

## **Daniel H. N. YEUNG**

### **The Initiators and Promoter of Sino-Christian Theology**

In the 1980s there was a wave of introducing western thoughts in Mainland China. The significance of this is regarded by some scholars as another Enlightenment since the May 4th movement. In this movement there was a small group of Chinese scholars who thought that the subtle interaction between Christian thought and we stern culture and academic should be noticed. On the other hand the religious heat generated in the mass in the same period also attracted the attention of some scholars. Therefore publication of works which introduced different religions increased so as to meet the need of the people, leading them to some knowledge of the basic thoughts of different religions and cultures from a positive and comprehensive perspective. Among these books, the "Series of Religious Culture" produced by the Institute of World Religions at China Academy of Social Sciences was a pioneer.

After talking with LIU Xiaofeng, a significant figure in the above-mentioned movement, I kept on thinking of a fundamental issue: the interaction between intellectuals outside the church and church theologians. And the following points are still very much in my mind some ten years later:

1. From the perspective of western theological development, how did the intellectuals outside the church and laymen inside the church make impacts on the theological tradition, even its turning points?
2. Is there a possibility of cooperation and interaction between church theology and theology in the humanities?
3. Traditionally most Chinese intellectuals are not pro-Christianity. But in the 1980s Chinese scholars started studying Christian culture and thought without the encouragement of missionaries. How should we who live outside Mainland China respond to them?

4. It has been a long history of more than 1300 years since Jin Jiao (Nestorianism) came to China. What are the common and different perspectives of scholars who study Christianity of this long period?
5. After Chinese scholars have participated in the translation of Christian classics, will they become interpreters and researchers of these classics, resulting in the enrichment of their own academic disciplines?
6. When the Chinese culture encounters the intellectual resources of Christianity, how will it adopt and transform this foreign tradition, so that it may be enriched by it?

The separate but complementary expressions which constitute a great vision

In order to push this wave of thought forward, I cooperated with LIU Xiaofeng in 1993 at Tao Fong Shan, and started a series of process. After two years of attempt this academic construction has proven to be effective and long-lasting. Thus the Institute of Sino- Christian Studies (ISCS) was established on "the same hill in 1995 in order to make long-term strategies with focuses. To make our vision clearer we called this new academic wave "Sino-Christian theological movement". Needless to say, this academic movement is committed to the construction of "Sino-Christian theology".

The starting point of this work was the invitation of two key persons, Prof. LIU Xiaofeng and Prof. HE Guanghu, to interpret this new academic movement from different perspectives and to construct some elementary theories. From the view of division of labour, Mainland China scholars are the initiators of this movement while ISCS is the promoter. The two are separate and yet connected. Separate means that scholars in different geographical areas defined the content, extent and aims of "Sino-Christian theology" from different perspectives at the beginning. For example, Mainland China scholars study Christianity for the sake of broadening their perspective and enriching their academic resources; ISCS as the promoter expects more church theologians to join in the dialogue so as to advance this movement. Connected means that both sides make efforts according to the same aim, i.e. to advance "Sino-Christian theological movement", in the hope that Christian studies would become a constituent of the Chinese academia. After years of efforts, "Sino-Christian theological movement" today does not only include the original few core members, but has grown

to become a visible and sizable academic group. Moreover, a new generation has also emerged and manifest the vital life and continuity of this new academic wave. This is remarkable and it provides some good grounds for great expectation.

*Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, News January 2008*

*Mit freundlicher Erlaubnis des Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, Hongkong*

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