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COLONIZING HEART AND MIND:

THE SOCIOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE GROWTH OF CHINA'S
UNDERGROUND CHURCH

By:
Joanne Tien

Thesis submitted to the Department of Religious Studies
Pomona College
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

24 April 2009
Professor Zayn Kassam
Professor Jerry Irish
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INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

When thinking about East Asian religions, Christianity rarely comes to mind. This may be because China's traditional cosmology included neither the biblical creation nor a supernatural being. In truth, Christianity was introduced to China as early as 635 AD, with the proselytizing of Alopen, a missionary of the Nestorian Christians of Persia. However, Nestorian Christianity never managed to win a foothold in the country. It was primarily the faith of a foreign community, and depended chiefly upon foreign leadership and support. This dependency on foreigners would continue to plague Chinese Christianity for several centuries.

With the internal disorder that accompanied the collapse of the Tang Dynasty, Christian missionaries found a new opportunity to carry their religion into China. From 1294 through the latter part of the fourteenth century, Franciscan missionaries journeyed through China trying to win new converts. However, as with the Nestorians, they were successful mostly in converting non-Chinese people living on the fringes of the empire. The church in Europe, suffering from the ravages of the Black Plague, could not support a full-fledged missionary campaign abroad. Moreover, in China, the Franciscans became identified with the Mongol invaders; thus, with the fall of the Mongol empire, Franciscan influence also came to an end.

With the ascension of the Mings, all Christian influence disappeared from the Chinese empire. Another two hundred years would pass before another attempt would be made to Christianize the country. During those centuries, China became increasingly isolationist and distanced itself from Europe. Europe, on the other hand, was entering its “Age of Discovery,” and Jesuits were spearheading new missionary advances, determined to “open China.” With the spread of Roman Catholicism in China, Christians numbered approximately 300,000. Before long, however, Jesuit missionaries proved themselves to be a foreign threat. K’ang Hsi, the emperor of China at the time, was offended by the foreigners’ insensitivity to Chinese culture, and their desire to control Chinese subjects from the Vatican in Rome. Christianity was increasingly viewed as a hostile and alien force, and Christian missionaries were soon banished from China.

Christianity had very little lasting impact on Chinese society until the 1800s. In 1807, Robert Morrison became the first Protestant missionary to enter China under the auspices of the London Missionary Society. As in the past, missionaries to China were met with mixed feelings from the Chinese population. Chinese intellectuals found it difficult to accept Christianity because of the inconsistency between the imperialistic attitudes displayed by Western countries and what the Bible taught against this type of oppression. Often, missionaries also had ties to the ubiquitous opium trade. In fact, the Treaty of Nanjing, which ended the First Opium War, was heavily biased in favor of the British and greatly benefited foreign missionaries. Five treaty ports—Guangzhou (Canton), Xiamen (Amoy), Fuzhou (Foochow), Ningbo (Ningpo), and Shanghai—were opened to British residence and trade. British subjects were granted extraterritoriality when residing in these treaty ports, meaning

that they were accountable to British, not Chinese, law and trial. Similar concessions were granted to the United States and France though they were not involved in the conflict. Thus, missionaries who were citizens of these foreign powers gained two important privileges: 1) The right of residence in the treaty ports, and 2) Legal protection under their own country's laws. With the Treaty of Tianjin, foreigners were even given the privilege of traveling through the empire, which further facilitated Christian proselytization. Moreover, religious toleration clauses were included in the treaties: "Any persons, whether citizen of the United States or Chinese convert, who...peaceably teach and practice the principles of Christianity, shall in no case be interfered with or molested."¹ These clauses forced the recognition of Christianity upon an unwilling population and implicated missionaries in the treaty system. As a result of these unequal treaties, Christianity spread rapidly in China. By 1899 there were 1,296 missionaries in the country.² These missionaries evangelized effectively by offering various social services like medicine and education. However, the Chinese who converted to Christianity were seen as denationalized and "the addition of a Christian to the church [was seen as] the loss of a citizen to China."³

It wasn't until the 1940s that the Chinese grew more responsive to Christianity and indigenous church groups began to form. Foreign missionaries supported the indigenization of the church for "the church could not remain an American or a British transplant and live."⁴ Henry Venn, General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, became the first person to emphasize self-governance, self-support (financial independence from foreigners), and self-

¹ G. Thompson Brown, Christianity in the People's Republic of China. (Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986) 26.

² Ibid. 31.

³ Michael Suman, The Church in China: One Lord, Two Systems. (India: SAIACS Press, 2006) 134.

⁴ Brown 40.

propagation (indigenous missionary work) for the Chinese church. The motto was later adopted by (and even became the name for) China's state church, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). This transfer of authority to Chinese leadership was difficult. The same planners who were committed to the ideal of a self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating Chinese church had also set up other institutional structures which continued to depend on foreign grants, experience, and administration.⁵ Nonetheless, progress was made on some fronts. Baptized Protestant communicants reached 567,000 in 1936, double the number from the previous 22 years. The number of ordained Chinese pastors grew from 764 in 1915 to 2,196 in 1936, a three hundred percent increase within 21 years.⁶ By 1949, there were more than 700 local churches, with a total of more than 70,000 members.

Before long, however, the Communist Chinese government became wary of the growth of the church and began intervening to keep it under control. Technically, religious freedom was guaranteed in Article 88 of the 1954 Constitution: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief."⁷ This guarantee was consistent with Marxist dogma, which taught that religion was the result of people's inability to explain or cope with the dreaded forces of nature. Religion is thus a useful tool for controlling the lower classes. By focusing on the world of the spirit, exploiters can take the minds of the exploited off their current conditions of misery. With the overthrow of the upper classes by the proletariat and the establishment of a classless society, religion should disappear. This demise could take many years. Thus, during the period leading to the perfect Communist state, force should not be used to eliminate religion. Says Marx: "the idols were set up by the peasants, and in time they

⁵ Ibid. 41.

⁶ Ibid. 41.

⁷ Ibid. 76.

will pull down the idols with their own hands; there is no need for anybody else to throw away prematurely the idols for them. The agitational line of the Communist Party should be: 'Draw the bow full without letting go the arrow, and be on the alert.'"⁸ This implies that the Communist Party should always be wary of religion but should not interfere in the worship of idols.

In practice, however, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) stance on religion was quite different. According to the CCP, religious freedom is narrowly defined. It is something that should be permitted within a mosque, temple, or church, but this freedom should not extend to religious ceremonies in public places. Moreover, the CCP distinguished between superstition and religion. From the perspective of the CCP, superstitious practices are harmful to people and should not be tolerated. Thus, the state is obligated to protect innocent and gullible people from exploitation. In addition, the CCP was particularly intolerant of Christianity because of its historical links with the Western powers that had oppressed China. Christians were singled out and deprived of their rights as citizens, not because of their religious faith, but because of their "rightest sympathies" or their relationship with foreign missionaries. During the 1950s, Chinese churches had relationships with more than one hundred foreign mission boards, societies, orders, and international councils.⁹ Chinese Christian leaders thus had two options for ensuring the survival of the church. They could either go underground or work out some accommodation with the new rulers of China. Except for some indigenous sects and independent churches, most Protestant leaders chose the

⁸ Ibid. 76.

⁹ Ibid. 77-78.

second option. Thus began the relationship between the Communist government and the Chinese church.

In 1950, the Communist government forged a connection with Y.T. Wu, a “patriotic Christian citizen” who deplored the close connection between the Christian Church in China and Western capitalism. After a meeting with Premier Zhou Enlai, Wu drafted the “Christian Manifesto,” which called on Chinese Christians to heighten their “vigilance against imperialism, to make known the clear political stand of Christians in New China, to hasten the building of a Chinese church whose affairs are managed by the Chinese themselves.”¹⁰ In addition, Wu encouraged Christians to support the “Common Political Platform,” which means that they should “oppose imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism.”¹¹ In particular, he argued that the church should distance itself from America because of “its plot to use religion in fostering the growth of reactionary forces.”¹² Wu condemned churches and organizations that relied on foreign personnel and financial aid and persuaded them to discontinue these relationships to work towards self-reliance. In April 1951, the Religious Affairs Bureau ordered all Christian institutions to “thoroughly, permanently and completely sever all relations with American missions and all other missions, thus realizing self-government, self-support and self-propagation in the Chinese church.”¹³ Before long, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was established with Wu as its chairman. In order to truly purge the church of imperialistic influences, the government initiated training classes for preachers and other Christian leaders. These classes studied patriotism, the difference between

¹⁰ Ibid. 83.

¹¹ Ibid. 83-84.

¹² Ibid. 84.

¹³ Ibid. 84.

old and New China, the nature of imperialism, and the meaning of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. During the climax of the course, students were required to write an autobiographical essay about how they were affected by imperialism. Students were also obliged to pledge their complete support for the New China.

The Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976 further worsened the situation for Chinese Christians as all of China's historical reserves, artifacts, and sites of interests were attacked. Religious life in China was completely banned, even under the Three-Self Church. Many religious buildings such as temples, churches, mosques, monasteries, and cemeteries were closed down and sometimes looted and destroyed. Bibles, religious tracts, and other books were carried out into the streets and publicly burned in huge bonfires. Posters were plastered on the walls of churches and religious buildings that said: "There is no God; there is no Spirit; there is no Jesus...How can adults believe in these things?...Like Islam and Catholicism, Protestantism is a reactionary feudal ideology, the opium of the people...We are atheists; we believe only in Mao Tse-tung."¹⁴ Cemeteries were desecrated and crosses removed from tombstones. The homes of Christians were invaded and searched for incriminating evidence. Pastors were sent to work camps in the countryside for reeducation. Suicides and mental breakdowns became commonplace.

Chinese house churches grew quickly during this time as a result of Christian worship being driven underground. With no other place to practice their faith, Christian families and friends began to meet in homes to read the Bible, pray, and share experiences. Often, groups met at irregular times and in different homes. Occasionally, a lay pastor from a neighboring village would visit a group and there would be a special service that involved Bible teaching and

¹⁴ Ibid. 125.

hymn singing. Realizing that it was unable to prevent Christians from attending these “unregistered meetings,” the Chinese government permitted the reopening of Three-Self churches in 1979 so that it could at least monitor the growth of the Chinese church. However, even today, with the existence of this legalized church in China, only 10 million out of approximately 90 million of China’s Protestant Christians attend TSPM churches.¹⁵ The vast majority of China’s Christians continue to attend the underground house churches that came into being during the Cultural Revolution.

SUBJECT OF THE THESIS

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the reasons why the underground church continues to grow much faster than the state-sponsored Three-Self Church, and to understand the implications of this growth. This question is important for two main reasons. First, the growth of the house church is paradoxical given that house churches are considered illegal unregistered meetings in China. Though the Chinese constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief, this freedom can only be exercised under the domain of the Three-Self Church for Chinese Christians. Thus, Christians who choose to worship outside the Three-Self Church do so at risk of persecution. According to the Jubilee Campaign, about 300 Christians in China are held in detention at any given time.¹⁶ Often, such persecution can even be said to constitute torture. According to the testimony of one prominent Christian leader, “They hung me up across an iron gate, then they yanked open the gate and my whole body lifted until my chest nearly split in two. I hung like that for four hours.”¹⁷ Other punishments include fines,

¹⁵ President Wong, Personal Interview, 19 July 2008.

¹⁶ Kate McGeown, “China’s Christians Suffer for their Faith,” BBC News 09 November 2004, 15 February 2008 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3993857.stm>>.

¹⁷ McGeown.

imprisonment, and in extreme cases, even death. Thus, the continuing growth of the underground church is interesting precisely because it is counterintuitive.

The second important reason for studying the growth of the underground church is because of its political implications. By attending the underground church, Chinese Christians actively defy the Chinese government by refusing to attend the state-sponsored Three-Self Church. This insubordination is felt especially strongly since the Three-Self Church claims to advocate Chinese nationalism and freedom from foreign and colonial influences. Thus, house churches appear particularly subversive because of the strong ties they have to foreign, especially American churches. House churches rely heavily on American churches for patronage, theological training, and financial support; since house churches meet illegally, these churches are their sole sources of Biblical education. Though house churches generally claim to be very patriotic and compliant with the Communist government, their ties to American churches have political ramifications. This is especially true since most house churches ally with Fundamentalist Evangelical churches in the United States. In general, Chinese house churches believe that the 66 books of the Bible are divinely inspired, the Bible is complete truth and without error, and that signs and miracles continue to occur even after the apostolic period. They are also opposed to the interpretation of Scripture by one's own will and assert that belief in the death and resurrection of Christ is the only path to eternal salvation.¹⁸ This belief drives their unwavering focus on evangelism. Such evangelism has neocolonialistic implications as it also leads the underground church to perpetuate the global spread of American Fundamentalism. In some ways then, the underground church

¹⁸ Back to Jerusalem Movement, 2006, Back to Jerusalem Movement, 01 October 2008 <www.backtojerusalem.com>.

unintentionally supports American cultural and ideological hegemony and the “Westernization” of the Chinese population. For example, there is already evidence that upon encountering Zionist Christian missionaries from the United States, Chinese Christians have become more pro-Israel in political ideology. What other implications are there for the existence of such a close tie between house churches and American Fundamentalist churches? This question is especially important to answer since Chinese house churches are growing quickly and are determined to bring Christianity “back” to the Middle East.

METHODOLOGY

To understand why house churches are growing faster than the state-sponsored Three-Self Church, I conducted ethnographic research during the summer of 2008, living with Chinese Christians in the underground church for two months. I gained a better understanding of the house church by attending church services, Bible Studies, fellowships, gospel outreach events, baptisms, and leadership meetings. I also conducted fifty-two hour-long interviews with Chinese Christians in four different provinces—Beijing, Gansu, Anhui, and Zhejiang—to account for differences between house church Christians living in different regions of the country and of different socioeconomic backgrounds. While Beijing and Zhejiang provinces tend to be very wealthy, Anhui and Gansu provinces are much less so. Circumstantially, the majority of my interviewees were church leaders, though I did speak to people of varying age groups (ranging from about 16 to 80 years old), and about an even number of men and women. During these interviews, I asked nine key questions: 1) How did you become a Christian? 2) How do you feel about the Three-Self Church? 3) Have you ever been persecuted? If so, how? 4) Is it hard to evangelize where you live? 5) How do you feel

about Westernization? With regard to the church? 6) How do you feel about the Chinese government? 7) Would you like the government to change? If so, how? 8) Do you see Christianity as a Chinese religion? 9) What is the relationship between your church and your community? From these interviews, and from visiting eleven different house churches in various parts of China, I was able to evaluate the relationship between the underground church, the Three-Self Church, and the Chinese government. It was from these interviews that I gathered evidence about the Evangelical/Fundamentalist/charismatic nature of the underground church, as well as its heavy reliance on the patronage of American churches. I then integrate my personal research with that of other authors to demonstrate the political implications of the underground church's growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are few academic scholars who have studied the situation of the underground church in China, especially in recent years. In his 930-page work *A History of Christian Missions in China*, Kenneth Scott Latourette provides an extraordinarily detailed history of missionary work in China up to the European Age of Exploration. Latourette also assesses the resistance faced by missionaries, their methods of evangelism, and the results of their work. Likewise, in his book *The Bible and the Gun: Christianity in South China, 1860-1900*, Joseph Tse-Hei Lee evaluates the impact of Christianity in late-19th century China. His work "offer[s] an interpretative framework for explaining the gradual integration of Christianity into Chinese rural society."¹⁹ In highlighting the ways by which Chinese communities were affected by conversion, as well as the indigenization of Christianity in China, Lee traces the growth of the

¹⁹ Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, *The Bible and the Gun: Christianity in South China, 1860-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2003) xv.

Protestant church through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Together, these books are useful for understanding the initial impact of Christianity on China. However, these authors discuss Christianity in China as though it is a past phenomenon, neglecting to address its continual growth, and the ongoing missionary work that perpetuates this growth.

Mary M.C. Cheng is more conscious about the growth of Christianity in China in the present day. In her work “House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China,” Cheng identifies some of the major reasons for the success of the underground church in recent years. Using ethnographic research methods, Cheng argues that one of the main reasons the house church has grown so quickly has been because of its formal organization structure as a social movement. Many house churches have “national networks and strategies for expansion across all provinces in China.”²⁰ In addition to having strong organizational structures that facilitate missionary work, Cheng argues that eight other factors contribute to the underground church’s survival and growth: 1) refusal to be co-opted by new government policies (due to their ideology of submission to Biblical doctrine), 2) having charismatic leaders who demonstrate high moral integrity, 3) political sensitivity and refusal to become involved in political affairs or criticism of the state, 4) flexibility regarding organizational strategies (dividing the church into smaller groups during periods of interference by government authorities), 5) extensive communication and resource networks, 6) the support of American Evangelical Christians, including public figures such as Billy Graham, 7) financial, spiritual, and technical support from American churches, 8) media exposure that makes the persecution of the underground church a human rights issue, and 9) dissociation with local or overseas

²⁰ May Cheng, “House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China,” China: An International Journal 1.1 (2003) 31.

political forces (but not non-political forces like churches). These findings correlate strongly with my own research, and account for many of the reasons why house churches are growing so quickly.

Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan provide some sociological explanations for the recent spread of Christianity in their book *Protestantism in Contemporary China*. They argue that the historical context of the 1980s was very conducive to Christianity's growth. During this time, most families had more cash, more freedom to participate in religious activities, as well as more anxieties to assuage—these factors combined contributed to the growth of Protestant Christianity throughout the decade.²¹ Hunter and Chan also identify the Cultural Revolution and its attempt to eliminate religion, as a major instigator for the growth of house churches. The Cultural Revolution forced believers who were determined to continue practicing their faith to do so in secret meetings, which is how the underground church first began. Numerous testimonies indicate that this was a period of great growth for the church and that underground networks flourished despite persecution. The social upheaval of the Cultural Revolution also caused many more people to turn to Protestantism as an alternative ideology and organizational structure, as their confidence in the state was shaken. For example, disaffection with the Chinese Communist Party was widespread among intellectuals after the Cultural Revolution, and a number of them began to develop an interest in Christian thought and traditions. On a more basic level, Hunter and Chan also attribute the growth of house churches to the insufficient number of official churches available in each locality, as well as the fact that many believers, especially elderly ones, prefer attending services daily, rather than just

²¹ Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 6.

the one or two times a week offered by most Three-Self churches. Home meetings also provide more spiritual and emotional support, and are better environments for healing, miracles, and charismatic forms of worship.

Jason Kindopp's article "Fragmented yet Defiant: Protestant Resilience under Chinese Communist Party Rule" further articulates reasons for the resilience and growth of the house church. His article frames the development of the Three-Self Church and its attempts to consolidate control over all Protestant institutions as part of the Communist party's demands for total control over all social organizations. In describing the house church's response to these actions, Kindopp writes,

continuing official restrictions and demands for control, including government manipulation of church elites, organizational control, lack of transparency, forced theological adaptations, limits on the number of churches, and constraints on a wide range of activities—from itinerant evangelism to charismatic worship practices to Sunday school for minors—all have reinforced the house churches' principled resistance to the party-state's system of religious control.²²

Kindopp concludes that official oppression has resulted in a strong sense of belonging as well as a high level of commitment to the house church, which has reinforced its determination to evangelize. For example, it has driven many adherents to contribute to the church financially, and to leave their homes and families to become itinerant missionaries in remote areas. Moreover, the Chinese state's strategy of persecution and repression has produced a theology of martyrdom among the house churches, which contributes to their resilience in the face of persecution. China's Christians strongly identify with a savior who suffered onto death; thus, they see their own persecution as a form of spiritual discipline. Many house churches have

²² Jason Kindopp, "Fragmented yet Defiant: Protestant Resilience under Chinese Communist Party Rule," God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions, eds. Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004) 133.

even turned individual persecution into a valuable form of personal capital—leadership candidates are ranked by the number of times they’ve been arrested. By turning persecution into an asset, the house church neutralizes the ability of the government to intimidate.²³ Thus, Kindopp’s analysis of the repression of house churches, and the house churches’ subsequent reactions, sheds light on the continued resilience and growth of the underground church.

Though many authors have explained why Protestantism is growing quickly in general (sociopolitical, historical circumstances), and why the house church is growing so quickly (organizational structure, evangelism, and other growth strategies), they have not as clearly articulated why the house church is growing much faster than the Three-Self Church. Some authors have indicated, however, that one key reason Chinese Christians choose house churches over Three-Self churches is because of the theological differences between the two. Li Xinyuan’s *Theological Construction or Deconstruction? An Analysis of the Theology of Bishop K.H. Ting*, sheds light on these differences by critiquing Bishop Ting’s theology from the perspective of a house church Christian. The very purpose of the book is to alert readers to the potential dangers of Ting’s liberal theology for the Chinese Church. To do this, the author first provides a brief outline of Ting’s career, arguing that “from his youth, Ting appears to have chosen a theology of political liberation in preference to the evangelical gospel which stresses personal transformation through faith in Christ.”²⁴ Li then analyzes Ting’s view of God, Christology, and Theory of Man, criticizing each aspect of his theology in turn. Li concludes that Ting has never had a view of God that is in harmony with the biblical revelation. Li also criticizes Ting for blending Christian theology with Communist philosophy, and for believing that Marxism

²³ Ibid. 141.

²⁴ Xinyuan Li, *Theological Construction or Destruction?: an Analysis of the Theology of Bishop K.H. Ting* (Illinois: Christian Life Press Inc., 2004) 12.

and Christianity are 99 percent similar and could eventually become one.²⁵ On Christology, Li condemns Ting for his concept of “the Universal Christ” or the “Cosmic Christ,” because, according to Li, the concept of the “Cosmic Christ” leads to a denial of Christ’s resurrection. Li also finds Ting’s statement “Emmanuel did not have to take place in a male body”²⁶ to be contradictory to a literalist interpretation of the Bible. Finally, Li criticizes Ting’s Theory of Man for treating God and Christ as abstract universal principles, while treating Man as a real, practical, and concrete entity. From this treatment, Li concludes that Ting’s ultimate concern is with Man, not God. Li sees Ting’s humanistic theory of man as promoting a theory of self-salvation, and a denial of man’s sinful nature. Thus, *Theological Construction or Deconstruction? An Analysis of the Theology of Bishop K.H. Ting* clearly delineates Li’s objections, as a house church Christian, to Bishop Ting’s theology. Li’s criticisms mainly find Ting’s theology to be too liberal and to stray too far from a strict interpretation of the Bible. This analysis reaffirms the view that the strong difference in theology between the two churches is key to why house church Christians refuse to attend Three-Self churches.

Even fewer authors have addressed the political implications of the growth of China’s underground church. Professor, journalist, and foreign policy consultant David Aikman makes some predictions about political ramifications in his book *Jesus in Beijing*. Aikman claims that the growth of Christianity in China can profoundly affect “how the world responds to Islamic-origin terrorism in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001.”²⁷ He argues that the role of house churches is especially important because many of their Christians applauded President

²⁵ Ibid. 32.

²⁶ Ibid. 64.

²⁷ David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2003) 12.

