I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (Jn. 10: 9) and "Jesus said to him. I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me" (Jn. 14: 6). How could it be any clearer! How could it be any more definite! The disciples came to one conclusion and all generations since have given witness that "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12).

Let us pray:  
Lord, you are the road to eternal life,

who else can we turn to?  
Lord, besides you there is none to save us.  
We come to thee.

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians* (a *Nanjing Theological Review* publication, 1988), p. 9.  
Translated by Britt Towery.

## 16. The Way, The Truth and The Life - Chen Yongtao

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John 14:4-6

### The Way

The Lord said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Mt. 7: 13-14). This tells us, first, that the Lord is the true way; second, that all of us are in the process of choosing between two unseen paths. Some gain life in the midst of death, others, though they live, are dead. The path of destruction was the one along which Adam came; the path of eternal life was that followed by the obedient Christ. As we find it in Romans: "For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ... just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5: 19-21).

*Adam's way.* Adam was made in the image of God, God gave him dominion over all creation, and created a companion for him because "it is not good for man to be alone." Adam's life then was a paradisaical one without tears, sorrow, disease or death. God was with him and if he had respected God's commands, he could have enjoyed these blessings without end. The sad fact of the matter is that it did not end this way. Our first ancestors were lost through greed, because they ate in secret of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil which God had forbidden to them. They were turned out of the garden and set off along the path of degradation. Thus, Cain's murder of his brother, the cacophony of Babel, the fallenness of Noah's times, the moral degeneration of the age of the prophets, were all steps toward the brink of death. Humans grew further and further from God and ever nearer to damnation. The Bible says that greed is the root of evil, and greed is the source of human destruction. This was true for the Israelites; how can it be otherwise for us? In Adam the end of humankind is the grave. Adam's path is one of oblivion, but there are many even today who follow this path, leading dead lives. Why? Because people find pleasure in sin and are deluded by empty vanity. Sisters and brothers, we should all serve as watchmen for our age, crying out in a loud voice: Lift up your heads humanity; see the tomb in the distance and death waiting its chance!

*Jesus' way.* Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life ..." The Lord Jesus is humanity's eternal path. Following the age of the prophets, the Israelite people experienced four hundred uneventful years. Maccabeus 9: 27 says: "Thus there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them." The Israelites and all humankind seemed to have fallen into an impasse. Death swallowed them up. But God was not slumbering, nor dead, and the Saviour was not looking the other way. Rather, the

wonder of salvation was beginning. The tender shoots of life finally broke through the hopelessness. It has been said that man's end is God's beginning. Shelley in his famous "Ode to the West Wind" penned the profound line "if winter comes can spring be far behind?" Truly, when humanity fell into the impasse of winter, the spring of God's redemption followed close behind. One marvelous night, the incarnate Christ came quietly to earth and through his brief life of thirty-three years, through his humiliation, preaching, betrayal, death, burial, resurrection and ascension, a new path - the path of eternal life, was laid before us. People need only renounce evil, turn back to goodness, and accept Christ to escape annihilation and gain instead eternal life. Because of the first Adam, God personally became flesh and shared in everything with us. Because of the second Adam-Christ-God asks everyone who accepts Jesus Christ to be incarnated and enter the eternal kingdom.

Not everyone chooses the road to eternal life. Heavenly roads are much harder to follow than earthly ones and the fallen heart is like a ball rolling along a board, while the path of eternal life is like a boat sailing against the current. It is a difficult road, sloping upward. But it is only the road traversed in difficulty which imparts inner spiritual riches and pleasure. The young Chinese poet Shu Ting has written: "perhaps, because of that irresistible summons, we have no other choice." Sisters and brothers, the Lord by grace has called us and we have chosen this barren road of service. But do we really recognize this road, truly understand our choice? A rickshaw-puller once said, "The road knows us, but we do not know the road." Christ knows us, he has chosen and called us. I ask you, can we truly know Christ, can we truly never regret, but courageously move forward? The example of Demas in Second Timothy (4: 10) is a good negative example. Perhaps there will be times when we feel like Demas, but the Lord will save us; perhaps at times our souls are heavy, but the Lord will free us. Sisters and brothers, since we have chosen this path, we should go bravely forward and never turn back. Since we have chosen it, we should lay all our burdens down and cast off all earthly encumbrances. The kingdom of heaven is before us. In spite of the fact that the road to heaven is both narrow and hard, if we strive, we will certainly enter. Our correct choice today and our painful footsteps towards it are our ticket to enter heaven.

