

Standing on the Shoulder of Giants — Prospecting Sino-Christian Theology

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Sino-Christian Theology was first proposed by Prof. Liu Xiaofeng in Tao Fong Shan (Hong Kong) in 1993, and has attracted a group of Chinese scholars, both local and foreign, who have been participating in it and debating about it incessantly. One of the most dramatic debates is the controversy, lasting for over ten months, was in the Christian Times (HK) during 1995 and 1996. It was concerned about the issues from the "Chinese Apollo" to "Cultural Christians" Who could have imagined that several thoughts of Prof. Lo Ping-cheung (HKBU) after an academic conference would exert so great a "butterfly effect"? Ten years have passed, there are still unceasing discussions about "Sino-Christian Theology" and "Cultural Christians". One need not wonder why Prof. Lai Pan-chiu (CUHK), a prominent participant of this theological movement, mentioned clearly and precisely that this continual controversy is the explication of the life force of this theology.

As one of the advocates of "Sino-Christian Theology", I regard that what is essential in this controversy lasting over ten years is that there is an essential difference between the departure and advocates of Sino-Christian Studies and all other existing theological systems (whether Western theologies or Asian theologies).

Departure:

Among Chinese church theologians, whether in China or in the West, it has widely been accepted that theology should be from the Church, for the Church, and facing the society. But Sino-Christian theology is from the Chinese academia, for the Chinese academia, facing the Church and the society.

Advocates:

Since the advocates of Sino-Christian theology are from the Chinese

academia, their concerns and themes would naturally be vastly different from those of Western theologians and Chinese church theologians.

Since 1993, the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies has been cooperating with a group of Chinese scholars in exploring together and promoting this particular theological movement. We have tried our best to provide the best, sustainable living space for Sino-Christian theology. What is primary is to let Chinese scholars in Christian studies formulate their own themes suitable for the Chinese academic context consciously and autonomously (church theologians, whether in the West or in the East, would always dominate every "new" theological movements under the call of "Orthodoxy"). What is equally important is to let Chinese scholars in Christian studies establish an academic companionship with church theologians, both local and foreign, in trust and respect, so that both parties would listen to, and learn from, each other under the spirit of equality and friendship.

From 19-23 September, 2005, a group of Sino-Christian scholars, who had been working hard without focusing on how great their results would be, gathered together near Fuxian Lake in Yunnan, China. They looked to the past and future of Sino-Christian theology in retrospect and prospect. After many days of enthusiastic discussions, the outlook of Sino-Christian theology is getting clearer:

1. Humanistic Character:

Sino-Christian theology begins in the Chinese academia, and the existential mode of Sino-Christian theology is based on the Chinese academia. Chinese scholars would make their contributions to discussion in Christian thoughts and theologies with a humanistic spirit and from a multidisciplinary aspect, and would make Sino-Christian theology as a constituent of the Chinese academic tradition, being alongside with and being in fair competition with the traditional cultures (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) and contemporary cultures (Marxism and contemporary thought).

2. Trans-denominational and Trans-confessional Character:

Sino-Christian theology does not belong to a particular denomination or confession. Its standing point is the thoughts and theological resources of Christianity through all generations, including Judeo-Christianity, Catholicism, the Orthodoxy and Protestantism.

3. Trans-cultural Character:

Sino-Christian theology obviously comprises of Chinese thoughts and

Christian thoughts. The confluence and integration of religion and culture between China and the West constitute the vitality of Sino-Christian theology, in which bi-directional translation, interpretation, assimilation and creation is ever lasting.

Entering into the second decade, Sino-Christian studies promoted by ISCS would enter into a new phase. Its scope of activity would expand from humanistic realms of literature, history and philosophy to biblical studies and empirical studies. Moreover, in correspondence with the rapid development of Chinese society, and the ever closer relationship between religion and society, the pragmatic issues of Sino-Christian theologies would become more manifest: a more pluralistic, open and pragmatic Sino-Christian theology is emerging.

I pray to the Lord that the one, who stands on the shoulder of giants, would possess a vision of prudence and discernment, the courage to be a follower of past traditions and a trail blazer for future generations, and the ability to explore new dimensions.

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