George Bush's decision to declare war against terrorism, and saw the War on Terror as a biblical endeavor. Aikman also finds that most Chinese house church Christians are "deeply pro-American,"²⁸ premillennialist, and politically pro-Israel, in contrast to the Chinese government. Moreover, with the current rate of growth of the underground church, Aikman predicts that "it is almost certain that a Christian view of the world will be the dominant worldview within China's political and cultural establishment, and possibly also within senior military circles."²⁹ By "Christian view of the world," Aikman is referring to an Augustinian sense of international responsibility, or a "benevolent" global imperialism. Thus, according to Aikman, a Christianized China may be more inclined to suppress terrorism, prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and "ensure international law and order wherever it [has] the capability of doing so."³⁰ In short, Aikman believes a Christianized China would follow the footsteps of US imperial foreign policy, though he describes this foreign policy as one of "international responsibility."

Though Aikman makes bold claims about the political implications of the growth of the underground church in China, he does not thoroughly analyze the legitimacy of his claims. The vast majority of *Jesus in Beijing* is an account of the underground church and its leaders. Aikman does not provide a thorough analysis of why he believes China will become America's next greatest ally against political Islam (or why it's necessary to have not just one, but two, global policemen). My thesis will expand on Aikman's work by drawing the connections between the underground church in China and its American supporters. However, unlike Aikman, I do not see China's Christianization as a positive force that leads China to become

²⁸ Ibid. 12.

²⁹ Ibid. 285.

³⁰ Ibid. 287.

an American ally and a protector of international law and order. Rather, I argue that the Christianization of China is yet another manifestation of American hegemony. Moreover, the underground church further perpetuates this hegemony by spreading American Fundamentalism throughout China and into the Middle East. Thus, my thesis will expand on the work of previous authors by: 1) Exploring the reasons behind the growth of the underground church in recent years, 2) Explaining why the underground church is growing faster than the Three-Self Church, looking particularly at their respective theologies, and 3) Studying the political ramifications of the growth of China's underground church especially with regard to its neocolonialistic implications.

DEFINING TERMS

Throughout this thesis, I define the underground church as “Fundamentalist/Evangelical/charismatic.” These terms are rather loaded and have taken on pejorative connotations in recent years. However, for the purpose of analysis, these terms are useful for conveying a common human experience. The term “fundamentalism” was originally coined to describe a narrowly defined set of beliefs that developed into a movement within the American Protestant community during the early part of the 20th century. Since then, it has been applied to a variety of reactive and anti-modernist forces, most of which are religious. Many Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and other “fundamentalists” reject the term as it was derived from American Protestantism. Likewise, many Protestant fundamentalists reject the term for its new association with Muslims, Jews, or Hindus. Fundamentalism, like liberalism, conservatism, republicanism, and democracy, is never precisely definable. Nor are all fundamentalisms alike in their orientation to the world or to the otherworld. However, for the

purpose of this thesis, I will rely on the definition of the term as expressed by Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan Rose in their book *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*. They identify key attributes of what they call the “new fundamentalist Christianity.” This “new” Christianity is characterized by a personal, “born again” relationship between believer and Jesus, which should lead the believer to convert others as part of the global evangelical mission. Within this Christianity, God’s sacred words are sufficient for an understanding of the world and act as a guide for righteous living; God’s words are also considered completely inerrant. Fundamentalism also mandates strict standards for personal behavior, including an abstention from alcohol and the prohibition of sexual activity outside of marriage. Moreover, fundamentalists consider personal belief and piety to be necessary for salvation, while social reforms that redress human inequalities are considered peripheral or are altogether discouraged. This is justified on the grounds that “worldly affairs [are] so complex that only God can cope with them....we can change the world only when God has changed the hearts of everyone in it.”³¹ The final defining feature of fundamentalism is its tendency to look for miraculous, God-centered interpretations of history, usually through the lenses of Biblical millennialism and dispensationalism.³²

Evangelicals often separate themselves from Fundamentalists, seeing themselves as theologically more moderate. According to the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, “Evangelicalism” is a wide-reaching definitional canopy that covers a large number of Protestant groups. As with Fundamentalism, the term originally referred to a series of religious movements that spread through the Anglo-American world during the eighteenth

³¹ Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 4.

³² Ibid. 4.

and early nineteenth centuries. Today, Evangelicalism is marked by four key characteristics: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicalism; a particular regard for the Bible; and crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.³³ In recent years, Evangelicalism has often been confused with Fundamentalism, with Fundamentalism being considered the ultra-conservative branch of Evangelicalism. However, although both groups are theologically conservative, Evangelicals seek to distance themselves from the Fundamentalist stereotype of being antagonistic towards larger society. Despite these differences, I characterize house churches as both “Fundamentalist” and “Evangelical.” Arguably, the underground church belongs to neither category since both terms originally referred to Anglo-American movements. However, because the underground church tends to adhere to the beliefs of both Fundamentalists and Evangelicals (leaning heavily towards the conservative end), I will use these terms interchangeably with regard to the house church. I also use both terms because, while the house church embodies all the characteristics of Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose’s “new fundamentalism,” it is also extremely evangelical, emphasizing both conversionism and activism.

Lastly, I also refer to the house church as “charismatic.” The word “charismatic” is an umbrella term used to describe Christians who believe that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit seen in the first century Christian church are still available to contemporary Christians. These manifestations include miracles, prophecies, and speaking in tongues. Charismatic Christians believe that such phenomena may still be experienced and practiced today. On the

³³ “Defining Evangelicalism,” Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, 2008, Wheaton College, 30 March 2009 <<http://isae.wheaton.edu/defining-evangelicalism/defining-the-term-in-contemporary-times/>>.

other hand, the Charismatic Movement refers to the spread of Pentecostal beliefs throughout the historic mainline denominations during the 1960s.³⁴ When using the term “charismatic” I am not referring to this specific movement, but rather, to the house church’s emphasis on supernatural healing, miracles, ecstatic religious experience, and usage of the gifts of the Spirit. I use all three terms—Fundamentalist, Evangelical, and charismatic—because the underground church displays many of the key characteristics of all three movements; moreover, even within the United States, these three movements often overlap.

AUTHOR’S BACKGROUND

Before beginning my analysis, it would only be fair for me to explain how I first became interested in the underground church, as it is not a common subject of study. To put it most simply, I myself am a Chinese Christian although I grew up in a Chinese-American church. Even so, I have always found it strange that Chinese-American Christians align so closely with American Fundamentalists and Evangelicals in their theological and political leanings. A thorough analysis of the relationship between Chinese-American Christians and American Fundamentalist/Evangelical Christians would need to come in a different study. Personally, however, I had always assumed that this connection was a result of Chinese Americans’ social conservatism; it would make sense for them to align with American social conservatives in a foreign country where they remain a minority. However, upon learning about the underground church in China, I was puzzled by the growth of this Fundamentalist ideology in a place where Christian Fundamentalists can be persecuted for their religion. Why do Chinese Christians choose such a Fundamentalist version of Christianity even at risk of persecution,

³⁴ Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, 2005, Routledge, 15 April 2009
<<http://www.routledge-ny.com/ref/religionandsociety/pentecostal/introduction.html>>.

when they have the option of attending state-endorsed Protestant churches? In addition, I have always found it strange that my own parents chose to convert to Christianity. Why convert to a religion that is so far removed from your own culture, especially when your culture has its own traditional religions? This question has led me to become deeply concerned with the spread of Christianity around the world, since I have personally seen how Christianization can contribute to Americanization. My personal connection to Chinese Christianity has informed my outlook while writing this thesis. However, despite this, I seek to remain as critical as possible in my analysis.

CHAPTER 1

LIKE RAIN FALLING AND GRASS GROWING: THE GROWTH OF CHINA'S UNDERGROUND CHURCH

This thesis begins by attempting to understand the core reasons for the phenomenal growth of China's underground church. Such growth is counterintuitive given that house churches in China continue to face persecution—harassment, imprisonment, torture, and possibly death. Even more puzzling is the fact that house churches are far more successful at recruiting new members than churches of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, which are legally protected and approved by the Chinese government. This variation in growth shows that it is not just Protestantism that is successful in China, but the underground church itself. Of approximately 120 million Christians in China, 90 million of them belong to the underground church.³⁵

Through my own ethnographic research, I identified thirteen key characteristics of the underground church, many of which contribute to its success. These include: 1) its size, 2) its belief in healings and miracles, 3) its charismatic form of worship, 4) the growth of the Three-Self Church, 5) the effects of the Cultural Revolution, 6) its mobility and flexibility in the face of government pressure, 7) a “persecution complex,” 8) the level of commitment of its leaders,

³⁵ President Wong, Personal Interview, 19 July 2008.

9) its focus on training new leaders, 10) the efficacy of its organization and management, 11) its ability to network 12) its focus on evangelism, and 13) its adherence to Fundamentalist/Literalist interpretations of the Bible. Since this project took an ethnographic approach, it is impossible to generalize and assume that all thirteen characteristics apply to all house churches. This is especially true since the respondents were not chosen completely at random; many were church leaders and many had connections to Fundamentalist, Evangelical churches in the United States. Moreover, interviews only took place in 4 out of China's 22 provinces. Respondents may have also skewed their responses due to the sensitive nature of the questions asked. This is especially true since interviews took place right before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a time when China's government was particularly repressive and wary of subversive activities. In general, however, there was a high level of trust between my respondents and me, given that I was introduced to most church members through personal connections. The consistency with which I heard respondents discuss the thirteen identified characteristics of underground church also indicates that they hold some truth.

Many of the reasons I identified are further supported by the research of scholars on the subject. In her article "House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China," May M.C. Cheng does a case study of Damazhan Church in Guangzhou, perhaps the best-known Protestant church in China. The purpose of Cheng's article is to discuss whether or not the underground church can be considered a social movement. She finds that at the microscopic level, internal and local factors differentiate house churches in their speed of expansion and goals. However, at the macroscopic level, she finds that house churches face similar political pressures and their networks form a moral alliance in their resistance to state control. Thus,

she argues that house churches are not isolated local phenomena, but are networked groups that exhibit the characteristics of a social movement.³⁶ As such, it has specific growth strategies of which she identifies eight. First, Cheng argues that Damazhan Church has been particularly successful because of its ability to resist political forces in the 1950s, and its refusal to be co-opted by new governmental policies. Damazhan also has very charismatic leadership, which has demonstrated both persistence and moral integrity, winning the confidence of its followers. In addition, the church is extremely sensitive to the political climate of the country, and has taken care to dissociate itself from overseas or local political forces. For example, Samuel Lamb, the leader of Damazhan, specifically requested that church members abstain from attending the pro-democracy demonstrations in 1989. This showed that he was not a political leader simply hiding behind a “religious cloak” as the government fears. Cheng finds that Lamb has also kept his church organization dynamic and his recruitment strategies sophisticated. During periods of interference by authorities, he has turned church services into small prayer and fellowship meetings. As a result of being divided into smaller groups, Damazhan has been able to remain relatively unnoticed by government authorities. Moreover, as each individual prayer and fellowship group expands, so too does Damazhan. Damazhan’s extensive communication and resource networks have also contributed greatly to the church’s growth by enabling it to connect with Evangelical Christians throughout the world. Thus, it has won the recognition and support of major Evangelical leaders including both Billy Graham and Jim Irwin. As a result, Christians in the United States and elsewhere frequently provide the church with financial, spiritual, and technical (literature and equipment) support. Lamb’s media exposure has also been helpful in that it has allowed him to turn the underground church into a human

³⁶ Cheng 17.

rights issue. In the Western media, members of the underground church are portrayed as victims of torture and persecution. By winning the sympathies of Western advocacy groups, house church members have been successful in forcing the Chinese government to curb its restrictions on religious freedom.

Likewise, Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan do their own analysis of church growth since 1979 in their book *Protestantism in Contemporary China*. They argue that social and political factors, such as rural isolation, poverty, boredom, greater social mobility, lack of education, disillusionment with the Chinese Communist Party, devaluation of traditional culture, and personal search for meaning, contributed to the process of unlocking the Chinese population from its traditional beliefs. Before 1949, China was humiliated by a series of unequal treaties imposed by Western powers. The Japanese invasion then caused millions of casualties between 1937 and 1944, which was soon followed by a bloody civil war. Communist Party rule after 1949 promoted rapid social change, including the collectivization then privatization of agriculture, the development of a huge industrial base, and the transformation of ideology and culture. Thus, Hunter and Chan conclude that the rapid social changes before and during the Cultural Revolution probably led people into a spiritual crisis. They then argue that certain parallels between Christianity and traditional religious traditions helped ease the acceptance of Christianity. Like traditional Chinese religion, Protestantism offers prayers, healing, fellowship, a system of morality, rationale for suffering, and promise of salvation. Hunter and Chan also argue that Protestantism has been successful in China because of the religion's flexible and successful organizational form, its appeal due to its connection to Western prestige, its powerful religious and moral message, its evangelistic nature, its strengths

as a relatively rationalistic religion, its attractive forms of worship, its ability to serve various nationalities, social classes, and personalities, and its affirmation of selfhood and individual value. Hunter and Chan then find that there are certain perceived advantages of conversion such as money, employment, education, the formation of useful networks of mutual help, promise of healing and magical powers, and Westernization and modernization. Chinese scholar Xu Shaoqiang elaborates on their findings by showing that 70% of believers in Henan, Anhui, and Zhejiang sought healing from the church. Xu also argues that an unhappy family life persuades many women, especially elderly ones, to become interested in religion. Women, particularly retired women, may also suffer from a sense of social isolation, and Christian groups help to ameliorate this by providing a social network.³⁷

THE RELATIVE SIZE OF INDIVIDUAL HOUSE CHURCHES

My findings overlap and agree with Cheng's and Hunter and Chan's on many levels. However, instead of compiling every reason for the growth of house churches, this chapter seeks to highlight the thirteen most important reasons, especially relative to the growth of the Three-Self Church. It also provides the empirical evidence that Cheng, and Hunter and Chan do not, demonstrating how these factors have contributed to the house church's success. Perhaps the most basic reason for the growth of house churches is their relative size. House churches are very large in the sense that one church leader can have hundreds of churches under him, and all of these churches are connected under one head, much like denominations in the United States. However, any given house church meeting point generally has only 10 to 100 members, compared to several thousand for the average Three-Self Church. Many church

³⁷ Hunter and Chan 168-174.

members find that the small size of the house church creates a close-knit community, which they find appealing. According to Brother Liu,³⁸ a twenty-four year old Christian who has attended both house churches and Three-Self churches, house churches are more “free.” Everyone in their church is part of “the family,” a “family member,” rather than just another attendee. Being one family, people care about and love each other within the house church. Brother Liu does not feel this same degree of love in the Three-Self Church he attends every Wednesday (he continues to attend the Three-Self Church because he is their only pianist).³⁹ Because house churches are so small, everyone knows each other and knows what’s going on in each other’s lives and in the lives of their family members. In several house churches I attended, church members would eat meals together and spend time together outside of church. In contrast, in all the Three-Self Churches I attended, members simply came for the sermon and left immediately afterwards.

Along with this sense of family and community, Brother Liu also prefers the house church because it gives him a sense of ownership. His family holds Bible studies in their own house, and both his parents are considered leaders within their house church, which has approximately 100 members. Because house churches are relatively small, it is very easy for anyone to rise within the leadership or to start their own branch church in their own house. This sense of ownership is given to ordinary members of house churches as well. For example, all leaders within Brother Liu’s church are chosen democratically. The entire congregation, including newcomers, is able to vote for their leaders in a secret ballot. In this way, all

³⁸ Names have been changed to protect the identities of all respondents.

³⁹ Brother Liu, Personal Interview, 08 July 2008.

members of the house church are given agency, and have a say in the direction and leadership of their church.

SICKNESS AND HEALING

In order to understand why the house church is growing, one must also understand why any given individual would choose to convert to Christianity in China. Through my interviews, I found that the most cited reason for converting is a belief in healing from sickness and other miracles. Like Xu, Brother Dao estimates that at least 70% of recent converts in his area chose to believe after getting sick or knowing someone who was healed after getting sick.⁴⁰ Even in Wenzhou, which has the highest percentage of Christians in the country, people mostly convert “when sick, having mental problems, or are demon-possessed. [People believe when] they have tried everything and are desperate.”⁴¹ Unlike the Three-Self Church, which discourages any emphasis on healings and signs and wonders, the house church thrives off of them.

A typical story is published in Tony Lambert’s *China’s Christian Millions*. It goes as follows: A young man suffers from pulmonary tuberculosis and spends more than 3,000 RMB at Mogoqi’s two main hospitals, but his condition still does not improve. This man was then taken to the home of a Christian who cared for him and gave him a massage to help him breathe better. The man became a Christian, and within a week, he was completely healed.⁴² More extraordinary stories include that of She Guoqing’s. She Guoqing used to be an atheist but was married to a Christian. Though his wife tried for many years to bring him to Christ, he

⁴⁰ Brother Dao, Personal Interview, 26 July 2008.

⁴¹ Brother Ting, Personal Interview, 05 August 2008.

⁴² Tony Lambert, *China’s Christian Millions* (United Kingdom: Monarch Books, 1999) 117.

refused, continuing in a lifestyle that included drinking, smoking, and playing cards. One day, however, he fell ill and reached a critical state close to death.

‘Suddenly, I heard much noise and relatives crying. I felt myself floating in the dark like an observer before the bed. I saw my thin body, my yellow face. Then I was led by an unseen force into a long, dark tunnel seemingly without end. I walked with great effort towards the end where there seemed to be a glimpse of light. At this moment I heard in the distance behind me someone calling: ‘Papa! Papa!’ I recognized the voice of my eldest daughter. About this time a person in white was pulling hard from the back. I woke up, opened my eyes and saw my daughter kneeling by my side, crying and pleading with Jesus to save me. I also saw that I was dressed in a dead person’s clothes. I asked my daughter what had happened. She told me: ‘You were dead for two days. Uncle and grandfather quickly put the funeral clothes on you. They wanted to put you quickly into the coffin, have the funeral and then the burial....I was very much against this as I felt you had not believed in Jesus and would not go to heaven. I could not bear to see you go to hell. So I desperately begged Jesus to bring you back to life, so you could accept Jesus...and then you could die...For two days and nights I cried out to Jesus unceasingly for his grace. I would not get up from the floor until he answered my prayer. Now Jesus has performed his miracle and brought you back to life.’ After hearing my daughter’s account, I was finally touched by her faith and God’s grace, which had touched my heart and melted it. I kept saying ‘Thank you Lord’. I want to use my second life granted by God to be his witness, to preach the gospel, to bear much fruit and to glorify his Name.’⁴³

Though such accounts are prominent, their factuality is questionable. Social scientists have generally been skeptical about claims that physiological illnesses can be cured through spiritual healing. For example, research conducted by scholars on the Pentecostal movement in the United States, have found that all reports were grossly exaggerated and often fabricated. There is little evidence to support claims that spiritual healing has any effect on the course of an illness, though patients in natural remission may attribute their cure to such intervention.⁴⁴

At the same time, however, Hunter and Chan do not want to completely discredit the religious dimension of healing, and argue that given the reductionist nature of Western

⁴³ Ibid. 119.

⁴⁴ Hunter and Chan 146.

medical science, there is a need to better understand the condition of the spirit during times of illness. They conclude:

‘What seems to have mattered was not the real or imagined cause or cure, nor the relative merits of divine and mundane healing, but the ‘moment’ or experience itself. Those who experienced or witnessed the act of healing were strongly impressed that they stood in the presence of supernatural power, and what passed before or after had no effect on that impression.’⁴⁵

Thus, regardless of how embellished Mr. She’s story might be, there is no doubt that his perception of his near-death experience is the cause of his conversion. Tony Lambert calls this a “holistic” approach to ministry, whereby the gospel of Christ and the need for repentance, faith, and healing, are all integrally connected.⁴⁶ In this way, the Chinese church is able to use healing as an additional means of drawing in new believers.

This seems only to make sense since healing has always been a respected part of Chinese culture and religious tradition. Daoists experiment with naturalistic and animistic models such as herbs, chemical potions, talismans and chants. Buddhists have many prayers for the sick and a Bodhisattva dedicated to healing. At the popular level, prayers to local or national gods and offers of sacrifices in return for help are commonplace. On the community level, regular ceremonies to purify villages and special rituals to ward off epidemics of plague or smallpox are also normal.⁴⁷ Thus, the similarities between traditional Chinese healing practices and the supernatural healing emphasized by house churches may make it easier for non-Christians to believe in both healing through prayer and Christianity as a whole. Since healing is the most cited reason for conversion, it is possible then that house churches are spreading

⁴⁵ Ibid. 148.

⁴⁶ Lambert 120.

⁴⁷ Hunter and Chan 148.

quickly because of their focus on the same type of religious belief that has traditionally been practiced in China, making the transition to Christianity but a small step.

MIRACLES

The house church's emphasis on healing is not the only kind of supernatural phenomena to carry over from traditional Chinese religion. Stories of miracles are equally commonplace and reaffirm the Christian's faith. For example, I interviewed a Chinese-American missionary who told me about a time she went to preach in a rural part of China during the 1980s when persecution was especially severe. She was at a house church and was just about to step up to preach when she developed a terrible stomachache and needed to go to the bathroom. As soon as she stepped out, the police came to look for illegal religious activity. At the time, there was a man leaving the house to go to work, and he just happened to see the police in time to warn her. Thus, she was able to escape without being caught.⁴⁸ Regardless of whether or not this incident was a coincidence, for the house church, it exemplified God's grace and providence.

Another Christian I interviewed told me about a time when a group of youth were up worshipping on the mountains to avoid government detection. During this youth retreat, three miracles happened. First, it was unbearably hot—39 degrees Celsius—with 300 people crowded into very small rooms. So, they prayed for God to lower the temperature and later that day it stormed. The second miracle happened that night. The wind from the storm continuously blew up the roof, allowing wind to come in and cool down the entire building. Then, the roof would fall back down exactly as it was. Finally, the third miracle occurred as the group was

⁴⁸ Faith Chen, Personal Interview, 13 July 2008.

about to leave. On the last night, the group was planning to wake up at 5am to pray and eat breakfast before leaving the mountain at 6am. The night before, however, the elder in charge couldn't fall asleep and woke up accidentally at 4am. When he looked at his watch, he thought it said 5am, and woke up everyone in the group. As a result, they all left an hour early—before 5am. As it turns out, at 5:20am, the police came to look for the youth, since during that time period it was illegal to evangelize to children under 18 years old.⁴⁹ These stories demonstrate how the house church interprets everyday phenomena as acts of divine intervention. Such interpretations reinforce their faith and serve as testimonies that can be used to attract new members.

CHARISMATIC WORSHIP

In line with its beliefs in supernatural healings and miracles, the house church is also appealing for its charismatic forms of worship. According to Brother Ting, a church leader I met, fewer younger Christians go to the Three-Self Church because they prefer dancing, clapping, singing, crying, and being able to worship freely with their emotions. He says that many Christians have left the Three-Self Church precisely because of this difference in worship style.⁵⁰ By this, Brother Ting refers namely to a Pentecostal style of worship, which I witnessed in every church I attended. Prayer was always said out loud, either shouted, groaned, or mumbled, with the speaker praying exceptionally quickly to convey additional emotion. Inevitably, the speaker would also begin to cry as he or she spoke. This emotional experience was further heightened by the fact that everyone always prayed out loud simultaneously. Thus, one person's crying would trigger another's and before long, the whole room would be filled

⁴⁹ Grandma Wang, Personal Interview, 14 July 2008.