A Japanese writer has written: "In digging a well, one should dig until the stream gushes forth." We have made our choice, we are duty-bound not to turn back and to put the storm of temptation behind us. Even though tears, despair, bewilderment and grief lie along the road ahead, its end is the glorious throne of God, the eternal life of the kingdom, and the eternal blessing of paradise.

Sisters and brothers, since we have chosen this path of eternal life, let our actions accord with the grace we have received. Grant that having chosen her, we may know her, may be able to live for her, die for her and never regret it.

## **The Truth**

*Christ's truth.* Many people search for truth, some even devote their entire lives to it. What, then, is truth? This question has perplexed many people. The Roman procurator Pilate asked Jesus: "What is the truth?" Listen to Jesus' reply: "I am the way, the truth and the life." The Lord is not only the way leading us forward; he is also the t which can set us free and judge us. "And the word became flesh lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1: 14). The Lord Jesus Christ the truth. What does this imply? At the minimum, that truth is *eternal*. "But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I' the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades'" ( 1: 17-18). Truth is *unchanging*. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13: 8). Truth is *transcendent*. "In beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ..." (Jn. 1: 1-3). Truth is *absolute*. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12). "Whoever believes in Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath" (Jn. 3: 36). Truth is *righteous*. "But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you" (Acts 3: 14). "But if anyone does sin, we have advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous" (I Jn. 2: 1).

*Truth brings freedom.* If a person has the truth of Christ, that person will certainly have freedom too. All of us long for freedom, one is a willing prisoner. When I was working in the church a friend asked me: If you could choose freely, what would you like to be replied: "A bird flying free in the sky." Why do we human beings long for freedom? Because we are born free. Then why are we not free? Because of sin and selfish desires. Sin prevents our conscience from gaining freedom. Desire makes us too weak to break with endless temptations; when old desires have been satisfied, new ones appear How then can human beings gain freedom'? The only way is to Jesus be the Lord of our hearts. Jesus is truth, he can set you free. If a person truly allows Jesus to be Lord of his or her life, they will certainly gain freedom, will certainly be released, be humbled, die the world and live to the Lord.

*A life of service.* A life of service, very important for Christians, is even more so for seminarians. For a preacher to set an example, earnestly practice what one preaches, is more effective than being a colorful speaker. Actions speak louder than words; so also with preaching. We all realize this; however, often in this seminary, we are lazy and slack off; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak and so often we do not look for opportunities to serve, but reject service altogether, taking the view that it is a waste of time, that it keeps us from our studies. We give all our attention to the pursuit of knowledge, or to the devotional life but we overlook the equally crucial matter of service. In the Book of Hosea, 7: 8, we read "Ephraim is a cake not turned." If we favor knowledge and the devotional life over service, won't we be like Ephraim? How would this benefit others, ourselves, or the church'? At the end of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell - and great was its fall!" (Mt. 7: 24-27).



In Psalm 86:11 the psalmist prays thus: "Teach me your way O Lord, that I may walk in your truth." And in 1 John we find "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true" (1: 6). Brothers and sisters, the function of truth is to make us free and once we are free we should do what is true, that is to live a life of service. May we all be able to pray as the psalmist does, to pray for the truth to release us, to make us free and then to strive to live a life of service. For our Lord has come into the world, "not to be served but to serve" (Mt. 20: 28).

## The Life

Jesus said: "What will it profit a man ..." Life, extremely important to each of us, holds an even deeper significance for Christians. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." The Lord is not only the way which guides us, the truth which sets us free, he also is life in abundance for us. What is more, Jesus is the source of life, all life comes from him. Plants, animals, even works of art have "life," but only humans have life both of the flesh and of the spirit. The life of the flesh is form, no more than a sign of life; the life of the spirit is content, substance, only this is the true life. God and Jesus are the source of life. The life of the flesh is like a meandering river course, only the life of the spirit is the living water within. Without the life of the spirit, our life is no more than a dried-up riverbed, which can benefit no one. All of us have spiritual as well as physical life, but for some of us the spiritual life is dormant or even dead. How then can we gain true and eternal life? From whence does it come'?

*From God, through Christ.* Whether we speak of physical or spiritual life, both come from God. This is clear in Genesis I : 2. John also tells us: "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people" (Jn. 1: 2-4). In the beginning we humans were all alive in the spirit, but our ancestors fell and we became living dead. The incarnation of Christ brought life once again. By accepting Christ, people could gain life anew. The first step is to turn to God who gave life to humankind and live in Christ.

*Repent and gain life.* Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, humankind lost life, but were given the chance to regain it through the gospel of salvation the Lord Jesus brought. In order to do this, however, they must repent of sin. If the gospel is to take effect in a person, it must be linked to the movement of the spirit in making that person repent. Without true repentance, we cannot begin to speak of "rebirth" and our faith will lack vitality. The tax collector praised by Jesus and the Pharisee faulted by him are mirrors for us. If repentance has no place in our theology, it will become an empty lifeless husk. If repentance is not part of our faith, it will become the faith of a Pharisee. Dear friends, we are all going to serve the church as pastoral workers, as servants of the gospel. Therefore, we must realize the relationship between repentance and life, beg God to open our spiritual eyes, and let us see our own sin, so that we may repent. May our constant prayer be: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." Only then can we preach the gospel of repentance and salvation.

*Spiritual growth and pilgrimage.* The Lord Jesus has repeatedly brought life to humankind, giving them the chance to receive life anew through repentance; this is God's

grace. But if we want our life to grow without ceasing, we must go ourselves to seek it, to seek it in Christ. Friends, what is it we came here to seek, after all? Some of us have been here one, two, three years, or even longer. But have we made the quest for life the main form and content of our quest? Or are we here only to seek knowledge, fame, position, comfort and pleasure? Are we here to seek only what will benefit ourselves? If that is the case, my brothers and sisters, how dangerous it is! I do not mean to oppose a quest for knowledge or to say that we should not take advantage of the opportunity for higher education, nor am I suggesting self-abasement. The crucial point is to make the quest for life central. In Revelation, the church at Sardis is accused of having "a name of being alive, but (being) dead." Are there churches and colleagues today who are in similar situations? Why should this be? It is because they have ignored the quest for life and are seeking something else. Brothers and sisters, let us never cease our quest for eternal life, that our lives may never cease to grow in Christ.

*A life of dedication; an abundant life:* In John 12: 24, Jesus says: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." If we realize the relationship between repentance and life it will help us to understand that between dedication and life. Without dedication, without sacrifice, there can be no new and abundant life. To put it another way: "Life should be total dedication; whatever is kept back for the self is just so much worry." When we confess our own sin, when we see God's grace, when we take up not only our own cross, but Christ's cross, then we can give ourselves completely as a grain of wheat which God can scatter over the land. If we do not have a mind of repentance, no sense of responsibility for sin, if we do not know our original state, we cannot have perfect dedication, nor a spirit of perfect dedication, we can be neither light nor salt and we may dress ourselves up as a "master". If we want to propagate the gospel effectively, we must dedicate ourselves totally, so we realize that we are not the master of the sheep, but their servant. Brothers and sisters, do you want abundant life? Do you want your work to be effective? Then you must first know your true self, then dedicate yourself totally and change some of your traditional attitudes. Total dedication will bring abundant life and your work will be extremely effective. May God be at work in our hearts, enabling us to make a new beginning in a new era, to come out of ourselves and come to God anew, rededicating ourselves, striving to gain eternal life. All this we ask that we may know that Christ is the life, enabling our lives to be daily more abundant and to share that abundant life with others.

Jesus said, " I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10: 10).  
Amen.