⁵⁰ Brother Ting.

with crying, moaning, and pleading for God. As Murray Rubinstein describes worship in the True Jesus Church, one of the biggest networks of house churches in China,

In True Jesus practice, believers pray for the Gift of the Spirit and through such prayer open themselves up to possession by the Holy Spirit...The atmosphere has been created through the singing of hymns as well as through the recitation of short prayers...They begin with simple words or verses. It is about this time that many begin to shake and sway. From their mouths come strange sounds that seem to flow out. Some of these resemble formalized chanting—the davening of Jewish prayer—while others are sharp glottal sounds. This is glossolalia in its classic form.⁵¹

Many Chinese Christians seem to prefer this style of worship because it is more “genuine.”

One’s degree of emotional display is believed to match his or her spiritual maturity and connection with God. Thus, older church leaders tend to be most dramatic in their worship.

This perceived connection between emotional display and spiritual maturity also serves to draw people into the house church. For example, I once attended a Three-Self Church service with Brother Liu, and he complained to me afterwards that he didn’t like it because he “did not feel spiritually moved by the prayer,”⁵² the way he normally does in a house church. Many people I interviewed who used to attend Three-Self churches but switched over to the house church also described how they’d never worshipped the way the house church worshipped before, and they found it to be more powerful and moving. Rubinstein argues that charismatic forms of worship may be appealing for their ability to give the practitioner ‘a voice’ by symbolic means. For example, he finds that the True Jesus service is organized to envelop the participant in spiritual feelings of great power. He writes, “when one is part of such a service, one feels swept away by a vast and powerful emotional river. There is, no doubt, an

⁵¹ Hunter and Chan 152.

⁵² Brother Liu.

emotional sense of release, a catharsis.”⁵³ Rubinstein argues that such a release is attractive for its sharp contrast to the strict restraints of Confucian codes of behavior. Research has also been done on Black Pentecostalism in the United States that shows that charismatic worship can be an expression of the desire for freedom, dignity, and equality. Thus, it may represent a gradual process of empowerment through spiritual experiences, community solidarity, and emotional release. In China, it is necessary that this release occur outside official church structures, since the Three-Self Church works together with the Chinese government in monitoring the religious activities of the underground church. Christians may be drawn to the underground church precisely to experience freedom, both spiritually and politically.

GROWTH OF THE THREE-SELF CHURCH

Ironically, the success of the Three-Self Church also contributes greatly to the growth of the underground church. Since it is more public, openly accessible, and legal, house church Christians appreciate the Three-Self Church for drawing in newcomers and people who are just curious about Christianity. As these new Christians become spiritually mature, they recognize that the Three-Self Church is “wrong” and leave to attend the underground church instead. Thus, the Three-Self Church serves as a gateway to the underground church. Says Grandma Li, a Chinese Christian who started out going to a Three-Self Church,

After I had been going to the Three-Self for a while, an outside servant of God told me not to go anymore. At first, I did not know what the Three-Self was. So, I prayed to God that He would show me the difference between the two churches. Both churches looked good...but then I started reading from Acts to Galatians, and I understood how Paul had suffered for God. I really understood...and so I stopped going to the Three-Self Church and have been

⁵³ Hunter and Chan 154.

separate since then...The problem with the Three-Self Church is with its leaders....Bishop Ting believes in the figurative resurrection, but he's wrong.⁵⁴

According to Brother Liu, this tendency for Christians to leave the Three-Self Church and join house churches is very common. It is for this reason that hostile relationships exist between Three-Self and house churches in many parts of the country. Many house church Christians I spoke with also noted that persecution is most severe when their local Three-Self Church begins to lose members to the house church. During these times, the Three-Self Church feels more insecure, and reports the local house church in retaliation.

However, such retaliation may be justified. Not all Chinese Christians leave the Three-Self Church due to a personal epiphany. In fact, it is very common for members of the underground church to go to Three-Self churches for the purpose of preaching and winning over believers. According to Pastor Chen, one such Christian who does this regularly, "In one Three-Self Church I went to, they hadn't studied the Bible for over 30 years. So members of the Church secretly invited me to preach because they wanted to hear the Word."⁵⁵ Elder Shin describes the process as such:

Before, I used to have a lot of bad feelings toward the Three-Self Church but now I am learning to love them. Now I will go into the Three-Self Church to preach and a lot of people will come out....We must love them. I would preach whatever they wanted me to preach and sing the hymns they wanted...and they would all come out of the Three-Self Church....Some leaders even come out of the Three-Self Church themselves....This one church I preached at—the entire church came out. So now it still looks like a Three-Self Church but it is really a house church in doctrine.⁵⁶

Other Chinese Christians spoke of over 10,000 people leaving the Three-Self Church at one time in a single city. Though these stories may be exaggerated, they are still indications of the

⁵⁴ Grandma Li, Personal Interview, 02 August 2008.

⁵⁵ Pastor Chen, Personal Interview, 21 July 2008.

⁵⁶ Elder Shin, Personal Interview, 22 July 2008.

house church's success in winning over members of the Three-Self Church. Because many house church Christians start out going to the Three-Self Church, the growth of the Three-Self Church ultimately contributes to the growth of the underground church as well.

EFFECTS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

As Hunter and Chan note, another frequently cited reason for the growth of the house church is the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. According to Tony Lambert, author of *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, the Cultural Revolution was “used by God to create a church refined by fire and uniquely adapted to reach out to millions disillusioned with Maoism. It...created conditions in Chinese society from which the church was to re-emerge invigorated in new, largely de-institutionalized forms when the fury of the storm had passed.⁵⁷ Thus, Lambert argues that the crisis of faith in Maoism provided a congenial social environment for the consideration of Christianity as a serious worldview. This crisis of faith was so severe that even the Chinese government admitted that reliance on orthodox Marxism could not be expected to solve all of China's problems. An article published in 1979 in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution read,

In the eyes of some of our young comrades, there currently seems to be nothing worthy of their belief. The specific reason is that what is said and what is done is worlds apart. The seven legal documents adopted at the Second Session of the Fifth National People's Congress are but a mere scrap of paper. It is expressly provided in the Constitution that all citizens enjoy freedom of thought, speech, the press and association. As a matter of fact, however, 'ideological criminals' are arrested everywhere. With acts like this how can you arouse the belief of China's young people in the Communist Party?⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Lambert 10.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 104.

This ideological crisis was felt especially strongly amongst young people. For example, a male university student and a female factory worker, using the pen name “Pan Xiao,” wrote a letter entitled “Why is the road of life getting narrower?” to *China Youth News*. Describing how the Cultural Revolution choked their idealism, they wrote,

In the past I cherished beautiful illusions about life....I considered that as my father, mother and grandfather had all been Party members, I, too, should naturally believe in communism, and in the future I would join the Party, without any doubt....But the facts I witnessed were in sharp contradiction with the education I received in my head. I witnessed searches of people’s homes, armed struggle, and utter disregard for human life....I trusted in the [Party] organization, but when I gave an opinion to the leadership, it became a reason for not admitting me for many years into the Youth League....To find the meaning of life, I observed other people. I asked advice from elderly, grey-haired people, and from young people, and busy teachers and commune members. But none of their answers satisfied me. If they said it was for the revolution, it seemed too empty and irrelevant....If they said it was for mankind, it did not link up with reality. If they said it was just to eat, drink and enjoy oneself, it seemed meaningless....Why is the road of human life getting narrower? I already feel so tired that if I were to breathe out once more I would die completely. [So,] I secretly went and attended worship at a Catholic church, really I did. I thought of shaving my head and becoming a Buddhist nun and even of taking my own life. I am completely confused and full of contradictions.⁵⁹

The *China Youth News* goes on to write that young people are “trying to forget their problems in employment, studies, marriage, and cultural activities by means of religion.”⁶⁰ From these accounts, it is clear that the Cultural Revolution left behind an ideological vacuum that pushed many people to turn to religion, including Christianity, in their search for meaning and self worth.

Additionally, Lambert argues that the Cultural Revolution allowed Christians to “share the sufferings of the nation,”⁶¹ thus removing some of its taboo as a “foreign” religion.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 105.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 107.

⁶¹ Ibid. 12.

Christianity was also especially appealing during and right after the Cultural Revolution, as Chinese Christians were able to find comfort for their sufferings in biblical teachings about discipline, redemption, and hope.⁶² Many respondents echoed these same feelings in my ethnographic research. They bemoaned the state of Christianity today relative to Christianity during the 1970s and 1980s. According to Grandpa Wang, during that time, people were more “on fire for the Lord,” and Christianity spread like “rain falling and grass growing.”⁶³ This is because “everyone suffered during the Cultural Revolution and needed to turn to God for protection.”⁶⁴

The end of the Cultural Revolution also encouraged many missionaries to take advantage of the increased liberalization of the country, and begin evangelizing on foot. Many missionaries like Grandpa Wang traveled through the mountainside during this time, leaving new believers and churches behind wherever they went. After the missionaries left, the house churches would then preach and worship on their own. After some time, these new Christians learned how to evangelize, and began going out on missions to plant new churches. Grandpa Wang describes this time period as “a hen giving birth to chickens”⁶⁵ for Christianity in China. Thus, the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath contributed to an explosion in the size of the church, which has lasted to this day, as Christianity is passed down from generation to generation.

MOBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

⁶² Ibid. 12.

⁶³ Grandpa Wang, Personal Interview, 15 July 2008.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

By being a period of severe government repression, the Cultural Revolution also forced the church to learn new survival strategies, and be mobile and flexible. During the Cultural Revolution, house churches would worship at unorthodox hours, such as very early in the morning, and in different locales. In order to avoid government interference, they would worship in far-removed locations such as high up on a mountain, and would be careful not to sing or talk very loudly so that their neighbors would not report them. Thus, the house church developed a tradition of mobility and flexibility. In case of an intensification of government repression, Grandpa Wang believes that the house church must reuse the same tactics they used during the Cultural Revolution. According to Grandpa Wang, the Chinese government intends to eliminate the underground church by consolidating many small house churches into a few big ones; this policy was made public in a government memo published by the Religious Affairs Bureau in 2005. This will shrink the total number of house churches, and make it easier for the government to track and control them. Grandpa Wang's solution, then, is to further divide the underground church—like cutting tofu—to continue church expansion.⁶⁶ The government generally persecutes just one church location at a time in order to avoid attracting international attention. So, as Grandpa Wang describes it, “as one place begins growing up, the government will crush it, so we’ll go somewhere else and that part will grow up. Once the government comes there, we’ll go somewhere else and bring that church up as well.”⁶⁷ As a result, government repression will actually end up increasing the number of new churches planted, by forcing the church to expand geographically. Thus, the mobility and flexibility of the house church is a major advantage it holds over the Three-Self Church.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Whenever there is a growing number of Christians in any given locale, a house church can immediately form as soon as a host offers up his or her house. In fact, many house churches are formed simply because there are not enough Three-Self churches nearby. Three-Self churches, on the other hand, are limited by their need for an official church building, which requires much funding and paperwork.

“PERSECUTION COMPLEX”

What is curious about the explosion in the growth of Christianity during and immediately following the Cultural Revolution is that the Chinese government was especially repressive during these times. Interestingly, however, the persecution of the church then and today seems to contribute to its wide appeal. According to Jennifer Huang, a Chinese Christian who now attends college in the United States, “People prefer attending house churches because of a ‘persecution complex.’ Persecution is a big part of Christianity since Christ was persecuted. So, it seems ‘good’ to be persecuted...it makes house churches feel ‘more Christian,’ ‘better.’”⁶⁸ This biblical basis for enduring persecution is repeatedly emphasized within the house church. In church services, Bible studies, and multiple interviews, Chinese Christians refer to verses such as Matthew 5:10-12:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.⁶⁹

Moreover, endurance of persecution is seen as mandated by Christ. When Christ prophesized about the End of the Age, he told his disciples, “You will be handed over to be persecuted and

⁶⁸ Jennifer Huang, Personal Interview, 28 April 2008.

⁶⁹ Matthew 5:10-12.

put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”⁷⁰ In John, Christ implied that in order to be a good disciple, facing persecution is inevitable. He says,

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.⁷¹

Likewise, in 2 Timothy, Paul writes, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...”⁷²

Strengthened by these words, persecution is given almost a glorified aura within the house church. In their book *Back to Jerusalem*, Brother Yun, Peter Xu Yongze, and Enoch Wang identify with the words of Tertullian, one of the great leaders of the early church of Tunisia:

Go zealously on, good presidents, you will stand higher with the people if you sacrifice the Christians at their wish, kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust; your injustice is the proof that we are innocent....Nor does your cruelty, however exquisite, avail you; it is rather a temptation to us. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.⁷³

Thus, they believe that as “the more [the Israelites] were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread,”⁷⁴ so too would the Chinese church. Kindopp refers to this mentality as a “theology of martyrdom.”⁷⁵ Persecution is not something to be feared, but rather, revered as a mark of a Christian’s level of devotion.

⁷⁰ Matthew 24:9.

⁷¹ John 15:18-21.

⁷² 2 Timothy 3:12.

⁷³ Paul Hattaway, et al., *Back to Jerusalem* (United Kingdom: Piquant, 2003) 19.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 19.

⁷⁵ Kindopp 141.

For example, in my interviews, Chinese Christians frequently referred to old, famous preachers they admired. Each of these preachers suffered prolonged periods of persecution. One Christian cited Pastor Allen Yuan, one of the founders of the underground church movement, as his role model. Allen Yuan was jailed during the Cultural Revolution, spending 22 years in a labor camp near Siberia. Through this hardship, however, Yuan refused to deny his faith, even at risk of execution—he wanted to die clean. Similarly, Wang Mingdao, perhaps the underground church’s biggest hero, also spent over 20 years in jail. First arrested in 1955, Wang confessed to a series of crimes against the government following physical, psychological, and spiritual torture. Even so, however, he refused to join the Three-Self Church and suffered a nervous breakdown, calling himself “Judas,” and behaving erratically. Because of his refusal to join the Three-Self Church, Wang and his wife were sentenced to 15 years of hard labor. While in prison, Wang’s health deteriorated. Malnourished and depressed, he also struggled with failing eyesight and diminished hearing. While contemplating suicide, Wang then retracted his previous confession in a written document. He pronounced his imprisonment unlawful and unjust, and connected his own detention to that of the saints who had been imprisoned, not for criminal acts, but for openly preaching the gospel. He also refused to do prison labor, arguing that he was not a criminal. As punishment, Wang was placed in solitary confinement for four months before being transferred to Datong Prison in Shangxi province, a hard-labor penitentiary where he spent another 5 years. In this prison, Wang was forced to undergo endless interrogation sessions, where he was tortured if his answers did not match what the interrogators desired. Still, he insisted that he was not a criminal, but was suffering for his faith. In 1968, Wang was transferred to the Yingying Prison in Shanxi province, where

he stayed until 1979, when he was released with the death of Mao and the rise of Deng Xiaoping. Even upon being released, however, Wang refused to sign any papers that indicated that he was a criminal.⁷⁶ Thus, the heroes of the underground church refuse to compromise their faith, especially during times of persecution.

In many house churches, individual persecution is a valuable form of social capital; leadership candidates are ranked by the number of times they've been arrested.⁷⁷ Inevitably, the highest esteemed leaders have been imprisoned multiple times, and have testimonies that emulate those of Pastor Yuan and Wang Mingdao. For example, President Wong, the leader of a major house church in Anhui, was given the opportunity to avoid imprisonment for his faith because his brother was a very high-ranking police officer. All he needed to do was to write a letter declaring that he didn't believe in Christ. Yet, President Wong refused, telling his brother that he could never give up his faith. Soon afterwards, he was caught and imprisoned for 102 days. At first, other prisoners mocked him for his faith and frequently tormented him. President Wong thought that he was going to die, and that he had already faced the worst on earth. However, he was reminded of Jesus' own persecution: "I heard Jesus say to me—Why did I go to earth from heaven? Why did I die on the cross? And I cried and I cried, and I said I believed."⁷⁸

Coworker Hsu, another house church leader, had both his house and church destroyed by the government. Both he and his father were jailed from 1995 to 1998, and forced to do manual labor as part of the government's "reeducation" program. In jail, they were

⁷⁶ Thomas Harvey, Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mindao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002).

⁷⁷ Kindopp 141.

⁷⁸ President Wong.

interrogated and told to give up their faith, but refused. When asked why, Hsu responded, “We are very clear that Jesus loves us. We are very clear about the grace we’ve received. So, suffering a little bit for God isn’t a big deal. Every time I think of Jesus’ suffering, I feel strengthened.”⁷⁹ Like Paul and Silas, they sang praise, prayed, and evangelized even while in jail.

Thus, following Christ’s commands, and the models set by both Biblical characters and the leaders of the underground church, persecution has become a measure of one’s “Christian-ness.” Persecution is also seen as a form of spiritual discipline that is beneficial to the believer. According to Yun, Yongze, and Wang, an unfortunate characteristic of many Christians is that when things go well, they tend to stop and enjoy their successes. However, it is because of this attitude that the early Christians became self-satisfied after evangelizing Jerusalem, and forgot about the other stages of the Great Commission. As a result, “a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”⁸⁰ According to Yun, Yongze, and Wang, the Lord was “helping” the disciples to remember the Great Commission, and for this reason, “provided some persecution!”⁸¹ Likewise, Brother Dao argues that “when being persecuted, the church is more unified, everyone loves the Lord. But, when not being persecuted, everyone starts to love the world and love money.”⁸² Therefore, in the house church, persecution is viewed in a positive light, and encourages both spiritual discipline and church growth.

COMMITMENT LEVEL OF LEADERS

⁷⁹ Coworker Hsu, Personal Interview, 27 July 2008.

⁸⁰ Acts 8:1.

⁸¹ Hattaway, et al. 18.

⁸² Brother Dao.

Another major strength of the underground church is the level of commitment of their leaders. This is especially notable since one of the main complaints articulated against the Three-Self Church is the quality of their leadership. Many Christians I interviewed criticized pastors within the Three-Self Church, arguing that they see their positions as “just a job.” Leaders within the Three-Self Church have internal conflicts over who gets to preach, what houses they get to live in, and who should be promoted next.⁸³ To house church Christians, these material concerns are clear signs that these pastors care more about living a comfortable life than about serving God. They claim that some pastors in the Three-Self Church are even members of the Communist party, mixing religion with politics.

I witnessed some of this weakness in leadership when attending a Three-Self Church with Brother Liu in Shanghai. In fact, the only reason Brother Liu continues to attend the Three-Self Church is because they have no other leaders to rely on. Thus, he feels obligated to be the pianist, to lead prayer meetings, and to help coordinate special events. After leaving the service, Brother Liu explained to me, “This is what I don’t like about the Three-Self Church. The leadership is bad...everything they’re doing for this event [a special service for the Sichuan earthquake of June 2008] is a mess. Instead of being concerned about their own spirituality, or their members’ spirituality, they just care about their own authority.”⁸⁴ Though the house church’s criticism of the Three-Self Church clearly cannot be taken at face value, and the quality of Three-Self Church leaders must vary in the same way that the quality of house church leaders must vary, it is important to note that the majority of leadership positions in the house church are completely voluntary, and generally unpaid. Thus, house church leaders

⁸³ Sister Huang, Personal Interview, 12 June 2008.

⁸⁴ Brother Liu.

pride themselves for being willing to take on additional responsibilities within the church and quitting their jobs to evangelize abroad. For example, President Wong used to be a leader in the Communist Youth League of China, a very prestigious position. However, he chose to resign after realizing that it would be impossible for him to be both a “true” Christian and a member of the Communist Party. After quitting, the government offered him many promotions to try to change his mind. Still President Wong chose to quit and went into full-time ministry. Now he is the leader of one of the largest networks of house churches in China. In the same vein, many house church leaders spoke about how their decision to serve God has hurt their relationships with their spouses, often because the spouse is not a Christian. Others were forced to neglect some of their responsibilities as wife or mother, and were thus ostracized by their families. Many more have been imprisoned and persecuted. Such are the sacrifices that house church leaders frequently make for the sake of their church. This does not imply that house church leaders have no other motivations. It is possible, for example, that many people go into full-time ministry due to a lack of career opportunities, especially in the countryside. I met several leaders who told me that before serving full-time, they had run businesses that continuously failed because God did not want them to be distracted by the world.⁸⁵ Thus, the failure of their business was interpreted as a calling from God to become a worker for the church.

However, despite the different motivations people may have for becoming leaders in the house church, it is clear that once in these positions, they are willing to make sacrifices on behalf of their church. As with persecution, this willingness to make sacrifices is a form of social capital within the house church. Thus, a culture is created in which absolute and

⁸⁵ Sister Mu, Personal Interview, 04 August 2008.

complete dedication to the church is considered the norm. House church leaders also seem to have more agency than leaders in the Three-Self Church, as they do not need to report back to the Religious Affairs Bureau in the same way that Three-Self Church leaders do. This may encourage leaders to be more innovative and resourceful, as they must take full responsibility for the church.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

To add to the quality of their leadership, house churches are also very intentional in their training of new leaders. Perhaps the most incredible organizational feature of the underground church is the underground seminary. Underground seminaries and training centers exist all over the country as an alternative to the legal seminaries in China, which prepare students for ministry in the Three-Self Church. The key difference between underground seminaries and Three-Self seminaries is doctrinal. Three-Self seminaries tend to be more liberal in theology, and according to many house church members, also require students to take classes on politics and Communism.