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Translated by Janice Wickeri.

## 17. The Spiritual Race - Bao Dexin

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Texts: Heb. 12: 1-2, 1 Cor. 9: 24-27, Phil. 3: 13-14

The Apostle Paul liked to use analogies to describe the Christian life, like the good soldier of Christ (2 Tim. 2: 3), the hard-working farmer (2 Tim. 2: 6), a workman who need not be ashamed (2 Tim. 2: 15), or actors on the stage (1 Cor. 4: 9). In the three texts cited above we have the deeply spiritual image of an athlete running a race.

An athlete who strongly desires to win the prize must carefully master each segment of the race. Before the race the runner must prepare well, during the race he must pay attention to technique and how best to apply his skill; and at the same time he must clearly understand the rules of the contest, otherwise his efforts will be in vain. Likewise, the one who desires to receive the prize in the race of the spiritual life, must also master each segment.

### Prepare for the Race

#### I. Lay aside heavy burdens (Heb. 12: 1)

The athlete who is preparing to take the field in the race must first shed all the "weight" which his body does not need. Likewise, the participant in the race of the spirit must first set aside every weight in order to go into battle light. Burdens are "community property". From time immemorial all mortal beings together "groan in travail until now" (Rom. 8: 22) under the weight of this heavy burden. Christians are no exception. When we decided to follow the Lord, perhaps the "narrow gate and hard road" was indicated by former good friends now becoming strangers to us; or our former happy and peaceful homes now changed into battlegrounds full of arguments and fighting. However the difference between us and other people is this: we have the special privilege of being able to place these burdens at the Lord's feet. He has given us the promise: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11: 28). Many times as we "navigate" through our Christian life, we hesitate to go forward, or we are so afraid that our hearts are not at peace. This is not because externally the wind and waves are so large that they are rocking the boat. Rather it is because we are so self-confident about our own strength that we do not see the Lord coming directly towards us. We cannot hear the comforting words: "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid" (cf. Mk. 6: 45-51). In chapter nine of St. Luke's Gospel, three men fervently proclaim their desire to follow the Lord, saying: "I will follow you wherever you go." But after Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." The three men all went their separate ways - because of life's necessities, relatives, or family reasons. From this we can see how important it is for a disciple to lay aside the things which weigh him down.

## 2. Lay aside the sin which clings to us (Heb. 12: 1)

The burden of sin is a great enemy of the one who would follow the spiritual road. If we are not careful, we will be quickly consumed by it.

Many people today are unwilling to accept the Lord, not because they are hostile to Christ's doctrine, but because they fear that once they accept the Lord they will not be able to do what they want to do. They lose heart and their temporary enthusiasm. Likewise, many people who have received God's call are not faithful to that "sign which comes from the heavens" because they cannot extricate themselves from the entanglements of some sin. Saul, the first king anointed by God to rule over the chosen people, lost his self-respect because of the women's song about "thousands and tens of thousands" and ended up dead at the hands of the Philistines (cf. I Sam. 9-31). Samson, that awesome leader who saved the Israelites several times, squandered the spiritual power which his "Nazirite" vow bestowed upon him because he succumbed to the wiles of the Philistine prostitute Delilah, and in the end he became "a burial object" of the Philistines (cf. Judges 13: 24-16: 31). Judas Iscariot, chosen by the Lord to be an apostle and appointed to be the treasurer of the apostolic band, ruthlessly betrayed the benevolent master with whom he had been in constant contact for three years because of the attraction of the glittering contents of the "money bag," and earned the ignominious title "son of Satan" from later generations. Since ancient times it has been the same the world over: who knows how many people, who previously had tasted the Lord's goodness, lost God's grace because of the three traps of "fame, fortune or physical gratification". Today's disciples can take these mistakes of others as a warning.

For Satan to destroy people, it is not necessary for them to publicly renounce the Lord. They need only leave a little opportunity for him to seize upon, and he will resolutely enter in to "plunder, kill and destroy." A little leaven caused the whole lump of dough to rise; one fox can destroy a whole vineyard (1 Cor. 5: 6; Song 2: 15). Likewise, "a hidden sin" can be for us "a slight mistake resulting in a great error." Ask the Lord to let us willingly cutoff the "hand" which caused us to fall, and to tear out the "eye" which causes us to lose our way (Mt. 5: 29-30).