As a result, the underground church created their own seminaries so as to train their leaders in the kind of theological education they approve of—generally, a more evangelical, literalist interpretation of the Bible. Many underground seminaries operate by inviting missionaries and seminary teachers from Taiwan and the United States to teach for several days or weeks at a time. By teaching for 8 hours a day, teachers are able to complete an entire seminary course in the short period of time that they are in China. Some underground seminaries actually count these hours as credits, and after earning the appropriate number of credits and taking all the required classes, a student of the underground seminary can

“graduate” and become “ordained.” Many underground seminaries also have guestrooms that serve as dorms for its students. Full-time students are educated during a full school year with occasional holidays. Full-time students tend to be younger, either high-school or college-aged, and continue to enjoy the support of their parents. According to Brother Ting, education is not highly prioritized, as Christian parents believe that it is more important to love and serve God than to receive a good education. Many Wenzhounese youth also stop going to school early in order to pursue business. Thus, many parents find that if their children are not being educated, they may as well enter full-time ministry and study full-time in the underground seminary.⁸⁶ For Christians who are already involved in full-time ministry and are either a leader of their own house church or otherwise involved, the house church offers short-term training seminars that often last about a week. These training sessions are important since they are the only source of theological education for most house church members. In addition, they train leaders on how to go about managing their respective ministries. After being trained, leaders will return to their respective hometowns to nurture their local churches. It is also normal for leaders to travel to other parts of China several times a year for a few days at a time to lead their own training seminars. Thus, knowledge is effectively passed down from one generation of leaders to the next, and from churches with more resources to those with less. Moreover, this emphasis on training does not apply only to new leaders. Brother Ting’s church, for example, has a training center specially set aside so that anyone can get additional training whenever they want.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Brother Ting.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

The house church is particularly effective at training new leaders by making new leadership positions openly available. Many church leaders I interviewed began preaching only a few months after they became Christians. Since house churches have few resources, it is important for people to voluntarily step up to leadership positions in order for the church to survive. As Brother Dao describes it,

In the house church we are like this. As long as you can read—without training—they ask you to preach. After you start preaching already, you get trained. From when I was 18, I started preaching, from reading the Bible. The majority of people couldn't read then. Now, only half the congregation can read, so they must rely on the preachers.⁸⁸

Even in wealthier, better-educated parts of China, it is common to encourage new believers to enter leadership positions. For example, while in Shanghai, I met a college student who just became a Christian a few months ago. However, she was already heavily involved in the college fellowship and occasionally responsible for leading Bible study even though there were more mature Christians in the group who could easily have led instead. In fact, the college fellowship had a system whereby two different people were responsible for leading every week, so that work would be divided equally, and everyone gains leadership experience. By effectively cultivating and training new leaders, the house church is able to become stronger as an institution. This is especially true since leaders probably feel more accountable to the church and therefore less inclined to leave.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

In addition to having strong leadership, the house church is incredibly well organized as a grassroots movement. Though there are house churches that are small, loosely organized,

⁸⁸ Brother Dao.

family-based home-meetings, many house churches are large-scale and highly organized, with extensive nationwide networks and sophisticated hierarchical structures. According to Partners International, a US-based organization that trains and supports house churches in China, house churches generally consist of large networks of churches led by a single, authoritarian, leader. May M.C. Chen finds that some house churches are so highly organized that they deserve to be treated as their own religious movement. For example, the “All-Scope Church” has national networks and strategies for expansion across every province in China. In the early 1980s, its core leaders set up a “church council” to deal with problems relating to heresies and persecution. The leaders of the council then sent teams to visit the grassroots churches and organized “pastoral districts” for the division of labor. Each district was made up of about 30-50 house groups. Later, “regional councils” were formed for every ten pastoral districts. Included in the structure of the church is also a seminary and missionary sending apparatus. According to Brother Dao, this is the typical organizational structure for most house churches in China.⁸⁹ I interviewed a leader of a pastoral district with 30 churches and 50 coworkers. As leader of the district, she was responsible for organizing prayer meetings on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, for all the coworkers in her district. In addition, every Saturday they would have a coworkers’ meeting. On Mondays, she organized choir practice for the district, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, they had instrument classes. Additionally, they would have guitar and keyboard training sessions at least once a year. She was also responsible for organizing two retreats per year for the district, one during the summer, and another in the winter. The leaders of each pastoral district would then meet every few months for a regional council meeting. It is because of the house church’s hierarchical and efficient organizational

⁸⁹ Ibid.

structure that it is able to so effectively train leaders, distribute resources, and evangelize outwards.

NETWORKING

The house church's strengths in organization and management go hand in hand with its ability to network with other churches. Isolated, a single house church would have a lot of trouble growing. Though the Chinese Constitution technically guarantees freedom of religion, certain Christian activities continue to trigger harassment from the government. These activities include evangelizing outside one's county, publishing, distributing, and reading Christian literature not published by the Three-Self Church, and inviting foreign missionaries to preach or teach. However, given that house churches reject the Christian literature and seminaries of the Three-Self Church, they must rely on either illegal literature or foreign missionaries as their only sources of religious education and growth. The easiest way to access these resources are via other house churches that are already well connected.

For example, I visited one church in a poorer, more remote, farming area of Anhui province. Though this church was large enough to have a hierarchical organizational structure, it remained completely isolated until 2003. According to its leader, this isolation had certain detrimental effects on the church. With little contact with other Christians, their sole source of religious education was the Bible, which very few members of the community were actually able to read. Thus, those who could read naturally became preachers, teaching straight out of the Bible. It was very easy to make "mistakes" and "erroneous" interpretations of that Bible in this way. Says the house church leader,

We used to say that baptism was bad. We thought we just needed to be baptized by the Holy Spirit, and didn't need to actually be baptized. We had

heard someone mis-preach and say that only being baptized makes you saved. So, because we knew that guy was definitely wrong, we figured it would be better just not to baptize altogether. For 20 years we didn't baptize—our first baptism was in 2006.⁹⁰

Thus, the church recognized its weaknesses without the help and support of other churches. Their church was poorly managed and eventually began to lose many members. So, they began to actively look for churches to connect to. “At this time, with God’s grace, one of our church members who worked in Anhui went to a different church there and met a minister. From him, we heard that the Far East Broadcasting Company had brought two teachers to town in Anhui, one of whom was President Wong.”⁹¹ Through their new connections with President Wong, Brother Dao’s church was able to receive lessons from the underground seminary, books published by house churches, and other resources.

This need to network with other churches for support and religious education appears to be very commonplace. According to Jason Kindopp, house church leaders have strong ties of collaboration that facilitates their growth. In fact, the six largest house church networks have formed an alliance named the Sinim Fellowship, which draws major house church leaders together for monthly meetings to coordinate operations. These leaders collaborate on pastoral education, leadership training, and the publication and development of Bibles, study guides, and training materials. Through such communication and mutual support, house churches are able to learn from each other, protect their common interests, and mutually expand.⁹²

FOCUS ON EVANGELISM

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Kindopp 136.

All these factors aside, perhaps the most obvious reason for the growth of the underground church is that it is very active in the pursuit of its own expansion. In contrast to the Three-Self Church, which regulates who can evangelize, where one can evangelize, and how evangelism can be done, for the house churches, evangelism is not a task specially set aside for missionaries to complete. Instead, it is an integral part of a Christian's daily life, of the church, and of the religion as it is practiced. Thus, everyone should evangelize, wherever, and however. This was very evident in my own conversations and experiences with house church Christians. Essentially, evangelism occurs at any opportune moment. For example, in Anhui Province, I attended a funeral that was transformed into a gospel outreach event. According to the leaders who organized the event, the person who passed away was a Christian, and as one of his final wishes, had requested that his funeral be used as an opportunity to evangelize. Thus, though the man's family was not Christian, the house church arrived at the funeral fully prepared to proselytize. The funeral became a spectacle, as a choir and dance troop performed to entertain and attract people passing by. Once a small crowd gathered, a member of the house church gave a sermon about how life is suffering, but Christians have peace in Christ; since the man who passed away was a Christian, he now has peace in Heaven. This example demonstrates how opportunistic the house church is in its efforts to bring the gospel to all of China.

Similarly, I met an ordinary Christian family in Shanghai that ran its own business. However, as part of its weekly routine, this family would drive out to the outskirts of Shanghai every Friday evening to evangelize to workers in the many factories in that area. They would hold the service right inside the factory, attracting many newcomers who just want to take a break. In fact, nearly every house church leader I interviewed spoke about some kind of

evangelizing efforts their church was involved in. At the least, most churches hold large gospel outreach events during the holidays—Christmas and Easter especially—attracting thousands of people at a time. In Elder Shin’s community, Christians go door to door to evangelize; as a result, by now, every person in his community has heard the gospel.⁹³ In 2006, his church also began evangelizing in schools. Shin himself would wait outside the local school to give out pamphlets as soon as school let out. Several other Christians also set up small shops right outside the school so as to get to know students and build relationships with them in order to draw them into the church. Shin also encourages his daughter to invite her friends to eat at his house and wash their clothes for them, so as to demonstrate Christ’s love. Three times a year, his church goes to the hospital to visit the sick and pray for them. For the future, Shin also dreams of starting a TV station that can preach the gospel to hundreds of thousands of Chinese people simultaneously.⁹⁴ Through these various mechanisms, the house church makes evangelism a daily part of their lives, reaching out to as many people as they can, whenever they can, facilitating their own growth.

Thus, within the past few decades, many factors have propelled the growth of the underground church, some pertaining to sociohistoric circumstances, and others to the very characteristics, organization, and strategies of the house church itself. Many of these reasons also explain the success of the house church relative to the Three-Self Church. However, the greatest distinguishing feature between the two churches is actually theological. These theological differences help explain the antagonism between the house church and the Three-Self Church, and why Christians in China consistently prefer attending the underground

⁹³ Elder Shin.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

church over the Three-Self Church. In general, house churches tend to be more evangelical, fundamentalist, and literalist in their interpretation of the Bible. In contrast, the Three-Self Church adheres to a more liberal theology that has been influenced by both liberation theology and process theology. This next chapter will further explain the theological differences between the two churches.

CHAPTER 2

A COMPARISON OF THE THEOLOGIES OF K.H. TING AND WANG MINGDAO

In his book, *Acquainted with Grief*, Thomas Harvey writes, “understand two men, and you will understand Chinese Christianity....Wang Mingdao and K.H. Ting!”⁹⁵ The theology of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement is best expressed in the writings of Bishop K.H. Ting, Chairperson emeritus of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and President emeritus of the China Christian Council. Bishop Ting is well known for his controversial campaign of “theological reconstruction,” in which he attempts to create an indigenous Christian theology, devoid of foreign influence, and applicable to the Chinese context. Having studied at Union Theological Seminary, and influenced by authors such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Ting’s theology contains elements of both liberation theology and process theology.

These liberal branches of theology contrast sharply with the theology of the underground house churches. In fact, Wang Mingdao, one of the founders and heroes of the underground church can be considered the antithesis of K.H. Ting. A popular evangelist, Wang believes it is futile to save the earthly world, as it lies within Satan’s realm. For this

⁹⁵ Harvey 7.

reason, he devalues both traditional culture and history. Like fundamentalist evangelical Christians in the United States, Wang also believes in the inerrancy of the Bible, the depravity of fallen man, and justification by faith. Focusing on transcendental, over earthly issues, Wang argues that in order to change the world, one must begin by changing the heart. His theology divides the world into believers vs. non-believers, God vs. Satan, and light vs. darkness.⁹⁶ Because of these divisions, Wang also argues that interactions between believers and non-believers should be kept to a minimal, except for evangelical purposes. This chapter will compare and contrast the theologies of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement as articulated by Bishop Ting, and that of the underground house churches as articulated by Wang Mingdao. For many house church Christians, it is this difference in theology that drives them to attend house churches rather than the Three-Self Church.

BACKGROUND OF BISHOP K.H. TING AND INFLUENCES ON HIS THOUGHT

In order to fully understand Ting's theology, it is first necessary to have a grasp of his background. Donald E. Messer, President Emeritus of the Iliff School of Theology argues that this context is important because the cultural, political, and theological perceptions of all people are influenced by a complex interaction of factors that includes their personality, life experiences, social status, education, nationality, and faith traditions. Though these factors do not necessarily determine their thinking, they "contribute to a degree of 'probability' that 'the occupant of a given place in the social structure will think in a certain fashion.'"⁹⁷ Therefore, an examination of the sociopolitical environment in which Ting was raised will shed much

⁹⁶ "Wang Mingdao," Yutopian Chinese Culture Page, 2000, Yutopian, 01 February 2009 <<http://www.yutopian.com/religion/christian/Wangmd.html>>.

⁹⁷ Donald E. Messer, "The Chinese Banyan Tree Theology of Bishop K.H. Ting", Amity News Service, 16 April 2009, China Christian Council, 03 February 2009 <<http://www.amitynewsservice.org/page.php?page=1522>>.

light on his theological reflections.

Bishop Ting was born in 1915 to a Christian family. He attended St. John's University in Shanghai, which was run by an American Episcopal Church. Here, he learned English and studied theology. By all accounts, Ting was trained in a classical Western understanding of theology; his university was accused of contributing to the "foreignization" of Christian intellectuals.⁹⁸ Ting grew up in a politically unstable period for China. As a child, his home city of Shanghai was divided into various colonial segments, administered by France, Great Britain, and the United States. Over 30,000 foreigners lived in the city of just 1,500,000 people. A large part of Ting's formal education also took place during Japan's occupation of China from 1937 to 1945. According to Messer, the presence of these foreign powers played a great role in influencing Ting's thinking. Ting frequently resented hearing other young Chinese people debate about which foreign power they preferred controlling China. During this time, Ting led Bible studies at a local YMCA in which he discussed current social and political issues. Despite being exposed to a Western-styled theological education, Ting resisted the "foreignization" of his thinking and championed Chinese patriotism and nationalism.⁹⁹ In 1946, after the end of the Japanese occupation, Ting moved to Canada for a year to serve in the Student Christian Movement. He then moved to New York, where he received a Master's degree at Union Theological Seminary. After completing his degree, Ting became the Secretary of the World's Student Christian Federation of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1951 Ting finally returned to China during another period of political turmoil, as Mao Tse-Tung was in the process of consolidating state power. During this time, missionaries were

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

expelled from the country and all ties between Chinese churches and foreign churches were cut. In general, Ting was supportive of the position of the Chinese government, and as a result, he became the Principal of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in 1953. As leader of the TSPM, Ting became a spokesperson for the Chinese revolution and the church's response to it; he argued that Christianity and socialism should work together to improve Chinese society.

In addition to being shaped by his social and political environment, Ting was particularly influenced by the thinking of Y.T. Wu, even more so than the liberation and process theologians he occasionally cites in his writings. Ting met Wu at the YMCA, where Wu was in charge of coordinating national student work; at the time, the YMCA was a popular meeting point for progressive youth. Wu would later become Ting's life-long friend and mentor. Before meeting Wu, Ting describes himself as "unconcerned about social and political reform in China."¹⁰⁰ However, Wu challenged him, asking: "Is it enough for Christians to be concerned only with personal salvation, or should Christians be concerned about social reform?"¹⁰¹ Ting experienced "a breath of fresh air"¹⁰² upon hearing Wu describe Jesus as a patriot who loved his people and a hero who sacrificed himself to save them. He "gained political insight" and from then on was convinced that reforming China was his top priority.¹⁰³

Wu propounded the Social Gospel and its practical concern for science, progress, and social justice, believing that Christianity could provide the spiritual regeneration necessary to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

motivate the Chinese populace to embrace national reconstruction.¹⁰⁴ He argued that Christianity was simply another name for the spirit of truth that underlies all phenomena. This truth manifests itself in Christianity in what Wu referred to as “the way of love.”¹⁰⁵ Although all religions expressed this “way” in some manner, he believed that only Christ revealed “the way of love” in a way that leads to social redemption. Thus, Jesus became the great revolutionary whose way of love would topple the corrupt social and political structures that oppress humankind. Wu also criticized orthodox pietistic Christianity for separating the Spirit from the material, turning Christianity into a series of meaningless rituals, irrelevant preaching, and ignorant fundamentalism. From Wu’s perspective, Christianity’s failure to actively address social and political issues is equivalent to Christianity becoming a reactionary force that threatens progress. True progress could then only occur if Christians were willing to recognize that the Spirit of God was leading the materialist revolutions then occurring in China. For Wu, these revolutions would result in the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.¹⁰⁶ Wu saw God’s “Kingdom” as an ideal state where humankind would be liberated from persecution, oppression, and injustice, and where physical, emotional, and material needs would be met. In order for the Kingdom to be realized in China, “new roads [had] to be built, mines opened, factories operated, [and] machines installed in all sorts of industrial enterprises.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Wu believed that Christianity needed to join the forces of social and political liberation sweeping across China in the form of the Communist Revolution, if only to ensure its own survival as a religion. Wu writes, “Christianity must learn that the

¹⁰⁴ Harvey 29.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 31.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 31.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 31.

present period is one of liberation for the people, the collapse of the old system, a time when the old dead Christianity must doff its shroud and come forth arrayed in new garments.”¹⁰⁸ These ideas had a profound impact on Ting and his theology. Wu trained Ting to understand that personal transformation can only be achieved through national independence and liberation.

In addition, Ting may be described as both a “practical theologian” and an “activist-theologian.” Ting “writes from both ‘head’ and ‘heart,’ weaving a Christian theology based on the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience.”¹⁰⁹ He “does theology” with “the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.”¹¹⁰ It is likely that members of the underground church would agree with these descriptions and find them problematic. In fact, Ting’s concern with the social and the political is perhaps the clearest distinguishing feature between his theology and the theology of the house churches.

BACKGROUND OF WANG MINGDAO

Thomas Harvey says that “anyone who would plumb the depths of Christianity in China, must first come to understand Wang Mingdao.”¹¹¹ Known as the “Dean of the House Churches,” Wang Mingdao is especially famous for his legacy of resistance to the state-sponsored Three-Self Church. Like Ting, Wang too was born during a period of political turmoil in China. During the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, Wang’s father committed suicide to avoid being killed for being a Chinese Christian, or a “traitor to the empire.” Wang was born five weeks after his father’s death, and was named “Iron Wang” for surviving these

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Messer 4.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 4.

¹¹¹ Harvey 9.

circumstances. Raised with only one parent, Wang grew up in relative poverty, receiving just one meal a day. Wang claims that this experience played an important role in shaping his character. He says,

Ever since I was small I have had a certain characteristic. No matter what issue arose unless I myself could see the rightness of a certain course of action, I would not blindly follow others. On the other hand, once I had seen the rightness of a certain course of action I would allow no obstacles to hinder me following it. I may be weak in body, but I am not weak in will.¹¹²

Eventually, Wang's mother saved enough money for him to attend the London Missionary Primary School in Beijing. Here, he met an older student who happened to be a devout Christian. This student taught Wang to order his life through prayer, Bible study, and personal meditation. As a result, Wang forged very high moral standards for himself and for others. He says, "every time I erred in speech or conduct I would be grieved and reproached in heart, shedding tears over sins which I confessed before God."¹¹³ Harvey also describes Wang as being "quick to point out flaws in others as well as in the institutions he found himself in."¹¹⁴ While in mission school, Wang encountered two wealthy students who harassed other students and even the teachers. The principal was unable to discipline them because the school depended on their parents' patronage. Wang saw this as an example of Christian hypocrisy, and said that "for believers in Christ to run a school in this way is to abandon Christian principles."¹¹⁵ As a result of this experience, Wang developed a certain disdain for the rich and powerful, in time causing him to view them as sources of corruption that devour the soul of the church.

¹¹² Ibid. 14.

¹¹³ Ibid. 16.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 16.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 16.

As a teenager, Wang actually planned to pursue a career in politics. This was a period of great nationalistic ardor for China, and student rallies to galvanize patriotism were commonplace. It was during this time, however, that Wang's experience with politics diverged significantly from Ting's. At one rally, Wang and his friends were pressured to join a union, and for fear of being branded traitors, Wang's friends gave in. Wang, however, stood up and refused, and was abused and branded as a traitor as a result. Since that time, Wang swore never to get involved in the "irrational passion of the nationalist movement,"¹¹⁶ and ended his pursuit of politics.

Unable to enter Yenching University in Beijing, Wang took a teaching position at the Presbyterian Primary School in Baoding. During this time, it was common for warlords and bandits to make a living off of extortion, kidnappings, and threats of violence. Due to the anti-foreign feeling throughout the country, foreign missionaries were the most valuable targets for such kidnappings. To discourage these attacks, the Presbyterian school began training a militia, armed with guns provided by Western missionaries. Wang was disturbed by these violent inclinations, and thus began his disenchantment with the influence of foreign missionaries over the church in China. Like Ting, Wang believed it was time for missionaries to leave the country and for Chinese Christians to begin leading the Chinese church. In fact, he says, "I felt strongly that the church needed a revolution and that the mission to bring about a revolution was entrusted to me."¹¹⁷ This revelation led Wang to change his name to "Mingdao" which means "testify to the truth."

At Baoding, Wang underwent a process of spiritual transformation. He realized that

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 17.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 18.

the more I prayed the more conscious I became of my unworthiness. I am unclean, vicious and hateful....No matter how good a man is, only let him be illumined by the Spirit of God and he becomes conscious of his own utter depravity....I was willing to obey him fully. I was ready to serve him faithfully all my life. From that day on my life was gradually but wonderfully changed.¹¹⁸

In this manner, Wang dedicated his life to serving God. He then returned to Beijing with no job and no prospects. Unable to find work, Wang designed a study space for himself, which he called “God’s Bible School.” According to Harvey, this period of failure, shame, and despair enlightened Wang’s reading of the Bible, for “some of God’s promises are written as it were in visible ink [and] it is only when they are placed in the flame of suffering [that] they become manifest.”¹¹⁹ During his “time in the wilderness,” Wang concluded that a university degree would only amount to a pursuit of “empty glory and fame” and that what he really needed was to “be trained and taught by God.”¹²⁰ From there, Wang decided to spend two months with his cousin in a small village in the mountains. While living there, Wang ascended the mountain each morning to spend the day in study, prayer, and praise. In two months, he read the entire Bible six times and “made considerable strides in [his] understanding of the truth.”¹²¹

Upon returning from his mountain retreat, Wang received a letter from an old friend who had heard a rumor that Wang was mentally ill. To convince his friend otherwise, Wang traveled to Tianjin to visit his friend, who was impressed with Wang’s spiritual maturity and invited him to preach. From that point forward, Wang’s reputation as a gifted preacher quickly spread. According to Wang, “when I preached I was deeply conscious of the presence of God

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 19.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 21.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 21.

¹²¹ Ibid. 21.

and enabled to speak with power and authority.’”¹²² Over the next ten years, Wang became one of the most influential preachers in China, with large audiences congregating wherever he went to preach. By 1948, he had preached in twenty-four of China’s twenty-eight provinces. Wang’s audiences identified with his attack on corruption, his call for integrity and purity, and his independence. His message was especially well received during a time when clergy and lay leadership “lacked depth” and many people converted merely for material advantages.¹²³ People responded to his call for repentance, conversion, piety, and discipline.

Wang’s rise in prominence coincided with that of Watchman Nee, John Sung, David, Yang, and Marcus Cheng, other leaders of the underground house churches, all of whom stressed repentance, conversion, holiness, doctrine, and discipleship. Evangelical and anti-liberal, they decried the leadership of modernists and liberals in the government-sanctioned churches. They argued that doubting Scripture, the resurrection, and Christ’s future return amounted to an erroneous interpretation of the Bible and a “poisoning” of the church.¹²⁴ Together with Wang, these preachers began establishing independent and indigenous churches throughout China. By 1948, they represented a quarter of all Protestant Christians in China. A comparison of the theology of the Three-Self Church with that of the house church will help explain why.

THE THEOLOGY OF K.H. TING AND THE THREE-SELF PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT

In his article “The Chinese Banyan Tree Theology of Bishop K.H. Ting,” published by Amity News Service, the publicity branch of the Chinese Christian Council, Donald Messer describes the theology of K.H. Ting as a banyan tree. In recent years, many tree species have

¹²² Ibid. 21.