## **During the Race**

### 1. Be certain of the goal (Phil. 3: 14; Heb. 12: 2)

For the athlete, the "goal" is most important, because it symbolizes the direction and ultimate end of the race. If the runner does not run in the direction mapped out for him, even though his distance and speed far surpass other runners, it is all in vain. Likewise, the runner in the race of the spiritual life cannot run without direction (cf. 1 Cor. 9: 26).

What is our goal? Chapter 12 of Hebrews tells us: "Look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." When doubting Thomas was uncertain about the way of life mentioned by our Lord, the Lord told him: "I am the way.... no one comes to the Father but by me." Here the Lord clearly pointed out the one and only goal for his disciples himself.

In our spiritual race we cannot have two goals. "No servant can serve two masters .... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Lk. 16: 13). If we have a goal other than the Lord in mind in our spiritual life, then we will always feel uncertain about what course to take; we will hesitate to go forward or even give up halfway. We are reminded of the rich young man who was unwilling to sell all that he possessed. Was he not unfortunately overly attached to his riches (Mt. 19: 16-22)? And remember Demas, who at one time was a fervent follower of Paul. Because he coveted the Sodom-like pleasures of Thessalonica, he abandoned the Lord's service (2 Tim. 4: 10). From this we can see that as far as the goal of the spiritual life goes, we must always choose the better of two goods.

Moreover, we cannot put another person, no matter how holy, in Christ's place as our goal. Otherwise we will be influenced by that person's inherent weaknesses too. Because the believers in the Corinthian church practiced a personality cult, they caused the holy of Christ to be divided, and so forfeited the witness they should have given (cf. 1 Cor. 3: 4). After a life fraught with difficulties, King David, speaking from his own experience said: "Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows" (Ps. 16: 4). At the same time we cannot raise ourselves up to be a goal for others. When our ministry has attained some success, perhaps some people will bring oxen and garlands and offer them to us (Acts 14: 11-15). In such circumstances we must prepare ourselves, so that we who have basked in God's glory may not fall into Satan's net. Then we must direct those people's vision towards the real goal - Jesus Christ.

## 2. Forget what lies behind (Phil. 3: 13)

A race is not like a stroll in the courtyard where we can leisurely gaze at the surroundings. If this were the case, our bodies would soon become unbalanced and we would fall down. Likewise, in the race of the spiritual life we cannot "put our hands to the plow and look back" (Lk. 9: 62).

We participants in today's race of the spirit should:

a. Forget our past faults. This is not the same as covering over our past faults. It means rather that we should believe in God's grace to forgive sin. We do not deny that before the holy face of God we are stained and unworthy persons. However we also firmly believe that, through the precious blood of Christ, God has already forgiven our sins, and considers us holy citizens of his kingdom. If we become anxious and worried in our belief about this, then the devil will enter our consciences and make great accusations. He will cause us to feel hopeless and to lose our strength for "running the race." We must be on our guard against the wiles of Satan.

b. Forget the success of the past. Summing up experience and announcing achievements is the mark of the successful person. But to rest complacently on past accomplishments is usually the beginning of failure, because the person who claims credit for himself does not think that he needs anything else. He always feels that he is "a head above the rest of humankind." He stands "on the street corner" and shouts: "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing." Little does he realize that in God's eyes he is "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked" (cf. Rev. 3: 17). Even the self-assured Peter, as he matured in his spiritual journey, expressed with deep feeling: "... Clothe yourselves with humility ... for God opposes the proud, but gives grace

to the humble" (I Pet. 5: 5). And the erudite and highly spiritual Paul overcame an inclination to boast, saying: "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness," and "I do not consider that I have made it on my own ..." (2 Cor. 11: 30; Phil. 3: 13). No wonder that as he neared death he was able to sing that universally acclaimed song of triumph. Let us ask the Lord to help us to always pay attention to his words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5: 3).

## **Gaining the Victor's Crown**

### 1. Follow the rules (2 Tim. 2: 5)

The spiritual race is like other contests: "an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." For the athlete, the rules are a kind of binding force. A person cannot act rashly or on his own, or else he will be disqualified from receiving the prize. It is the same for one who runs the race of the spirit. He must accept the binding force of truth. Thoughts, desires, words and actions from the past which run counter to God must be replaced with the rules of truth. Frequently in our ministry we cannot see results. The reason for this is that we do not minister according to the Lord's rules. Rather we rely on our own wisdom to carry out God's work. The Lord never remembers service performed outside his will. He told those who invoked the Lord's name to cast out devils, cure diseases and perform miracles: "I never knew you, depart from me, you evildoers" (Mi. 7: 22-23). Therefore we must work to make our ministry have everlasting value, and that it will be a ministry remembered by the Lord. The key lies in whether we are willing to have our own thoughts and desires "nailed to the cross," and allow Christ's will to have absolute priority in our hearts. The reason that Paul firmly believed that God reserved a crown of justice for him was that he clearly knew that he "never disobeyed that sign from heaven." If we run completely according to the rules of truth revealed in the Bible, then Paul's song of triumph will also become ours.

### 2. Complete the course (2 Tim. 4: 7-8)

The final sprint in the race is the key time for deciding which athlete will obtain the prize. Likewise, the final sprint in the spiritual race is the key time for determining whether the Christian obtains the crown of life.

To judge whether a person is good or bad, to determine whether an activity was a success or a failure, we cannot only regard their "starting points." We must also consider their "end points." Likewise, to weigh a Christian's love of the Lord, we should look at the concluding stages of his or her life. Orphan's following and Demas' ministry make this evident to us (cf. Ruth I ; 2 Tim. 4: 10).

"The end of something is better than its beginning" (ECU. 7: 8). Whether we have a share in God's glory does not depend on how devoted is our offering of today, but depends on whether we can carry this fervor right up to the final moment of our lives. An important prerequisite for the apostle Paul to obtain the crown of glory was: "I have

fought the good fight which I was supposed to fight, and I have finished the race I was supposed to finish" (2 Tim. 4: 7 new translation). Therefore, we must always examine ourselves, to find out whether we have abandoned the fervent love of the Lord which we had in the beginning (cf. Rev. 2: 4-5). "For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end."

Dear brothers and sisters, this "race" of life is long and rugged. We must put a lifetime's effort into it, and redeem it with our blood, sweat and tears. At the same time, it is a race which is full of grace and glory. At the end of the road is our happiness and reward. We have only to lay aside our heavy burdens, peel off the sins which easily cling to us, hold to Christ's path, repudiate the thoughts of the flesh, maintain patience and march forward courageously, and that crown of life will definitely be ours.

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians* (a Nanjing Theological Review Publication, 1988), p. 257.

Translated by Peter Barry, M.M.

## 18. The Light of the World - Liu Chendong

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Text: Jn. 8: 12; Mt. 5: 14-16

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (Jn. 8: 12). He also said, "You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5: 14-16). Below I will explain these two Biblical texts so that Christian brothers and sisters can encourage each other in Christ to be illuminated by the true light and to see this light from within the light.

### **The Lord is the Light of the World**

In the beginning, God created Heaven and Earth (Gen. 1: 1). This was an empty, chaotic and dark world. God said, "Let there be light", and there was light (Gen. 1: 4). This was God's way of creating. What he said came to be, and what he commanded became real (Ps. 33: 9). Confronted by an airless and depressing world, the first word of God's creation was, "Let there be light!" This was God's proclamation, his condemnation of darkness and his act of creation. And he saw the light was good.

This light came and chased away the darkness. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He is the true light. In him, people can escape the control of evil and the life of darkness.