¹²³ Ibid. 22.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 24.

declined and died in China as a result of high-density urbanization. However, the banyan tree has managed to flourish as a result of its resilience in stressful environmental conditions. Like the Chinese banyan tree, Messer argues that K.H. Ting's indigenous theology has provided Chinese Christians with "spiritual shade, shelter, and strength"¹²⁵ throughout China's tumultuous relationship with Christianity. He identifies four major themes in Ting's theology: 1) God's primary attribute of love, and Jesus as both the Great Lover of humanity and the Cosmic Christ, 2) the nature of humans as both sinners and "sinned-against" 3) the unity of the church, post-denominationalism, and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and 4) Chinese patriotism as expressed in Christian ethics and service.

JESUS, THE GREAT LOVER OF HUMANITY AND THE COSMIC CHRIST

Ting's conception of God as the Divine Lover underlies his entire theology and his approach to the ministry of the church. For him, "God is love. This is the greatest fact of all facts of the cosmos."¹²⁶ In his book *God is Love*, Ting writes that "more and more Chinese Christians, and I as one of them, have come to think of God as Love, as the only possible way to think of God at all."¹²⁷ He explains that earlier in his training, he had thought of God largely in terms of His omnipotence, His power, His might, His self-sufficiency, His self-containment, and His changelessness. Though Ting had realized that God was also love, he did not see love as God's supreme attribute. God's love was often overshadowed by His righteousness, His severity, His anger, His judgment, and His arbitrariness.¹²⁸ However, due to

¹²⁵ Messer 6.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 6.

¹²⁷ K.H. Ting, *God is Love: Collected Writings of Bishop K.H. Ting* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries International, 2004) 36.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 37.

the “vicissitudes of all these years,”¹²⁹ Ting has come to see the love embodied in Jesus in the four Gospels as the nature of God. In fact, for Ting, “love is at the back of God’s whole creative process.”¹³⁰ When Ting sees Christ as the revelation of God, he thinks of Christ as the revealer of God’s love. In the New Testament, Ting finds two portraits of Christ particularly unmistakable: Jesus the Great Lover of men and women, and Jesus the Cosmic Christ.

As the Great Lover of all men and women, Jesus reaches out to every human being regardless of how outcast, marginalized, or mistreated they are. Christ offers love, forgiveness, care, compassion, and companionship to the lost, the lonely, and the last. In his article “God’s Love,” Ting portrays Christ as someone who weeps with those who suffers and rejoices with those who rejoice. Christ does not condemn people who go astray but rather, protects them. For Ting, Christ truly understands human needs as he himself was “the lonely man, homeless and self-forgetful, with his outpouring of love and sympathy, his suffering and agony, his tender words on the cross, and the final victory over ruthless power.”¹³¹ Christ lived and died as a true lover.

Combined with this image of Jesus as the Great Lover, is that of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ. Ting wants to make sure that Christians understand that Christ did more than die on the cross. In fact, according to Ting, Christ sustains the universe. “He is the primacy over all creation. He exists before all things, and all things are held together in him. He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. In him all things were created, things visible and invisible.”¹³² Moreover, Christ has been and is with God in all the creative work in the

¹²⁹ Ibid. 37.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 37.

¹³¹ Ibid. 40.

¹³² Ibid. 40.

universe, even to this day. In combining Jesus as the Lover of men and women with Jesus as the Cosmic Christ, Ting began to see Jesus as the Cosmic Lover or the Creator-Lover.

According to Ting, such a view of God is revolutionary for Chinese Christians. Chinese Christians have been taught to recognize God for His almightiness, His severity, and His unrelenting judgment of nonbelievers. They view God as a “Ruling Caesar” and go to church simply to seek God’s favor, for fear of falling sick as punishment. He criticizes Chinese Christians for believing that ministry work can win God’s pleasure and bring health and wellbeing to the family. In fact, Ting has a rather accurate perception of Chinese Christianity in many parts of China. He writes,

Many Christians at the grassroots enjoy ‘testimony’ meetings’ in which anybody can speak. At such meetings, a common pattern emerges: some misfortune happens to a person; he or she searches for his or her sin or sins; after identifying the sin or sins and confessing to God and much praying, God moves away the misfortune. On the other hand, misfortune lingers and intensifies for those who are hardhearted and do not repent, culminating in unending suffering and death in the family.¹³³

Ting critiques such a view of God, arguing that it creates a “spirituality of acquisition and utilitarianism.”¹³⁴ He criticizes Christians for praising God and expecting health, wealth, and protection in return. Such Christians only see church “as if it were Noah’s Ark, without a faith that concerns itself with the welfare of the people outside.”¹³⁵

This view contradicts sharply with Ting’s own perception of God. For Ting, God is love, and in being love, God has rejected the power of coercion over men and women. Thus, love is the motivation behind all of God’s work in nature and in history—not punishment or reward. Ting argues that no other view is possible; he writes,

¹³³ Ibid. 41.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 42.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 42.

We must not...[give] to God the attributes that belong exclusively to Pharoah, Caesar and their like. We need to relegate to the side all those attributes such as his absolute power, his absolute knowledge. His absolute changelessness, his absolute dominion, his arbitrariness and intolerance, imposed on God as a reflection of an absolutization of human beings' own cravings, especially those of male human beings. These attributes need to be de-absolutized and subordinated to God's supreme attribute of love.¹³⁶

God is not a cosmic tyrant who forces obedience. Ting finds it more important to see God as Christ-like than to see Christ as God-like. Moreover, it is with this Christ-like love that God runs the cosmos. In affirming love as the supreme attribute of God, Ting relegates God's omnipotence and omniscience to second place.

Ting then goes on to argue that God, in his love, craves the emergence of people with whom God can have fellowship. Fellowship, in turn implies freedom. In order for humans to enjoy freedom, God must respect human choices and therefore curtail his own omnipotence. Thus, not everything that happens in nature and history is God's work and design. Many things happen that contradict God's loving kindness and are harmful to the welfare of the world. For Ting, Creation is a long process that is not yet complete, and is imperfect. Creation involves the making of free human beings who are not slaves, but children of God. Because the world is still in the making, ugliness and devilry have their place. It is natural that both God and human beings suffer in order to reach the goal of a perfect community.¹³⁷ Knowledge of God's love provides humans with hope that God is working with humans towards this purpose. Because Jesus is the Great Lover and the Cosmic Christ, it is not God's will for the masses to suffer. God is not all-powerful, nor is He in control of every event in a person's life. Instead, God is all-loving, and all-caring about every event in a person's life.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 43.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 45.

Ting's belief in God also converges with his convictions about socialism. According to Ting, socialism is love organized for the masses of the people. Ting is convinced that "for China, neither feudalism, nor colonialism, nor capitalism is acceptable as an alternative to the social system we call socialism with Chinese characteristics which, in forty years, has enabled twelve hundred million human beings to live more decently in the next century."¹³⁸ According to Ting, socialism is not an accident in history. Rather, it is the road for Chinese society to liberate and develop the country's productive power, improve people's material livelihood, and raise cultural self-respect. Ting argues that the unfair distribution of wealth produced by capitalist systems creates endless suffering; this is harmful, because in such a state, people cannot recognize God's love.

Ting acknowledges the fact that socialism is intricately tied to atheism. He asks "Does the advocacy of atheism affect my support of socialism?"¹³⁹ His answer is a blatant "No." He sees both atheists and Christians as "half-completed products" in God's creative process. There are atheists who are sincerely devoted to efforts to fashion a more humane society. Thus, "their cry against God is really a cry in favor of humanity."¹⁴⁰ Ting even argues that Christians should be sympathetic to atheism in that it rejects false notions of God. The God that atheists reject is the same "tyrannical Jupiter who chains Prometheus to a cliff because he does good for humanity, or the ruthless underworld King Yen...who sends emissaries to fetch people to be thrown into everlasting hell,"¹⁴¹ the same concepts of God that Ting wishes to dispel. According to Ting, atheistic humanism is simply another form of human seeking after God.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 38.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 39.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 39.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 39.

Without being aware of it, atheists can be allies with Christians in salvaging the “authentic faith.” As Ting’s wife puts it, “As Chinese Christians we do not see Christianity and socialist China as opposed to each other. It is God working, whether in his name or not.”¹⁴² For this reason, Christians ought to join forces with all humanitarians—even if they are atheists—so as to oppose the idolatry in those views of God that diminish human dignity and block human liberation.¹⁴³

HUMANS AS BOTH SINNERS AND “SINNED-AGAINST”

The second major theme in Ting’s theology is the idea that human beings are both sinners and “sinned-against.” Ting affirms the traditional Christian concept that human beings are imperfect and fall short of God’s standards. He agrees that everyone is in need of God’s redemption and forgiveness. At the same time, however, Ting does not deny human goodness. He argues that in spite of the fall, a human being is still the image of God and the mirror of His glory. Ting commends heroic human actions such as those that occur during times of crisis. Since the goodness of human beings stems from God’s creation and God’s love, it should not be dismissed, but recognized. God’s divine image emerges in people at unexpected times.¹⁴⁴ Ting’s validation of human goodness is rooted in his recognition that sin is not just personal. Instead, sin is embedded in social structures and processes. Thus, reformation of society is necessary in order for a real reformation of the human being to occur. Societies that are embroiled in poverty, corruption, disease, hunger and crime, will only breed more poverty, corruption, disease, hunger, and crime. People who are exploited by colonial governments and

¹⁴² Messer 7.

¹⁴³ Ting 39.

¹⁴⁴ Messer 7.

international corporations are vulnerable, and are more “sinned-against” than sinful.¹⁴⁵

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH, POST-DENOMINATIONALISM, AND THE THREE-SELF PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT

Ting’s third major emphasis is on the unity of the church as exemplified in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Ting believes it is necessary for Chinese Christians to move toward a new understanding of the church to suit the needs of contemporary China. Such a post-denominational model would more accurately coincide with the church portrayed in the Bible. China’s post-denominationalism is a direct political result of being cut off from “foreign” denominations in 1949. This circumstance allowed Ting to “transcend and transform the narrow Western denominational histories and practices that were earlier imported to China,”¹⁴⁶ and unite Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventists, Methodists, Anglicans, Evangelicals, and others under one umbrella church. His efforts have allowed the church in China to “hold together in genuine respect and equality Christians who historically and theologically often have been light-years apart.”¹⁴⁷ Ting believes the Three-Self Patriotic Movement has been key to this development, and to making Christianity “Chinese” through its principles of self-support, self-governance, and self-propagation. However, Ting argues that a true indigenous theology has yet to be realized. During the anti-foreignism of the late 1800s, it was said that “the addition of a Christian to the church [was seen as] the loss of a citizen to China.”¹⁴⁸ For this reason, Ting emphasizes the importance of the emergence of an indigenous Chinese Christian theology. This theology must be separated from Aristotelian, Latin, and Teutonic thought. Though Ting affirms the core faith and values of historic Christianity, such

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 8.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 9.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 9.

¹⁴⁸ Suman 134.

as the Nicene and Apostle's Creed, he also believes that Christian faith will remain foreign until it is communicated as an authentic Chinese expression. Thus, Ting's campaign of "theological reconstruction" can be considered the last step in his move towards post-denominationalism.

CHINESE PATRIOTISM AS EXPRESSED IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND SERVICE

The fourth major theme in Ting's theology is his commitment to Chinese patriotism. According to Ting, Chinese Christians are called to demonstrate their love and loyalty for their country through community service. This is a direct implication of biblical precepts that command Christians to love God and neighbor. Christians must also exemplify high ethics and morals in society. According to Ting, ethics have an important missiological value given Confucianism's deep impact in China. Many people have converted to Christianity in China precisely because of the ethical content of the Gospel. Thus, Ting is extraordinarily critical of Christians who claim that service is "unspiritual" or who look down on the "Social Gospel." Instead, Ting believes that the Bible integrates the spiritual and the societal, citing Matthew 20:28: "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."¹⁴⁹ There are too many reforms that must occur in China for the government to do on its own. For this reason, Ting's premier slogan is "love country, love church." This notion must not remain theoretical; rather, it must be made visible in deeds of service to society and to the church.¹⁵⁰ Important areas of service include: the promotion of literacy; cleanliness and hygiene; the advancement of equality between men and women; thrift in weddings, funerals, and other ceremonies; care for the handicapped, the sick, and the poor; the fight against the buying and selling of brides; and

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 20:28.

¹⁵⁰ Messer 10.

environmental protection. Clearly, many of these service programs are catered to the cultural and social circumstances of China. Ting believes that through such service, Christians will be able to truly witness Christ.

TING'S THEOLOGY, LIBERATION THEOLOGY, AND PROCESS THEOLOGY

From this analysis, it is clear that Ting's theology retains many of the influences of process and liberation theologies. In fact, Ting's idea of the Cosmic Christ is borrowed directly from process thought. It is also from process theology that Ting draws his notion of God as love. According to Robert Mesle, a recognized authority on process thought, "God is love....It is through God's love that all things live and move and have their being."¹⁵¹ Like process theologians, Ting downplays God's omniscience and omnipotence. In process theology, God's omniscience is simply God's ability to know everything there is to know as a range of possibilities and probabilities. God's power is manifested in God's ability to persuade through love, not coercion. Such ideas are reflected in Ting's argument that God limits his own omnipotence in order to respect human freedom. As a result, God is unable to prevent human suffering. However, through love, God pushes humans to work together to alleviate suffering by improving their community. This view converges nicely with Ting's socialism, which requires all citizens to participate in community service to build a better China. Ting also draws from liberation theology in his arguments about the need for Christianity to be involved in the liberation of humans from structures of oppression. Like liberation theologians, Ting attributes much of this oppression to colonialism and capitalist economic systems. In the tradition of liberation theology, Ting also emphasizes the need for Christians to be concerned

¹⁵¹ Robert Mesle, Process Theology: A Basic Introduction (Missouri: Chalice Press, 1993) 8.

about social justice and the plight of the poor.

However, Ting never completely embraces liberation theology and refuses to identify his “indigenous Chinese theology” as such. He fears that liberation theology may have the effect of idealizing or romanticizing the poor. Ting writes that we should

hesitate to think that the poor, just because they are poor, are necessarily the bearers of truth and that the mandate of history is necessarily in the hands of the poor in their struggle against the rich. To be poor is miserable. The poor deserve justice. But poverty is no virtue, unless voluntary, and does not always bring with it wisdom. To make a messiah of the poor just because they are poor and to pit the poor against the rich...is neither Marxist nor Christian.¹⁵²

Ting acknowledges that liberation theology is relevant to the Chinese situation in that it affirms a “Savior on the Cross who redeems human beings from sin...and enables Christians to start from the great love of Christ and his salvation to an awareness of their own responsibility in the tasks of liberation of humankind.”¹⁵³ Like liberation theologians, Ting hopes to see the realization of the Kingdom of God in human history, through the improvement of the health and welfare of the Chinese people. However, Ting differs from liberation theologians in that he believes the key purpose of theology is to reconcile humans with God and other humans—not liberation.¹⁵⁴ Thus, Ting draws upon liberation theology to reconstruct classical Christianity in a way that allows Christianity to work hand in hand with socialism. At the same time, however, Ting is reluctant to fully endorse liberation theology. It is possible that this reluctance may be due to liberation theology’s historical ties with violence and revolution. Allied with China’s authoritarian government, Ting is more interested in promoting national stability by constructing a theology that emphasizes God’s love and

¹⁵² Messer 8.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 8.

goodness, and that encourages citizens to participate in community service.

THE THEOLOGY OF WANG MINGDAO AND THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH

Unlike Bishop Ting, Wang Mingdao offered a simple message of repentance, conversion, and salvation. Wang's audiences were not intellectuals, but common people, and his message was tailored to their needs. Embroiled in social and political turmoil, people responded to Wang's sermons, which emphasized self-discipline and the promise of divine succor. To those within the church, Wang preached separation from corruption and encouraged people to live a life of simplicity, purity, faith, and discipline. For the clergy, Wang's key message was integrity, discouraging them from consorting with "false prophets." Wang also addressed those outside the church, exhorting them to turn away from idols and superstition and to put their faith in Christ.

REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION

Perhaps the central pillars of Wang's theology are repentance and conversion. Having always hated corruption, Wang believes that the pursuit of wealth, power, influence, and pleasure simply ends in bondage. The only way to be set free is through faith in Christ. According to Wang, all the afflictions of the world—sickness, evil, bloodshed, violence, and disease—are rooted in "evil desire." From such evil flows personal and social disorder. Order and purity can only be restored through grace, faith, and discipline.¹⁵⁵ For this reason, repentance is key. Wang says, "Without doubt those who genuinely believe in the Lord Jesus will first have repented before God....It is necessary first to repent before you can speak in terms of believing in the Lord Jesus....We need first to make people aware of their sin and of

¹⁵⁵ Harvey 34.

the painful consequences of sin.”¹⁵⁶ Only through such repentance and conversion can there be real transformation. In fact, Wang claims to have witnessed countless numbers of people—the hardhearted and the loveless—whose lives have been transformed after turning to God in repentance.¹⁵⁷ He says, “People who were once fierce and violent have become like sheep. People who once sought their own interests now seek the interests of others. People who were once discouraged are now aflame with zeal. Those who were once broken-hearted and those who once wept are now greatly comforted.”¹⁵⁸ In his promotion of repentance and conversion, Wang is openly critical of the Three-Self Church’s view on the matter. He says,

The protagonists of the social gospel criticize these people and condemn their activities as emotional and they charge these people with being superstitious and deceived. The fact is, not only does the preaching of the social gospel fail to get better results than this, they even fail to match up to them.¹⁵⁹

Though both Wang and Ting believe that only reformed people can reform society, Wang believes that it is only through repentance and conversion that one can find an alternative to the “vice and corruption that poisons all life.”¹⁶⁰ Wang also equates “conversion” to the movement from confusion to clarity and disorder to order through faith in Christ. After thirty years of social and political upheaval, Wang’s message of religious faith, doctrine, and discipline resonated strongly with those who felt the need for China to reestablish an ethical society.

ETHICS

This emphasis on ethics, or *Daode*, marks the second key pillar of Wang’s theology. Like

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 34.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 35.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 35.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 35.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 35.

Ting, Wang too tried cultivate an indigenous Chinese theology by integrating his theological views with traditional Chinese ethics. In Chinese, “*Dao*” literally means “the path or way,” but refers primarily to truth or doctrine. Wang sees doctrine and life as inextricably intertwined, and when properly ordered, they produce excellence (*de*). Thus, *Daode* refers to the way, the life, and the truth of excellence. Wang also viewed Christ as the true sage. In Daoism, the sage, or enlightened ruler, is one who can cultivate order and harmony by following a path of non-aggressive action. The sage nourishes all things and continually returns things to harmony and balance. The sage is also someone who has gained a wisdom that extends beyond mere intellectual knowledge, and who has an intuitive understanding of life. By living a holy and blameless life, Christ exemplified all the characteristics of a true sage. Through his teaching and preaching, Christ demonstrated the path people should follow, and the duties they should perform. Thus, for Wang, Christ is the ultimate teacher and example of the *Daode*. It is the role of the church to exemplify the “life of Christ” and embody the *Daode* of Christ. Wang describes this role as such:

Christ raised up certain people to whom He said, ‘You are the light of the world!’ Who are these people? Can it be other than those of us who are His disciples? What a marvelous mandate! What a noble calling! Since we are to be the ‘light of the world’ in the same way that He was ‘the light of the world,’ then our words and deeds, like those of the Lord, ought always to be throwing light on the path of the people in darkness.¹⁶¹

From this quotation it is easy to see that Wang viewed the world as two separate paths. Those outside Christ walked in darkness, while those who followed the path (*Dao*) of Christ enjoyed a life in the light. Thus, Christians should model good ethics through their lives:

When an artist paints a picture or does a carving, he places an actual object in front of him, and with this before him he paints his picture or does his carving.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 36.

We call that object a model. Every Christian ought to be a model, a pattern. Thus, if people are ignorant as to how they should order their life, all they need to do is watch a Christian and then they should know. But the fundamental question is this, how many Christians today are in a position to serve as patterns for others? How many are worthy to be patterns?¹⁶²

From here it can also be seen that one of Wang's key concerns was for God's way to be manifest in the world through the church. It is for this reason that Wang was particularly frustrated by the corruption of churches in China. For Wang, corrupt churches could not offer the gospel. Instead, like Israel, their paths are disordered by the ways of the fallen world and lead only to darkness and death. He says, "God has commanded those who belong to Him to come out from unbelievers and to be separate from them. Yet the Church of the present-day persists in following worldly ways and in going hand in hand with those who are God's enemies."¹⁶³ The purification of the church thus became one of Wang's top priorities. Such purification demanded the exposure of the corrupt practices of Christians and Christian leaders. He criticized these Christians for ingratiating foreign missionaries in return for financial security and prestige.

FUNDAMENTALISM

Even more so than corruption, Wang was concerned about the message of Christian modernists. "Modernism" refers to a theological shift that occurred amongst Protestants and Roman Catholics during the early 20th century. This shift arose as a result of the need to reconcile Christianity with the new scientific findings of the time. Modernists attempted to find new interpretations of religious experience that could accommodate the implications of the theory of evolution and the discoveries of psychology and archaeology. They tended to

¹⁶² Ibid. 36.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 37.

deny the objective value of traditional beliefs and regard many of the Christian dogmas as symbolic rather than factual (such as God's creation of the universe in six days). Modernists also denied a literal interpretation of the Bible and the historicity of the Jesus Christ of the Gospels. Rather than emphasizing the importance of formal creeds, modernists simply stressed good ethical and moral behavior. Liberals and modernists also applied their views through the social gospel. They emphasized the saving of society over the saving of individuals. Such progress could be embodied in moves towards world peace, the end of racial discrimination, and the advancement of social justice.¹⁶⁴ Clearly, Ting's theology, influenced by liberation and process theologies, would also fall under this category.

From Wang's perspective, liberal and modernist Christians preached "another gospel" that had exchanged the kingdom of God for a lesser kingdom of social improvement. He saw their attempt to fuse the gospel with national liberation as heresy. According to Wang, the Three-Self Church, which clearly exhibits modernist views in its theological leanings, had given up the gospel in exchange for "mere placebos" that could never get at the root of human misery and social disorder. He explains,

Obviously we...recognize the need to eliminate killing and violence and robberies and diseases and pain—all of which characterize life in society today. But we ought also to understand that all these calamities are ultimately the result of sin. So long as you do not solve the question of sin you cannot even begin to talk about anything else.¹⁶⁵

For Wang, the myopic perspective of modernists like Ting has blinded them to humankind's most critical need, which is to be reconciled with God. He asks:

What is the greatest need of mankind? Is it extravagant clothes? Is it lavish food? Is it a congenial occupation? Is it adequate medical provision? Is it upright

¹⁶⁴ "What Liberal Protestants Believe," Beliefnet, 2008, Beliefnet, 20 April 2009 <<http://www.beliefnet.com/>>.

¹⁶⁵ Harvey 39.

politics? Is it a comprehensive system of law? Is it a higher level of society? Is it harmony among the nations? Is it the reform of our habits? Is it the establishment of virtue? All these are the needs of mankind. But the greatest need of all is not among them. Mankind's greatest need is to come to God for forgiveness of sin in order to have eternal life. Whether people acknowledge it or not, their greatest need is to be brought into touch with God. For God is the source of all happiness. But they have been cut off from God by sin and they themselves are unable to bridge the gap. What else can people do but endure pain and await the onset of death?¹⁶⁶

Despite his rhetoric, Wang's main conflict with the modernists was not over the goal of social improvement, but rather, over the means for achieving it. While modernists like Ting saw human beings as both sinners and "sinned-against," with sin being a function of social structures, Wang saw individual sin as the root of all evil. Modernists believed that social reconstruction required the reformation of both individuals and political institutions. In contrast, Wang believed that social reconstruction needed to come through the church. However, it was not the church's purpose to serve and support the flawed social and political visions of a corrupt society. Instead, the church was to offer a clear alternative to this corrupt society in Jesus Christ. Wang criticized modernists for relying on secular institutions to set the goals of the society in which God was at work. Thus, Wang's chief opponents became those who saw the kingdom of God as realized in the secular transformation of society. He openly condemned their message saying:

I cannot do other than to oppose those who preach merely the social gospel. They do not attack me first, but they will certainly mount a counterattack. I recognize that this is inevitable, but I do not shrink from the encounter nor do I seek to evade it. For the sake of the commission that God has entrusted to me, for the protection of the Church, for the good of mankind, and for the glory of God—for all these reasons I must oppose the social gospel and warn those who preach it.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 39.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 40.

In his article “Obey God or Obey Men?” published in his journal *Spiritual Food Quarterly*, Wang compared modernist leaders with the “religious leaders” in the Bible who persecuted the Apostles. He accuses them of using the authority of the Three-Self Church to deceive believers who don’t fully understand the truths of the Bible. This results in the faith of the Church being subordinated to the rule of men and men’s authority. The truth then becomes obscured, the Bible misinterpreted, and the foundations of the Church undermined. In his commentary “The Missing Voice,” Wang relates himself to the biblical character Micaiah, who resisted the four hundred false prophets that tried to lead Israel astray.¹⁶⁸ Wang believes that the true prophet stands alone and is opposed by the many and the powerful. The true prophet speaks the word of God regardless of the consequences, even if it may sting. In contrast, false prophets say what they must to gain good fortune. From Wang’s perspective, the leaders of the Three-Self Church are like these false prophets, who have diluted the Christian message in return for political power. He says:

Today the Church is in a sad state, burning incense to all kinds of ‘golden calves’ and worshipping at strange altars. Many preachers who should be rebuking sin with God’s Word have become silent. Among them, some are afraid to risk danger and calamity, and so they dare not open their mouths for God. Others are out for their own benefit, which requires that they please men. Therefore they cannot speak the truth of God...At this time what the Church urgently needs are prophets who are not afraid of power people.¹⁶⁹

Thus, Wang was clearly opposed to the theology of the Three-Self Church with its “heretical” teachings and corrupt leaders.

NECESSITY OF SUFFERING

Another major theme of Wang’s teachings was the necessity of suffering. He believed

¹⁶⁸ 2 Chronicles 18.

¹⁶⁹ Harvey 74.

that persecution and suffering were necessary for people to resist idolatry and evil. For Wang, suffering was not a sign of defeat and dishonor, but rather, a badge of honor and a powerful weapon against the enemies of God's elect. Suffering revealed the ultimate struggle between God's sovereign rule and the disorder of humankind. Truth, holiness, and suffering were the church's weapons to overcome evil. As Harvey puts it, "if truth exposed evil, holiness kept it at bay, but it was suffering that in the end vanquished evil."¹⁷⁰ Wang also saw persecution and suffering as prerequisites for purification, vindication, and the expansion of the church in history. Wang fervently believed that persecution served God's ends; it is for this reason that he was confident that the threats he faced would not be carried through. In fact, he believes that the more sincere Christians are persecuted, the stronger they will become in their faith. In the same way that Christ suffered at the hands of the government, so too must Chinese Christians. In line with Wang's theology of suffering was his emphasis on accepting God's will. He encouraged his followers to trust the Lord without any doubt, uneasiness, or fear. The Lord has already shown his love for humankind through his death and resurrection. Since the Lord loves humans so, "He would never do anything that is detrimental to you."¹⁷¹ He quotes Jesus in saying, "What I am doing you do not understand now; but you will know after this,' you will be greatly comforted and gladdened."¹⁷² Thus, suffering is but one trial within the walk of faith; to Wang, God always has the best intentions for humankind.

THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH'S CRITIQUE OF THE THREE-SELF CHURCH

K.H. Ting and Wang Mingdao clearly have different priorities within their teachings.

Ting is more concerned about what it means to be a Christian in the world, with his emphasis

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 75.

¹⁷¹ Wang Mingdao, Spiritual Food, trans. Arthur Reynolds (Southampton: Mayflower Christian, 1983) 59.

¹⁷² Ibid. 59.

on God's love and the importance of service and patriotism. Wang, on the other hand, preaches about repentance, conversion, and reliance on God, denouncing the corruption of this world. However, an even clearer portrait of the differences between these two leaders can be gained from an examination of the underground church's critique of the Three-Self Church.

Immediately preceding his arrest, Wang engaged K.H. Ting in a polemical battle. In an article entitled "Truth or Poison?" Wang sought to expose the ideological foundations that put the TSPM at odds with the gospel. The TSPM denounced Wang for making reactionary distinctions between believers and unbelievers, which served to separate Christians from the masses. However, for Wang, such a distinction is biblical. Without a distinction between believers and unbelievers, the gospel would be unintelligible. To prove his point, Wang turned to Scripture and cited several biblical texts that made no sense apart from making a distinction between believers and unbelievers. Using his interpretation of the Bible, Wang challenged the TSPM to refute the meaning of these passages. To defend his literalist way of reading the Bible, Wang argued:

Let me ask if what I have written here is a distortion of the Bible? I have argued only upon the testimony of Scripture. The words are not many or difficult to understand nor do they require in-depth analysis. Anyone with true faith in the Lord can understand what I have written....If you argue that Christ and his teachings are in error, you are truly an 'anti-Christian institution' and a new 'anti-Christian movement.'¹⁷³

For Wang, the "unity" promoted by the TSPM required that Christians "sunder Christianity from Scripture, sound doctrine, and the essence and mission of the church."¹⁷⁴ Without a distinction between believers and unbelievers, biblical terms such as "sin," "repentance,"

¹⁷³ Harvey 82.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 82.

“conversion,” and “sanctification,” simply become political rhetoric. This doesn’t mean that Christians shouldn’t join with non-Christians to support a common cause that affects both Christians and non-Christians. Rather, Wang objected to the demand of the TSPM that Christians enter into Christian union with those who deny Christianity’s central tenets (which, for Wang, included the TSPM itself). For this reason, Wang argued that the division between fundamentalists and modernists could not be bridged without making a mockery of what (fundamentalist) Christians professed to believe.¹⁷⁵ Wang simply could not accept Ting’s statement that “those who do not believe in Christ will also finally enjoy eternal salvation.”¹⁷⁶

In another article entitled “We Because of Faith,” Wang argues that his main conflict with the Three-Self Church is not political, but theological. Their main divisions are over doctrinal issues such as biblical authority, miracles, the atonement, and the second coming of Christ. For Wang, Christianity implies a faith in Christ and an adherence to what Scripture revealed about him. According to Wang, modernists viewed Scripture as symbolic and mythical, and manipulated its words to meet social needs. This was unacceptable to Wang, who held Scripture as the inspired Word of God. For Wang, Scripture must be at the heart of the faith, life, and union of the church. He says, “the modernists who explain away the fundamental doctrines about Christ and say they are not essential to faith, are they not dishonoring, despising, and denying the Son? Are they not ‘transgressing, and abiding not in the doctrine of Christ?’”¹⁷⁷ For this reason, Wang was extremely critical of those who wanted to base the church on secular philosophical, social, or political foundations. In fact, Wang referred to this collection of modernist ideas as “a faction of unbelief.” He writes, “The faction

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 86.

¹⁷⁶ Li 28.

¹⁷⁷ Harvey 87.

of unbelief has intentionally eliminated every important biblical principle, which is accepted by faith...they did not believe in God's omnipotence and omniscience. They did not believe the redemption, resurrection and return of Christ. They were clearly unbelievers."¹⁷⁸ Other criticisms Wang had for Ting and the Three-Self Church included: their lack of belief that Man was directly created by God; their denial of the virgin birth of Christ; their denial that Jesus redeemed men from their sins on the Cross; and their lack of belief that Jesus will come again. In the past, modernists such as Y.T. Wu have blatantly expressed their unbelief, describing the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Trinity, the Last Judgment, and the Second Coming as "absurd, fantastic and incomprehensible beliefs...No matter how hard I forced myself, I could never accept them."¹⁷⁹ Similarly, Ting has said that "theological thought [can undergo] appropriate adjustments...we strongly believe that Christ accomplished the task of reconciling God and Man while on the Cross. However, we are unable to express clearly how that was actually accomplished. There are many theological interpretations."¹⁸⁰ Such words were seen by house church Christians as denoting unbelief in the literal words of the Bible, and literalism became one of the key distinguishing features between the Three-Self Church and the house church.

According to Li Xinyuan, author of *Theological Construction or Destruction: An Analysis of the Theology of Bishop K.H. Ting*, house church Christians also object to Ting's very view of God. As mentioned earlier, Ting's theology is based primarily on the notion that God is love. Li agrees that the Bible reveals God's love, and that God's love endures forever. However, according to Li, the Bible does not say that because God is love, love is God's first attribute.

¹⁷⁸ Li 25.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 27.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 28.

God has also proclaimed in many areas of the Bible that He is good (Psalm 136) and that He is holy (Leviticus 11:44, 1 Peter 4:16). How, then, can one tell what God's first attribute is? Rather, Li believes that God does not have a first or a last attribute. Instead, God has multiple attributes harmoniously united. God's perfection is manifested through the completeness and indivisibility of His attributes.¹⁸¹ These attributes include: holiness, kindness, goodness, righteousness, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and everlasting being. According to Li, no "Bible-respecting" theologian would arbitrarily uplift any one attribute of God over the others because God's attributes are mutually regulating, mutually complementary, and mutually affirming. Thus, it is impossible to speak about God's love without also speaking of His other qualities; this type of "love" does not exist. Every one of God's qualities is basic to His nature. From this analysis, Li concludes that Ting created his own image of god to serve his own beliefs, that of Marxism. Moreover, for Li, Ting's definition of love does not even express the true meaning of *agape*, divine love. The primary meaning of *agape* is to sacrifice out of goodness so that the recipient may have joy. From a biblical perspective, this means that God's love is expressed in the sacrifice of his Son to remove God's wrath for Man's sin. God's attribute of love thus requires the loved ones to accept His love by faith. This is the love of Jesus as revealed in the Gospel. Only through faith can humans establish a relationship with God and obtain salvation. However, Ting seems to see God's love more as an essential attribute of the universe. From Li's perspective, Ting is simply using this view of God to make up for some of Communism's deficiencies.

Li also disagrees with Ting's idea of Jesus as the "Cosmic Christ" or the "Universal Christ." Ting borrowed this idea of the Cosmic Christ from the writings of Teilhard de

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 33.

Chardin. However, Ting linked the concept with the practical happenings of the Chinese revolution. In Li's view, such a theory of Christ allowed Ting to "transfer from a narrow Christ who is concerned only for Christian believers to a broader Christ who fills all...[setting himself free from] a narrow theological view....that differentiates believers from nonbelievers."¹⁸² Li's issue with this approach is that this "narrow theological view" is actually the "evangelical gospel truth" and is the faith of the vast majority of Christians in China. Moreover, Ting's notion of the "Universal Christ" arises from the historical reforms that took place in China during the establishment of the People's Republic of China. These historical reforms led Ting to believe that "in China, the new creature that Paul spoke of has already come, the difference being that this new creature is not within the church but outside it."¹⁸³ For Li, social and political reforms have no persuasiveness in theological thinking. Instead, Li argues that no historical reform can produce what Paul had called the "new creature." Paul was truly referring to those born again by the Holy Spirit. Li thus criticizes Ting's concept of the Universal Christ or Cosmic Christ for perpetuating the idea of universal salvation, allowing all humans to be saved whether they believe in Christ or not. Ting also saw Christ as the "internal driving force" of the evolution of the universe. As mentioned earlier, Ting believes that the universe is not yet complete, and that there is no limit to God's creation. Christ has participated and is participating in the creation of all things. Li also criticizes this aspect of the Cosmic Christ by arguing that the Bible clearly shows that God had finished His work of creation by the seventh day. Ting also sees redemption as a link in the process of continuous creation. This is problematic for Li as it denies the "genuine" redemption that results through

¹⁸² Ibid. 50.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 50.

the blood of Christ. Li sees evidence of Ting's denial of salvation through Christ in statements such as these: "We cannot explain very well why the incarnation is necessary in God's creative process; nor how Christ and his crucifixion affects our reconciliation with God."¹⁸⁴ When Ting refers to resurrection, he refers to the experience of China as a nation, a resurrection in the Chinese Christian's personal, national, and church life, rather than the resurrection of Christ. Even more unacceptable, Ting says that Christ's resurrection "goes counter to common sense,"¹⁸⁵ and that "Emmanuel did not have to take place in a male body."¹⁸⁶ For Li, such ideas contradict a literalist interpretation of the Bible as well as the notion that God is a God with a plan.¹⁸⁷

Finally, Li takes issue with Ting's theory of Man. As mentioned earlier, Ting's theology emphasizes the goodness of human beings, for humans are both sinners and "sinned-against." Li, however, sees this view as humanistic, and thus a distortion of biblical revelation. He argues that such an emphasis shows that "Man is the real center of [Ting's] concern."¹⁸⁸ Demurring with Ting's view of God as an abstract universal principle, Li depicts Ting as describing Man as "a wonderful piece of work! His rationality is so noble! How limitless his power!...The cream of the universe! The spiritual chief of all things!"¹⁸⁹ From Li's perspective, in doing so, Ting thoroughly denies Man's sinful nature. This can be seen in Ting's denial of the necessity of Christ's salvation, his denial of salvation by justification and faith, and his denial of the universality and reality of sin. Li's reading of the Bible clearly shows that Man's sinful condition is what broke his relationship with God. Li believes that sin entered the world

¹⁸⁴ Li quoting Ting, in Li 62.

¹⁸⁵ Li 63.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 64.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 64.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 69.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 75.

through Man's disobedience to God. It is because of sin that Christ became flesh. Thus, Ting's perception of sin as some "ugly and violent" phenomena that is the result of Man's still being in the process of creation, is erroneous. Moreover, Li sees Ting's view of Man as resulting from his adherence to traditional Chinese humanism. Ting himself has said that he considers himself "a Chinese intellectual cultivated in the Confucian tradition and not entirely Christianized."¹⁹⁰ For this reason, Ting is sympathetic to Mencius' teaching of the "good nature of Man," and in turn, rejects the orthodox doctrine of "total depravity." Ting's writings are permeated with subjective humanism. Ting always starts with *we* – "*we* are willing; *we* like; and *we* want. In other words [caricaturing Ting, Li surmises]...*we* only want the God that *we* like. *We* mold God into a shape *we* like."¹⁹¹ Li disagrees with this view, as it puts Man before God, and makes Man master of his own destiny.

From the perspective of Chinese Christians like Wang and Li, Ting's theology is nothing more than a combination of Marxist dialectical materialism, Communism, liberal theology, process theology, and liberation theology. Because Ting's ideas are filled with secular, political, and cultural perspectives, the house church refuses to "treat them simply as theology."¹⁹² From their perspective, Ting is merely a politico-religious figure that emerged from a particular environment for the purpose of "accommodating" God's word to human Communist ideology. They believe that Chinese Communism is his basic belief and ultimate concern. Ting himself describes Communism as "the community of mankind according to God's will' or a 'higher faith.'"¹⁹³ Thus, from the perspective of the house church, Ting is simply searching for

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 72.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 78.

¹⁹² Ibid. 29.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 29.

a theological basis for his “basic belief,” which is Marxism.

These fundamental theological differences between Bishop Ting and Wang Mingdao help explain the antagonism between the underground church and the Three-Self Church. From the perspective of many house church members, the theology of the Three-Self Church is heretical, and even “unchristian.” This prevents the two churches from ever integrating, and enables the underground church to continue growing much faster than its rival. The next chapter will explore the sociopolitical implications of the rapid growth of China’s underground church.

CHAPTER 3

MARCHING BACK TOWARDS JERUSALEM

As with any evangelical religious movement, there are significant implications to the growth of China's underground church. In fact, one might argue that house churches in China lie at the center of the global evangelical movement today. Despite claiming independence, many house churches continue to receive patronage from churches in the United States and Europe. Together with their American counterparts, these house churches seek to fulfill the Christianization of China. At the same time, the underground church aims to grow beyond the borders of China, spreading the gospel to South and Western Asia and the Middle East. In fact, the "Back to Jerusalem Movement" works closely with American churches to evangelize through the "10/40 Window." In tracing the movement of missionary work from the United States to China and from China to the Middle East, the underground church finds itself at the crux of a transnational evangelical movement. This has significant political implications for three key reasons: 1) the missionary work of the underground church resembles that of European colonizers in its methods and language 2) this evangelical work is generating an aggressive backlash in many parts of the world including the Middle East, and 3) the spread of Christian Zionism has significant consequences for the Israel-Palestine conflict.

COLONIAL EVANGELISM

In his book *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots*, T.O. Beidelman coins the term “colonial evangelism,” describing it as a sense of mission that involves the spreading of a nation’s vision of society and culture to an alien, subjected people. Colonialism also exhibits “‘an expansionist and proselytizing ethos’ based on a sense of both ‘duty and domination’ and manifested in a policy of ‘paternal guardianship.’”¹⁹⁴ As a result of this mentality, colonizers seek to transform “inferior” peoples to a “higher” level. In its most basic form, colonialism is simply the interaction between disproportionate social groups that possess in different degrees the power to dominate. This characteristic appears in all colonial endeavors but is intensified in religious missions. In fact, Beidelman argues that missions are an especially important form of colonialism—more so than political or economic colonialism—because of the “cultural arrogance” involved. In fact, for Beidelman, “Christian missions represent the most naïve and ethnocentric, and therefore the most thorough-going, facet of colonial life.”¹⁹⁵ Unlike government officials or businessmen, missionaries invariably aim to change the beliefs and actions of native peoples. This amounts to a colonization of heart and mind as well as of body, which arguably has far more detrimental and enduring consequences than the taxes and economic exploitation carried out by colonial administrators.

THE BACK TO JERUSALEM MOVEMENT

¹⁹⁴ T.O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 6.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 6.

The clearest example of the underground church's "colonial evangelism" can be seen in the Back to Jerusalem Movement, a coalition of Chinese house churches whose mission is to "preach the Gospel and establish fellowships of believers in all the countries, cities, towns, and ethnic groups between China and Jerusalem."¹⁹⁶ The Back to Jerusalem Movement is rooted in Acts 1:8 which says, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."¹⁹⁷ According to Brothers Yun, Yongze, and Wang, leaders of the Back to Jerusalem Movement, the term "the ends of the earth" clearly refers to the geographic progression of the advance of the Gospel throughout the world.¹⁹⁸ When Jesus first commanded the church to be his witness, he was standing on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives was located approximately 60 meters higher than the temple area in Jerusalem. Thus, they argue that Jesus must have been describing the natural progression of the evangelization of the region. Jesus commanded his disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem (the city directly below where they were standing), Judea (the province west and northwest of Jerusalem), Samaria (the province north of Judea), and to the ends of the earth. According to Yun, Yongze, and Wang, Jerusalem was thus the first stage of the evangelical movement. The city was perfectly placed at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. In Acts 6:7, Paul even writes that "the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."¹⁹⁹ From Jerusalem, Christianity has historically spread in a westward direction, from southern Europe through central, northern, and western Europe, to the southern

¹⁹⁶ [Back to Jerusalem](http://www.backtojerusalem.com/pages/vision.php), 2002-2006, Back to Jerusalem Movement, 27 November 2008 <<http://www.backtojerusalem.com/pages/vision.php>>.

¹⁹⁷ Acts 1:8.

¹⁹⁸ [Back to Jerusalem](http://www.backtojerusalem.com).

¹⁹⁹ [Back to Jerusalem](http://www.backtojerusalem.com).

Mediterranean countries of North Africa, through central and southern Africa, to the Americas, the islands of the South Pacific, Australia, and New Zealand, before finally arriving at the Pacific Rim and East Asia. Because of this trajectory in the way Christianity has spread across the globe, Yun, Yongze, and Wang believe that China was one of the last and most recent countries to be reached by the gospel. Finding that the remainder of the world's "unreached" countries lie to the west and south of China, Chinese Christians believe that they are on the "frontline"—God has *given* them the responsibility to complete the Great Commission by evangelizing to the remaining countries and people groups in Asia, the Middle East, and Islamic North Africa. Thus, the gospel will circle the entire globe and return to where it started, in Jerusalem. Christ's second coming will then be precipitated by the completion of this circuit.

However, Yun, Yongze, and Wang do not claim to be the founders of the Back to Jerusalem Movement. This vision was first "given" to the Jesus Family house church in the late 1920s. Following the tenets of Christian community, members of the Jesus Family believed that Christians should sell their possessions and distribute their wealth amongst all other "family members." The Jesus Family was also notable for their commitment to the motto: "sacrifice, abandonment, poverty, suffering, death."²⁰⁰ In addition, the community was mobile; members of the Jesus Family were known for walking from town to town preaching the Gospel. By the late 1940s, there were over one hundred different Jesus Family groups throughout China, with a total of some twenty thousand members.²⁰¹ Eventually, however, the Jesus Family church became too mainstream and most ordinary believers no longer shared the

²⁰⁰ Hattaway 39.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 40.

Back to Jerusalem vision. In the 1930s, the church split and a new group known as the Northwest Spiritual Movement emerged to fulfill the Back to Jerusalem vision. This group was characterized by their simple strategy. Since they believed Jesus would soon return, they focused their energy on evangelism and soul-winning rather than church-planting. Like many house church Christians today, members of the Northwest Spiritual Movement were also willing to forsake everything, including their lives, in order to complete God's call.

The Back to Jerusalem vision was further continued by a small group of Christians studying at the Northwest Bible Institute in Shaanxi Province in the 1940s. James Hudson Taylor II, the grandson of the famous founder of China Inland Mission, was a major influence on this group of evangelists. Forced to leave his mission field in Henan Province due to the Japanese invasion of China, Taylor moved to Shaanxi Province, where he established a Bible school. Through this school, Hudson and his family trained, encouraged, and helped establish the Back to Jerusalem Movement. Taylor worked closely with Pastor Mark Ma, who would become the founder and leader of the Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band. According to Ma, the Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band began with a vision from the Lord that he received on November 25, 1942. On that night, the Lord told him in prayer, "the door to Xinjiang is already open. Enter and preach the Gospel."²⁰² Xinjiang was largely comprised of Muslims and nomadic Tibetan Buddhists. After five months of praying, Ma revealed his call to two fellow coworkers, only to find that one of them had received the same call ten years earlier. Upon returning to the Bible Institute later that day, Ma learned that eight other students had also felt the burden for Xinjiang. A month later, Ma received a confirmation of his calling in another conversation with the Lord:

²⁰² Back to Jerusalem.