If there were no Jesus, how would people know what road to follow through life? How could they know the duties and the final resting place of life? When the Lord Jesus came into the world, he was like a great light shining in the darkness. The people walking in darkness saw this great light: "those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined" (Is. 9: 2). From this unprecedented event emerged all that is clear to us today. For in the coming of Jesus, humanity has seen God, and his great power, righteousness and love. "We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (Jn. I: 14). In Jesus' life of more than thirty years in this world, God completely revealed himself. Jesus revealed the power of God in his miracles, and his teaching and exemplary life displayed God's righteousness and holiness. He helped people out of pity, comforting and healing them, and finally he demonstrated God's great love by redeeming them through his death on the cross.

During his time on earth, Jesus never ceased condemning the sins of people. Not only immoral behavior, but also unrighteous speech and impure thoughts are evil in God's eyes. Jesus followed a life of holiness and purity so that he could show people what their lives should be like and lead them to see the inferiority and shame of their



unrighteousness. He practiced what he preached, and his actions and glorious resurrection showed others the path they should follow, as well as the duties, purpose and hope of human life. He came into the world to disclose what humanity needed to see, but had never seen before. He was a light to all people. Humanity should have welcomed this light and loved it, but when the light shone in the darkness, the darkness did not accept it (Jn. I: 5). The light is holy and pure, and joy is found in its midst. When the light came into the world, humanity did not accept it, but continued to love the darkness because of their evil behavior. But even though they hated the light, Jesus did not abandon his mission or his responsibility. The Lord Jesus said as long as he was in the world, he was the light of the world (Jn. 9: 5). When he was in the world, his light shone at all times and in every place. His light illuminated the darkness and dispersed it. He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God. When he comes again there will be no darkness, for the glory of God will be the light of the city and the Lamb will be its lamp (Rev. 21: 23). His light will shine everywhere and everyone will see its glory.

## **You Are the Light of the World**

Jesus Christ also said, "You are the light of the world." He said that he is the light of the world, but he also told us that we are that light as well. Even though we are impure and unrighteous sinners, we have received his redemption and have been miraculously transformed. We could not have imagined that he valued and favored us so much, and that he considered us as worthy as himself. The Lord has placed the mission he was entrusted with on our shoulders; he has transferred his work in the world to our hands; he has called us to become the light of the world, just as he was the light of the world himself. We have been greatly honored.

Since we have become the light like our Lord, we must continue to shine in the darkness through our words and actions. In this way, we can reveal the power, goodness, holiness and love of God. If we are like our Lord, the people of the world will see us and know the correct path for their lives, their duties and their final home.

For this reason, our actions should correspond to our calling as the light. If they do, then we are in communion with God, and can receive his illumination and grow in the Spirit. "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another; (1 Jn. 1:5-7). All who seek the truth must conform with this principle; that is, only a life lived in the true light can shine with the light.

Today, God is creating many new lights in this land. However, some people in the light have been spewed from his mouth. They speak well, but before long their own darkness completely covers the little goodness they talk about. Their words and actions are opposed to each other. Generosity, knowledge, scholarly learning and technical ability all have their value and usefulness, but if we only value these qualities and neglect holiness, we cannot receive God's joy or glorify him. Our Lord has told us we are the

light of the world. God's glory does not come from knowledge, nor does it depend on technique. It is found only in a shining life.

The world needs light. The world needs light because it was originally emptiness, void and chaos. All times and places are threatened by disorder and emptiness, and therefore need God's creation and renewal. They need the light. Even religion needs this light.

Our Lord wants us to be the light of the world. To be alight among humanity means not escaping from the world. This is the meaning of the incarnation. The Word became flesh and lived among us. Because of this, humanity can see God's truth and grace. More and more people are unselfishly bringing Christ to others, and making real the life of his blood and flesh in the midst of humanity. God became man, and destroyed the wall separating him from humanity. We do not want to erect a wall among humans; we want to pull down such walls and make them into bridges to spread the word of Christ to everyone. To be a witness for God is to be a light for our Lord. And in the future, we will shine like the sun for the Father in his kingdom. "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Dan. 12: 3).

*The Mountains of Spices: sermons by seminarians (a Nanjing Theological Review publication, 1988), p. 129.*

Translated by Craig Moran.