On the morning of May 23 as I fasted and prayed about the name of the Band the Lord revealed the verse of Scripture to my heart, “This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then the end shall come.”

I said, “O Lord what does this mean?” “It is this, I not only want the Chinese Church to assume responsibility for taking the Gospel to Xinjiang but I want you to bring to completion the commission to preach the Gospel to all the world.” I asked, “O Lord, has not the Gospel already been preached to all the world?”

The Lord said, “Since the beginning at Pentecost, the Pathway of the Gospel has spread, for the greater part, in a westward direction; from Jerusalem to Antioch to all Europe; from Europe to America and then to the East; from the Southeast of China to the Northwest; until today from Gansu on Westward it can be said there is no firmly established Church. You may go Westward from Gansu, preaching the Gospel all the way back to Jerusalem, causing the light of the Gospel to complete the circle around this dark world.” I said, “O Lord, who are we that we can carry such a great responsibility?” The Lord answered, “I want to manifest My power through those who of themselves have no power.”

I said, “That section of territory is under the power of Islam and the Muslims are the hardest of all peoples to reach with the Gospel.”

The Lord replied, “The most rebellious people are the Israelites, the hardest field of labor is my own people the Jews.”.... The Lord continued speaking, “Even you Chinese, yourself included, are hard enough but you have been conquered by the Gospel.”

I asked, “O Lord, if it is not that their hearts are especially hard, why is it that missionaries from Europe and America have established so many churches in China but are still unable to open the door to Western Asia?”

The Lord answered me, “It is not that their hearts are especially hard, but I have kept for the Chinese Church a portion of inheritance, otherwise, when I return will you not be so poor?”

When I heard the Lord say He had kept for us a portion of inheritance, my heart overflowed with Thanksgiving and my mouth uttered many Hallelujahs! I stopped arguing with the Lord.²⁰³

²⁰³ Ibid.

Mecca Chao received a similar calling and soon joined The Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band as well. Upon converting to Christianity, Chao's heart was touched so deeply by the love of God that he promised the Lord that he would go wherever He should lead him. Shortly thereafter, Chao received a vision in which he saw a piece of paper being held before his eyes with the word "Mecca" written on it. However, Chao did not understand what this meant and did not obey God's call. Gradually, he fell into temptation and "walked the way of the world, the ambition for position and gain taking the place of God in [his] life."²⁰⁴ For the next several years, Chao fought in the Chinese army. One day, however, he was captured during battle and became a prisoner of war, facing torture and deprivation. It was during this time that "the Lord lovingly called his prodigal son back to his embrace."²⁰⁵ Mecca Chao then asked the Lord for direction in his life and the Lord responded by giving him a vision of a map of Ningxia Province, the seat of Islam in China.

While studying at Northwest Bible Institute, Chao met Pastor Mark Ma, who informed him of the meaning of the word "Mecca." Ma told Chao about his own mission, which was to travel westward, preaching the gospel to Muslims until he reached the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Thus, Chao too joined Ma on his evangelistic mission. On May 15, 1946, Ma and his fellow evangelists from the Northwest Bible Institute formally organized themselves into the Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band, defining their mission as two-fold. First, they would plant the seeds of the gospel in the seven provinces around the periphery of China (Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Xikang, Qinghai, Gansu, and Ningxia), and in the seven countries on the borders of Asia (Afghanistan, Iran, Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Palestine). Second, they

²⁰⁴ Hattaway 31.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. 31.

would establish new churches according to the example of Scripture and shepherd existing churches.

According to Paul Hattaway, there were many other smaller initiatives by different Chinese church groups to preach the gospel to the Middle East during the 1940s. Some worked in largely Tibetan areas, others evangelized to the minorities of southwest China, and others still in predominantly Muslim countries. However, despite their different origins and spheres of work, these groups all considered themselves to be part of the larger vision of the Back to Jerusalem Movement. Often, these groups were completely disconnected and were not aware of each other's existence. However, "all [were] convinced that the Lord [was] sending them to the western borders to preach the gospel, and they [were] going with a strong sense of urgency of the shortness of the time, and the imminence of the Lord's return."²⁰⁶ They would probably argue that it was the Spirit of God that moved and connected them.

CONNECTION TO COLONIAL CHRISTIANITY

The magnificent growth of the Back to Jerusalem Movement is significant largely because of its attitude and approach to missionary work, which closely resembles T.O. Beidelman's "colonial evangelism." Unlike the missionaries of the colonial era, house church Christians do not officially claim to be socially, economically, or racially superior to the people they are trying to convert. Nevertheless, hints of such attitudes can still be detected in the rhetoric they use to describe non-Christians. This is not entirely surprising given the house church's strong connection to colonial Christianity. For example, in his testimony, Peter Xu Yongze, founder of the Born Again house church movement, lauds the Crusades for spreading

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 41.

the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samara, and into the Roman Empire “ by the power of the Holy Spirit and through suffering and the shedding of blood.”²⁰⁷ Yongze also credits 19th century missionary Hudson Taylor for being one of the strongest influences on the Back to Jerusalem Movement. In fact, Yongze even refers to the Back to Jerusalem Movement as “Taylor’s vision.”²⁰⁸ Unfortunately, Taylor’s influence has led the Chinese church to retain much of the colonial rhetoric and attitudes of the missionaries of the China Inland Mission.

Hudson Taylor was an English missionary who had a vision for planting the gospel in every Chinese province. Through his organization, China Inland Mission, Taylor sent over 600 missionaries to China by the turn of the 20th century. By 1918, it was the largest missionary organization in the world. Taylor’s missionary enterprise was greatly facilitated by both colonialism and imperialism. Outpost settlements and trading posts often created a safe haven for missionaries who went out into surrounding territory to preach the gospel.²⁰⁹ According to Michael Suman, author of *The Church in China: One Lord Two Systems*, missionaries were also instrumental in promoting colonialism and supported the use of armed force to serve that purpose. Many missionaries took part in the signing of unequal treaties with China; some of these treaties even suggested the extermination of China as a nation.²¹⁰ As a result of the Treaty of Tianjin, which opened China to missionary endeavors and legalized the import of opium, missionary work in China has historically been linked to imperialism.

Authors like Fred Parker argue that Hudson Taylor attempted to dissociate himself from the negative implications of colonialism by adopting the way of life of the people, wearing

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 63.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 63.

²⁰⁹ Fred Parker, “The Worldwide Mission of the Church,” Mission to the World: A History of Missions in the Church of the Nazarene through 1985, 1988, Southern Nazarene University, 04 March 2009 <<http://home.snu.edu/~HCULBERT/parker1.htm>>.

²¹⁰ Hattaway 132.

Chinese clothes and eating Chinese food. However, the rhetoric of the China Inland Mission still hints at a belief in the inferiority of the native population. For example, Helen Taylor, Hudson Taylor II's wife once wrote in a prayer request, "Will you help these young people with your prayers? The powers of evil in these darkened corners of the earth which are the habitation of cruelty and violence will not easily yield to the light of the gospel."²¹¹ In *These Forty Years: A Short History of the China Inland Mission*, F. Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor's son, argues that it was necessary for the English to bring missionaries to China because "the average life of the average Chinaman today is dark, degraded, and wicked to a deplorable degree."²¹² Though the Chinese were more educated as a people than "perhaps any other great heathen nation...they are yet, compared with Christian countries, ignorant, superstitious, credulous, priest-ridden, almost beyond belief."²¹³ In fact, "they are yet today so immoral that Paul's description of heathendom in his time, in Romans I—that most awful description of godless peoples—applies without the alteration of a word to China as it is at the dawn of the twentieth century."²¹⁴ Taylor found evidence for this characterization in the fact that, during his time in China, he saw no asylums for the blind, no hospitals for the sick, no homes for the lame or maimed, and in most cities, no almshouses or other provision for the elderly. Thus, Taylor reasoned that the Chinese people must be "impure in heart and life; they are selfish, grossly, callously selfish, caring little or nothing for the sufferings of their less fortunate neighbors....We hardly know what wickedness is until we go to a heathen country."²¹⁵ Taylor concludes, "if ever an individual needed saving the Chinaman does. And if ever a people

²¹¹ Ibid. 36.

²¹² Howard Taylor, *These Forty Years: A Short History of the China Inland Mission* (Philadelphia: Pepper Publishing Company, 1903) 29.

²¹³ Ibid. 29.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 30.

²¹⁵ Ibid. 34.

needed the uplifting, ennobling, emancipating power of Jesus Christ, surely the dark, degraded, godless people of China need it today.”²¹⁶

COLONIAL RHETORIC OF THE BACK TO JERUSALEM MOVEMENT

It is this same colonial attitude that characterizes the work of the Back to Jerusalem Movement. It is clear that many Christians within the Back to Jerusalem Movement regard the “unreached peoples” of southwest China, the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia as poor, backward, “dark” people who need to be “saved.” This is evident from the language they use to refer to the people to whom they wish to evangelize. For example, in describing his journey west from China to the Middle East, Mecca Chao writes that

all along the way are the pasture grounds of the wild Tibetans, Mongols and Muslims, who live in tents. There are no inns. There are high mountains of grassy deserts, packs of wild animals, man-eating Tibetan dogs, and murderous bandits. Along the road there were many bodies of those who had been starved to death or killed.... God let me prove the strength of a Hallelujah to scare away robbers and wild beasts and meet every difficulty.²¹⁷

From the perspective of these Chinese missionaries, the region is an area where hundreds of travelers perish, “their throats cut and their goods plundered by ruthless bandits.”²¹⁸ Similarly, in describing their strategies for evangelism, Yun, Yongze, and Wang stress the importance of sending teams of workers because “there are many advantages to having a team, especially in spiritually dark places without any Christian presence.”²¹⁹ Without claiming racial or socioeconomic superiority, leaders in the Back to Jerusalem Movement claim moral and spiritual superiority. In describing their mission, Yun, Yongze, and Wang argue that “Islam

²¹⁶ Ibid. 31.

²¹⁷ Hattaway 34.

²¹⁸ Ibid. 35.

²¹⁹ Ibid. 83.

holds more than a billion souls in captivity and blindness.”²²⁰ Places where Buddhism and Hinduism are well-established are regions where Satan has taken root: “when faith-filled believers start taking flames of fire from God’s altar into these dark regions, and those fires start spreading to others and the light increases, Satan will be furious.”²²¹

Further examples of such views can be found in the books the Back to Jerusalem Movement recommends to “Christians with a heart for obeying the Great Commission.”²²² The majority of these books are guides that help missionaries understand the cultures of the Middle East so that they can better evangelize there. However, in making such generalizations about the Middle East, many of these authors essentialize and patronize the experiences of people who live in the region. For example, in his book *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God: Church Planting among Folk Muslims*, Rick Love provides recommendations for evangelizing to folk Muslims, people he defines as “doctrinally Muslim but practically animist.”²²³ According to Love, folk Islam is characterized by spirits and demons, blessing and curses, healing and sorcery. Of the world’s one billion Muslims, more than three-fourths are folk Muslims. While folk Muslims confess Allah, they really worship spirits and are more concerned with magic than with Muhammad. For example, in one North African country, missionaries have witnessed occult fairs that drew as many as 20,000 people. During these “Satanic signs and wonders conferences,” people gathered in small groups to witness supernatural feats, offer blood sacrifices, and receive blessings. Possessed by spirits, some participants slashed themselves with knives, while others danced in trances. Other missionary workers have

²²⁰ Ibid. 90.

²²¹ Ibid. 90.

²²² Back to Jerusalem.

²²³ Rick Love, Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God: Church Planting among Folk Muslims (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000) 2.

described people possessed by animal spirits using their bare hands to kill and devour other animals.²²⁴ These practices concern Love because magic has a Satanic component; Scripture makes clear that real demons seek to control people, and that magical practices are based on the powers of darkness.²²⁵ Love does not deny that spirits and demons also characterize Christianity. In fact, his main area of concern is with spiritual warfare. However, in discussing issues of spiritual warfare, Love implicitly expresses his belief that Christianity is spiritually superior to folk Islam. He says, “the truth that needs to be proclaimed first among folk Muslims should be the rescue dimension of the gospel—God’s ability to bring them from darkness into light...church planting among unreached people involves encountering the kingdom of darkness.”²²⁶ In the same colonial mindset, Love believes it is necessary to “save” folk Muslims from the darkness that is their religion.

Love also explicitly claims that Christianity is morally superior to folk Islam. He recounts an incident in which he asked a Muslim if there is any type of magic that enables people to better love and serve others. After reflecting, his friend tells him about white magic, which helps build harmonious relationships. However, Love argues that the ultimate goal of this type of magic is not love and service, but rather, protection and control. In contrast, Love says that there is a moral dimension to God’s power: it either demonstrates God’s love or strengthens believers to love. Love then goes on to outline some of the “character flaws” of folk Muslims: folk Muslims are easily offended and rarely forgive; they quickly experience “hurt feelings” and hold on to their “grudge.” As a result of these grudges, folk Muslims divorce frequently. Since couples hold on to grudges, bonds of marriage are fragile. Thus, Love sees a

²²⁴ Ibid. 20.

²²⁵ Ibid. 1.

²²⁶ Ibid. 91.

“moral encounter” as being part of his spiritual battle with folk Islam. As part of this moral encounter, he persuades missionaries to model a more moral, Christian path. This can be done through the establishment of marriage seminars, pre-marital counseling, and family planning workshops.²²⁷

Mary Ann Cate and Karol Downey make similar assessments in their book *From Fear to Faith: Muslim and Christian Women*, which is also recommended by the Back to Jerusalem Movement as a model for evangelizing in the Middle East. In this work, Cate and Downey present Muslim women as people who “know God as distant and impersonal—Allah does not see them.”²²⁸ According to Cate and Downey, Muslim women attain their identity solely through their fathers or husbands; “her entire world is dominated by men.”²²⁹ These men dominate Muslim women in every aspect of their lives; it is for this reason that women wear veils, a representation of their submission. Moreover, “a Muslim woman has no identity of her own. Her value is half that of a man: countless rules and regulations keep her in an inferior position.”²³⁰ Thus, Cate and Downey conclude that fear is one of the greatest strongholds for a Muslim woman. Muslim women live in fear of being mistreated, beaten, or divorced. They also fear infertility, mother-in-laws, gossip, religious leaders, and religious police. Their worlds are guided by the “utter vulnerability of being a woman under Islam.”²³¹ This vulnerability is perpetuated by the fact that “Islam” literally means submission. The entire history of Islam is based on submission, for Ishmael, after all, was born as a result of slavery. Thus, Muslims can only relate to God from the perspective of a servant or slave. The position of a Muslim woman

²²⁷ Ibid. 167.

²²⁸ Mary Ann Cate and Karol Downey, *From Fear to Faith: Muslim and Christian Women* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2002) 89.

²²⁹ Ibid. 89.

²³⁰ Ibid. 90.

²³¹ Ibid. 90.

is even worse, for in addition to being the servant of Allah, she is also the servant of her husband, and a servant to her brothers and sons. In contrast, Christians can identify themselves as the sons and daughters, rather than the slaves, of God. Moreover, in Christianity, the “true enemies” of women are not men. Rather, “the true enemy is Satan who comes to rob women of their identity and value in Christ.”²³²

Cate and Downey’s depiction of Muslim women is problematic for several reasons. First, it essentializes the experience of Muslim women. Though Cate and Downey qualify their statements by saying that “we should never presume that [all Muslim women] are the same,”²³³ they do not provide examples of alternative experiences. Nor do they provide evidence of ways by which Muslim women are empowered through their religion. Moreover, Cate and Downey argue that the Quran is the source of violence against women. In attempting to answer the question “why do some Muslim men abuse their wives?,”²³⁴ they point to Sura 4:34 which says, “men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other...so good women are the obedient...as for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them.”²³⁵ From this verse, Cate and Downey conclude that Islam commands husbands to discipline and beat their wives. They argue that “what is obvious in this verse is that a progression of steps is to be used in dealing with a rebellious, refractory wife: the husband is to verbally admonish her; if that fails, the husband is to sexually desert the wife; if both measures fail, the husband is commanded to physically beat

²³² Ibid. 90.

²³³ Ibid. 89.

²³⁴ Ibid. 115.

²³⁵ Ibid. 115.

his wife.”²³⁶ According to Cate and Downey, it is because of this verse that Muslim women have become victims of “conjugal terrorism,” economic, emotional, and mental abuse.²³⁷ Cate and Downey’s depiction of Muslim women as helpless victims of abuse and servitude, combined with their view of Islam as the source of this victimization, implicitly demonstrates their lack of respect for both Muslim women and Islam. From the language and testimonies of missionaries in the Back to Jerusalem Movement, it is clear that house church Christians share similar attitudes. If they do not already, they may begin to, after reading this book from Back to Jerusalem’s recommended list.

THE “10/40 WINDOW”

The patronizing and somewhat colonial nature of the Back to Jerusalem Movement is also evident from its association with the Christian mission to evangelize the 10/40 Window. In fact, the Back to Jerusalem Movement is defined by its focus on the 10/40 Window. Their call from God is to preach the Gospel and establish fellowships of believers in all the countries, cities, towns, and ethnic groups between China and Jerusalem. This region is particularly important for “within those nations lay the three largest spiritual strongholds in the world today that have yet to be conquered by the Gospel: the giants of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.”²³⁸ According to Back to Jerusalem’s website, more than 90% of the “unreached people groups” in the world are located within this “10/40 Window,” the “dark” region of the world located 10 degrees to 40 degrees north of the equator, spanning from West Africa through the Middle East and Central Asia to East Asia.²³⁹

²³⁶ Ibid. 115.

²³⁷ Ibid. 115.

²³⁸ [Back to Jerusalem.](#)

²³⁹ [Back to Jerusalem.](#)

According to the Joshua Project, a research initiative that gathers demographic information to encourage pioneer church-planting movements and facilitate effective coordination of mission agency efforts, the 10/40 Window holds special significance for six key reasons. First, the 10/40 Window is both historically and biblically important, being the location of the creation of Adam and Eve, the flood, and the building of the Tower of Babel. Together, these events represent man's sinful behavior against God and God's judgment and wrath. The second reason the 10/40 Window holds special significance is because it comprises the least evangelized peoples and cities in the world. The Joshua Project estimates that 2.37 billion individuals and 5,209 "unreached people groups" live in this region. The 10/40 Window also contains the majority of the world's least evangelized megacities, with populations greater than one million. In fact, the top 50 "unreached" megacities are all located within the 10/40 Window. The 10/40 Window also contains four of the world's most dominant religious blocks: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Non-Religious. The Muslim World is found predominantly in the left or western part of the 10/40 Window, spanning across the north of Africa into the Middle East. Similarly, South Asia, "the heart of Hinduism with its 330 million gods,"²⁴⁰ dominates the middle of the 10/40 Window, while Buddhism influences the right side of the 10/40 Window in Southeast Asia. China, which is now an officially atheist country, occupies the eastern portion of the window. In addition, the 10/40 Window is characterized by "the preponderance of the poor." According to the Joshua Project, of the poorest of the poor, more than eight out of ten live in the 10/40 Window. On average, people in this region exist on less than a few hundred dollars per person per year. The Joshua Project argues that it may not be a coincidence that there is such an overlap between the

²⁴⁰ Joshua Project, 22 April 2009, US Center for World Mission, 15 March 2009 <www.JoshuaProject.net>.

world's poorest countries and its least evangelized countries; after all, "the poor are the lost, and the lost are the poor."²⁴¹ The 10/40 Window also includes numerous "spiritual strongholds." In addition to suffering from poverty and disease, people in the 10/40 Window have been "kept from the transforming power of the Gospel."²⁴² They are examples of the "truth" expressed in 2 Corinthians 4:4: "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."²⁴³ Finally, the 10/40 Window is important because it represents a renewed focus for evangelism. According to the Joshua Project, the focus of the Christian missions community 200 years ago was for the coastlands of the world. A century later, missionary work spread to the interior regions of the continents. Today, the focus must thus be on "unreached people groups," most of which reside in the 10/40 Window.

THE JOSHUA PROJECT

The mission to evangelize the 10/40 Window is particularly problematic because of the methods used to achieve this goal. The Joshua Project, for example, presents itself as a research institute that gathers information on various people groups to better enable missionaries to work in "unreached" areas of the world. Regions that are less than 2% Evangelical, and less than 5% Christian Adherent are defined as "unreached." From this definition, the Joshua Project has developed a "Progress Scale" to determine the degree of Christianization in each region. This scale ranges from "unreached," to "formative," "established," and then "significant." Each ethnic group is also accompanied by a "People-in-Country Profile," which identifies the ethnic group's geographic, linguistic, religious, and ethnic background. The

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ 2 Corinthians 4:4.

profile then includes a brief description of the group's history, beliefs, and "needs." For example, a profile of the Tajik Afghani peoples of Afghanistan begins by describing Tajiks as "tall, slender, fair-skinned people with blue or green eyes and often with red or blond hair; intermarriage with Turks and Mongolians introduced almond-shaped eyes and straight black hair to their physical characteristics."²⁴⁴ Being 99% Muslim, the Joshua Project writes that "Islam permeates every area of their lives. Rituals relating to birth, puberty, marriage, and death are all built around their beliefs. They faithfully repeat memorized prayers five times a day."²⁴⁵ Similarly, the Taklimakan Uygur people of China are described as having a "gentle culture, living primitive lives in extreme isolation."²⁴⁶ At the time of their "discovery," the Joshua Project writes that the Taklimakan Uygurs "told the time by the sun, had no form of government or authority structure, and no schools or writing system. They lived around an oasis, farming animals and growing crops for their existence."²⁴⁷ With regard to the Nunu peoples of China, the Joshua Project says,

The Nunu are trapped in complete spiritual darkness. They have no known believers or Christian witness. The Nunu are a childlike people. Early missionaries commented on the meekness of character possessed by China's minorities. Paul Vial, who worked among a group in Yunnan, wrote, 'The [minority person] is born timid but not fearful; he shuns strangers as if they were bringing the plague. He is not afraid, but he is not daring. In front of a Chinese, he is as a dog before a tiger. He is like a large child who follows you, but who never precedes you.'²⁴⁸

These examples parallel the language used by the China Inland Mission over a century ago. In addition, these profiles serve to objectify entire people groups, defining them by certain, often

²⁴⁴ Joshua Project.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

unfavorable, characteristics. These characteristics are often articulated in the context of the group's convertibility, or ability to see the greater "light" of the gospel of Christianity, with negative value being placed on being less "convertible." Each profile is also accompanied by a picture of a single member of the people group, who is supposed to represent the entire group. As a disclaimer, the Joshua Project notes that "in some instances when the exact people group is not identified, the Joshua Project has made educated attempts at matching. As a result some photos may be representative of the people cluster rather than the specific people group or possibly incorrectly matched altogether."²⁴⁹ On nearly every sidebar within the website, there is a highlighted profile of an "Unreached People of the Day" that requires special prayer and attention. Ultimately, this project supplies missionaries and evangelists with (often negative) stereotypes about the people groups with which they would be working upon entering the field.

In addition to perpetuating colonial evangelism, the Joshua Project may be related to actual colonial endeavors as a result of its relationship with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In an article written in *Tehelka*, an independent public interest news magazine in India, VK Shashikumar argues that when AD2000 (the predecessor to the Joshua Project) was founded, the project was based on a military model meant to invade, occupy, control, and subjugate indigenous populations. The goal was to send out spying missions so as to uncover micro-details about the religions and cultures of various ethnic groups. Shashikumar writes,

There is another, perhaps more important, reason why Bush is keen on supporting his evangelist friends who run huge transnational missionary organisations (TMOs). In the decade 1990-2000 they ran a global intelligence operation so complex and sophisticated that its scale and implications are no less than staggering. This operation has put in place a system which enables the

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

US government to access any ethnographic information on any location virtually at the click of the mouse. This network in India, established with funding and strategic assistance from US-based TMOs, gives US intelligence agencies virtually real time access to every nook and corner of the country.²⁵⁰

Shashikumar argues that US possession of such ethnographic data should ring alarm bells within India's intelligence agencies for the Joshua Project maintains its "peoples lists" with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention which historically has connections with the CIA.²⁵¹ The CIA has publicly admitted to using data collected by experts from Wycliffe/Summer Institute of Linguistics, World Vision (WV) and the International Mission Board/Southern Baptists in its covert intelligence operations in many parts of the world. In their book *Thy Will be Done*, Gerald Colby and Charlotte Dennett describe how a missionary from the Christian and Missionary Alliance gave an eight-hour briefing to the CIA on Thailand's tribal areas. As CIA director in 1976, George Bush Sr. announced that that he would ban the practice of enlisting "clergymen and newsmen as intelligence agents."²⁵² However, in April 1996, then CIA director, John Deutch announced that the agency could waive the ban in "unique cases and special threats to national security."²⁵³

Thus, it is clear that Shashikumar sees the Joshua Project as a threat to Indian culture and society and even national security. Through "subversive strategies," the Joshua Project targets people in every language, urban center, and geographic division, leading to the strategic conversion—or recolonization—of entire geographical regions. Moreover, the Joshua Project is

²⁵⁰ VK Shashikumar, "Bush's Conversion Agenda for India: Preparing for the Harvest," [Christian Aggression.org](http://www.christianaggression.org), 2004, ChristianAggression.org, 02 April 2009 < http://www.christianaggression.org/features_bush.php>.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

not the only resource providing such information. Multiple missionary guidebooks with similar styles and themes have been written on the subject, including *Strongholds of the 10/40 Window*, by George Otis, *The Move of the Holy Spirit in the 10/40 Window*, by Luis Bush and Beverly Payues, *Praying through the 100 Gateway Cities of the 10/40 Window*, by Peter Wagner, Stephen Peters, and Mark Wilson, and *China's Unreached Cities: Volume 1*, by Paul Hattaway (the same author of the *Back to Jerusalem Movement*, a collaborative work between Hattaway and several Chinese house church leaders).

BACKLASH

Perhaps it would be more enlightening to think about the effects of the Christian mission to evangelize “unreached peoples” from the perspective of “unreached peoples” themselves. There is a real backlash against Christian missions in many parts of the world. For example, in a blog entitled “Christian evangelism and Conversion Among Brahmins,” one user asks members to discuss the danger of Brahmins converting to Christianity. In response, “shuddhi” writes, “The hidden agenda they have [is] to eradicate Hinduism from the face of the Earth and implement their religion which is merely 2,000 years old [and] is deplorable and heart-wrenching. I hope Lord Krishna takes his avatar now and destroys these evils!”²⁵⁴ His solution is to “do a reverse conversion.... Only if we do this with double the zeal of these mongrels can we succeed in ending this evil. We should hit them hard in the eye.”²⁵⁵ From this response, it is clear that aggressive Christian evangelism has provoked an equally aggressive and even violent response.

²⁵⁴ “Christian Evangelism and Conversion Among Brahmins,” *Tamil Brahmins*, 2009, TamilBrahmins.com, 02 April 2009 < <http://www.tamilbrahmins.com/archive/index.php/t53.html>>.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Similar sentiments are expressed in David Kostinchuk's "The Jungle of Christ." In this article, Kostinchuk describes Christian missionary work as "a massive worldwide well planned, organized onslaught against Hindus and Muslims in an effort to convert them to Christianity."²⁵⁶ The purpose of his paper is to alert non-Christians about the people involved in this assault. He then provides an exhaustive list of evangelical organizations, which includes AD 2000. In particular, Kostinchuk criticizes missionaries for attempting to inject Christian morals and ethics into Muslim governments, while simultaneously breaking up families as parents turn against their children, children against their parents, siblings against siblings, and husbands against wives, as a result of religious conversion.

A website entitled "www.ChristianAggression.org" has been designed specifically for the purpose of educating the world about "the atrocities that conversions bring and to bring this aggressive nature of Christianity to an end."²⁵⁷ The website then features article after article of incidences in which church and missionary activities have had negative effects on local populations. In particular, the website highlights six key tactics the church has used to convert people to Christianity: charitable allurements, deception, educational indoctrination, medical care, sexual abuse, and violence. Within each category, the site lists several specific examples. For instance, on December 4, 2000, Christian converts under the direction of missionaries desecrated an ashram (Hindu religious retreat) in Northeast India. The Christian converts also raped two female devotees and attacked two men who had gone to the ashram for

²⁵⁶ David Kostinchuk, "Evangelism Exposed," [SunnahOnline.com](http://www.sunnahonline.com/ilm/dawah/0011.htm), 2007, SunnahOnline.com, 02 April 2009 <<http://www.sunnahonline.com/ilm/dawah/0011.htm>>.

²⁵⁷ [ChristianAggression.org](http://www.christianaggression.org), ChristianAggression.org, 05 April 2009 <http://www.christianaggression.org/about_need.php>.

puja (religious rituals).²⁵⁸ In response to these atrocities, ChristianAggression.org has set up a petition to the UN Commission for Human Rights to eliminate proselytization in the interest of promoting world peace and harmony and the respectful coexistence of all religions. On its “blacklist,” ChristianAggression.org also lists Partners International, a Christian ministry that works closely with house churches in China, providing them with financial resources, leadership training, and organizational support.

Specifically responding to the mission to evangelize the 10/40 Window, Br. Amir Abdullah writes in Nida 'ul Islam Magazine,

In evangelical jargon they call it the 10/40 window. The 10/40 window is the rectangle with boundaries of latitudes 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. To the modern day crusaders of the Christian missions it is exactly what China is to the Coca Cola company—one billion people just dying to hear the message... This region has become the target of unprecedented efforts by Christian missionaries to convert the Muslims to their religion. Like a cancerous growth, we are seeing Christians gain a foothold in the lands of the believers. The first time these crusading forces came with swords and suits of armor, this time they arrive with credit cards and million-dollar aid cheques. Employing Faustian machinations, these human shayateen are converting many Muslims to their false religion and serving to inject a virulent poison into the stream of the *Ummah*. The Muslim world is under attack.²⁵⁹

This quote demonstrates the way by which Christian missionary work is strongly associated with both globalization and neocolonialism in many parts of the world. Br. Amir Abdullah also clearly articulates his opposition to the motives behind Christian missions. He quotes a Christian Aid pamphlet that says, “Folake left a successful career in journalism to answer God's call to take the gospel to women in purdah—the practice of keeping Muslim women from being seen by any man other than their husbands. They are practically prisoners in their houses. If

²⁵⁸ ChristianAggression.org.

²⁵⁹ Br. Amir Abdullah, “Christian Missionaries in the Muslim World,” [Contender Ministries](http://ContenderMinistries.org), 1997, Contender Ministries, 05 April 2009 <<http://contenderministries.org/islam/missionaries.php>>.

they go out, they must be completely covered except for their eyes.”²⁶⁰ In this pamphlet, Christian Aid was clearly attempting to articulate the need for Christians to “liberate” Muslim women. From the perspective of Br. Amir Abdullah, however, Christians are simply “motivated by their desire to mislead our brothers and sisters. They want our sisters to walk around exposing themselves shamelessly in the same manner that *kafir* [obliterator] women do.... They are calling us to the worship of *Taghoot* [a false diety] and thus they are calling us to hellfire.”²⁶¹

Br. Amir Abdullah is particularly opposed to the methods Christian missionaries use to achieve their goals. World Vision, for example, combines its evangelical work with its work in humanitarian aid. Through their “sappy media campaign,”²⁶² World Vision has even persuaded many Muslims to donate money to their cause. Br. Amir Abdullah finds this deceptive for, “World Vision is not the altruistic humanitarian organisation they would have us believe, but rather a *kafir* missionary organisation. Their mission is not to alleviate the suffering of those afflicted with hardship, but rather to convert them.”²⁶³ To Br. Amir Abdullah, the collusion of missionary work with humanitarian work is “reflective of the hatred and contempt [missionaries] hold for Allah and His religion.”²⁶⁴ Br. Amir Abdullah accuses Christians of seeing natural disasters and wars as opportunities to convert believers to their “false religion,” as many Chinese missionaries did during the aftermath of the earthquake in Sichuan. However, the most common method for missionaries to achieve their goals is to

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

establish front businesses in order to gain access to the target country. He quotes Cindy Brown, an American missionary who set up a fake landscaping business:

It's real tough getting into Malaysia because it's such a closed Muslim nation. But the good Lord has been opening doors.... The company that hired us is owned by Muslims, but there are some Christians on the Board of Directors who helped us get in. It's kinda funny that a Muslim-owned company has opened the way for us to spread the Gospel in Malaysia. You gotta love the wicked!²⁶⁵

Thus, Br. Amir Abdullah concludes that it is “good old-fashioned Christian deception”²⁶⁶ that forms the basis of Christian evangelism. For this reason, missionary churches in African countries often resemble mosques. Likewise, educational aids sent by Christian humanitarian organizations like World Vision often consists of Bible studies, Christian literature, Sunday school classes, and spiritual counseling guides. From Br. Amir Abdullah’s perspective, the purpose of educational aid is thus not to produce educated individuals, but to produce obedient Christians. When reciting the Bible, missionaries even use a style of recitation that is similar to the Quranic *Tajweed*. Many missionaries also hold their services on Fridays and use Islamic expressions such as “*bismillah*” (verse), “Jesus *Alayhi Salam*” (peace be upon him), and “*Allah Subhanah*” (God most glorious). Amongst Christian missionaries, such methods are promoted to demonstrate “intercultural understanding.” However, from the perspective of the author, “It's all a calculated deception to ensnare the unsuspecting Muslim into thinking that Christianity is ‘not so bad’ and ‘is just like Islam.’”²⁶⁷

Finally, Br. Amir Abdullah also argues that Christians have engaged in “creative approaches” such as murder, sexual assault, kidnapping, and calculated deception in their

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

evangelistic efforts. Egyptian Muslims, for example, have had problems with American missionaries who capture young Muslim girls and pressure them into participating in immoral activities while photographing them. These photographs are then used to blackmail Muslim women into partaking in Christian activities. Br. Amir Abdullah claims that Muslim children have even been captured from war-torn countries and sold to non-Muslims to be raised as Christians. This article clearly demonstrates some of the responses of the Muslim community to Christian evangelism—or neocolonialism—in the Middle East. However, many Christian missionaries do not take these claims seriously. In response to this article, Contender Ministries writes,

This article sheds some light on where the extremist views from the Muslim world come from. In Muslim countries there is no free press, and the state run media is filled with this kind of propaganda. There is also no shortage of similar articles on the internet and similar views are taught in Islamic schools. Most Christians would be shocked to know what is being taught about their beliefs, missionary work, and lifestyles in Islamic schools, newspapers, and magazines around the world.²⁶⁸

From this exchange, it is clear that many missionaries still do not understand the people they are attempting to convert, and vice versa. In this example, there is no dialogue between Br. Amir Abdullah and Contender Ministries. Whereas Br. Amir Abdullah views Christian missionaries as aggressors who seek to recolonize the Middle East and destroy Islam, Contender Ministries simply sees Muslims as “extremists.” The Back to Jerusalem Movement, with its determination to convert the “unreached,” and its lack of respect for non-Christians, will likely exacerbate such divisions.

BLOODSHED AND EVANGELISM

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

The Back to Jerusalem Movement is also problematic because of the way its members perceive the world as a spiritual battlefield. In describing their work, missionaries of the Back to Jerusalem Movement often use language associated with warfare and conquest. For example, one song sung by members of the Back to Jerusalem Movement reads:

Lift up your eyes toward the West
There are no laborers for the great harvest
My Lord's heart is grieving every day
He asks, "Who will go forth for me?"

With eyes fill with tears
And blood splattered across our chests
We lift up the banner of Christ
And will rescue the perishing sheep!

In these last days the battle is drawing near
And the trumpet is sounding aloud
Let's quickly put on the full armor of God
And break through Satan's snares!

Death is knocking at the door of many
And the world is overcome with sin
We must faithfully work as we march onward
Fighting even unto death!

With hope and faith we will march on
Dedicating our family and all that we have
As we take up our heaving crosses
We march on toward Jerusalem!²⁶⁹

This song clearly portrays the Back to Jerusalem Movement as an army marching to invade and conquer Jerusalem. Like soldiers in war, missionaries of the movement must put on a full armor and "fight unto death." Like 19th century colonizers, they believe that their work will benefit the people they "conquer"; they are rescuing the "perishing sheep."

²⁶⁹ Hattaway 54.

Such a mentality is clearly expressed in the testimonies and autobiographies of the leaders of the Back to Jerusalem Movement. For example, in his testimony, Brother Yun, currently the key leader of the Back to Jerusalem Movement, recounts something another missionary had told him: “You must recognize the way of the cross is the call to shed blood. You must take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Muslim countries, then all the way back to Jerusalem.”²⁷⁰ Though this missionary was most likely referring to the need for Christians to become martyrs, he clearly sees bloodshed and evangelism as intricately connected. Brother Yun received the message. He says, “I came to understand clearly that the destiny of the house churches of China is to pull down the world’s last remaining spiritual strongholds—the house of Buddha, the house of Mohammed, and the house of Hinduism—and to proclaim the glorious gospel to all nations before the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!”²⁷¹ In training and sending missionaries, Brother Yun argues that Chinese Christians must be equipped so that they can “fight for the Lord with maximum effectiveness.”²⁷² He goes on to say, “We are going into battle because we know that for more than seventy years God has been speaking to the Chinese church, telling us to take the gospel back to Jerusalem for his glory. That is why we can march forward, confident that the Commander-in-Chief will be at the head of his army.”²⁷³ Brother Peter Yongze adds, “pray that we will be fully prepared for a battle to the death. I believe that we are facing the greatest spiritual war the church has seen. The stakes are high!... The devil, who has kept Muslims, Buddhist and Hindu nations captive for

²⁷⁰ Ibid. 56.

²⁷¹ Ibid. 57.

²⁷² Ibid. 57.

²⁷³ Ibid. 60.

thousands of years, will not surrender without a strong and bloody fight.”²⁷⁴ However, Yun does qualify his statements. He recognizes that “the Back to Jerusalem missionary movement is not an army with guns or human weapons,”²⁷⁵ asserting instead that it is an “army of broken-hearted Chinese men and women whom God has cleansed with a mighty fire, and who have already been through years of hardship and deprivation for the sake of the gospel.... [it is] in the spiritual realm [that] they are mighty warriors for Jesus Christ!”²⁷⁶ Though members of the Back to Jerusalem Movement claim only to be part of a spiritual army fighting a metaphysical war, their use of violent language is foreboding.

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

This vision of the world as a spiritual battlefield is largely based on a Zionistic reading of the Bible. As Fundamentalist Christianity has spread through the house churches of China, so too has a certain brand of Christian Zionism. In fact, many American churches continue to send missionaries to teach apocalyptic readings of the Bible in China’s underground seminaries. The beliefs taught by these missionaries converge nicely with the ideology of the greater Christian Zionist movement in the United States. In general, Christian Zionists believe that the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 are in accordance with Biblical prophecy. Some Christian Zionists also believe that the “ingathering” of Jews in Israel is a prerequisite for Christ’s Second Coming. For these reasons, Christians should actively support a Jewish return to Israel.

There are two common approaches by which Christian Zionists justify support for Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel. The first is based on Genesis 12:3, which says, “I will bless

²⁷⁴ Ibid. 70.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. 58.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. 58.

those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”²⁷⁷ As a result of this verse, many Christians feel compelled to embrace Israel since blessings will be bestowed on those who ideologically and financially bless the “chosen people.” The second approach is based on dispensationalist theology, which argues that mankind has reached the last dispensation of the Book of Revelation and humans are now living in the end times. Within dispensationalist theology, “rapture” refers to the belief that prior to the coming of the Messiah, God will remove all his true believers from earth, and this will take place either before, after, or during the reign of the anti-Christ. The rapture will take place without warning and all of God’s true followers will vanish in an instant, their souls ascending to heaven, while the souls of non-believers are left behind. The most widely held form of dispensationalism holds that Christ will return prior to a literal end-times millennium. Rapture will then be followed by three and a half years of pseudo-peace, referred to as the “Abomination of Desolation.” These years are symbolically represented in Daniel 8 as a ram and a goat. Daniel 8:13-14 says,

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, ‘How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?’ He said to me, ‘It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.’²⁷⁸

Thus, the three and a half years of “Abomination of Desolation” will be marked by war, famine, and disease. Following this period, there will be a time of “Great Tribulation,” during which the earth will be completely overtaken by the anti-Christ. Dispensationalists believe that the anti-Christ will be someone with immense world popularity and all those who oppose him

²⁷⁷ Genesis 12:3.

²⁷⁸ Daniel 8:13-14.

will be ostracized from their societies. During the Great Tribulation, 144,000 Jews will then convert to Christianity and this conversion will reveal to them the true intentions of the anti-Christ. These 144,000 Jews will then proselytize to nonbelievers who were not raptured. They will also meet the anti-Christ in the final battle of Armageddon and defeat him. Only after this battle will the seven years of tribulation end, and upon this end, Christ will return to defeat Satan and establish a Messianic Kingdom on earth for one millennium. Many dispensationalists like Hal Lindsey have begun using this theology to interpret current political events. For example, in his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Lindsey discusses how the European Economic Community (EEC) represents the 10-headed beast referred to in the Book of Revelation, and how this 10-headed beast will pave the way for the anti-Christ to seize political and economic control of the world.²⁷⁹

Many of these beliefs are spreading rapidly through the underground church as a result of American missionary work. For example, during the summer of 2008, a Chinese American church based in New York sent a missionary, Teacher Liang,²⁸⁰ to teach in eleven different house churches in China. Nearly word for word, Teacher Liang spread the beliefs of Christian Zionism. In particular, she stressed the importance of evangelism for the end times are near. She is sure about this from her reading of current events; the creation of Israel, Israel's war with Palestine, the fight over oil, environmental degradation—all these are signs of the end of the world. Teacher Liang even argued that the Holocaust happened as a result of the Jews' disobedience to God in 1917. During that year, God gave European Jews the opportunity to

²⁷⁹ Rammy M. Haija, "The Armageddon Lobby: Dispensationalist Christian Zionism and the Shaping of US Policy Towards Israel-Palestine," *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 2006, 05 April 2009 <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/holy_land_studies/v005/5.1haija.html>.

²⁸⁰ Name has been changed

return to Israel through the Balfour Declaration. However, most Jews were complacent in their success and decided to stay in Europe. As a result, God caused the Holocaust to happen, forcing the Jews to return to Israel, a crucial step for the coming of the end of the age. Likewise, Teacher Liang believes that Israel's wins during the 1948 and 1967 wars were both results of Asaph's prayer in Psalms 83:

O God, do not keep silent;
be not quiet, O God, be not still.
See how your enemies are astir,
how your foes rear their heads.
With cunning they conspire against your people;
they plot against those you cherish.
"Come," they say, "let us destroy them as a nation,
that the name of Israel be remembered no more."
With one mind they plot together;
they form an alliance against you-
the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
of Moab and the Hagrites,
Geba, Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia, with the people of Tyre.
Even Assyria has joined them
to lend strength to the descendants of Lot.
Selah
Do to them as you did to Midian,
as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon,
who perished at Endor
and became like refuse on the ground.
Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb,
all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
who said, "Let us take possession
of the pasturelands of God."
Make them like tumbleweed, O my God,
like chaff before the wind.
As fire consumes the forest
or a flame sets the mountains ablaze,
so pursue them with your tempest
and terrify them with your storm.
Cover their faces with shame
so that men will seek your name, O LORD.

May they ever be ashamed and dismayed;
may they perish in disgrace.
Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD—
that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.²⁸¹

Israel was able to revive and take back the Holy Land because God promised so, and God is always faithful. According to Teacher Liang, the Bible even foretells the story of black Jews returning from Ethiopia to Israel. Isaiah 43:6 says: “I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth.”²⁸² Thus, God clearly facilitated the return of the Jews to Israel, even Jews from the “south.”

Teacher Liang even adheres to Lindsey’s view that the 10-headed beast in the Book of Revelation refers to the European Economic Community, now the European Union (EU). Though the European Union has many more than 10 members, she is convinced that in the very end, only 10 powers will remain. She also predicts that the addition of Turkey to the European Union will mark another step towards the end times, as Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country. Daniel 2:40-25 describes a beast whose feet and toes are partly made of baked clay and partly made of iron. This mixture represents a kingdom that will be partly strong and partly brittle. As the iron is mixed with clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not be united. According to Teacher Liang, the addition of Turkey to the European Union will be the fulfillment of this prophecy, as Turkey will cause the EU to become weak and disunified. Teacher Liang even claims that when the EEC was created in Rome in 1957, the building in which the meeting took place was numbered 666; for her, this is another clear sign of the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies. Because of these signs, Teacher Liang stressed the

²⁸¹ Psalms 83.

²⁸² Isaiah 43:6.

importance of evangelizing quickly for time is running short. She also encouraged her students in the underground seminary to tell all their Jewish friends to return to Israel since Jewish settlement is a key part of the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Teacher Liang was extraordinarily successful in spreading her Zionist political agenda. In fact, as a result of Teacher Liang's sermons, many students in the underground seminaries cheered for both Israel's team and China's during the 2008 Olympics.

There are significant implications for the spread of Christian Zionism within a rapidly growing house church movement in China. Many of these ramifications have already manifested themselves as the result of the success of Christian Zionism in the United States. Based on Zionist arguments, Palestine is the Promised Land that God gave the Jews, and thus, Jews today have a permanent and unconditional right to this land regardless of the fact that another group of people has historically lived there.²⁸³ This belief has played a major role in influencing American foreign policy. For example, since 1973, Washington has provided Israel with more support than any other state. By 2004, Israel had received over \$140 billion in direct American economic and military assistance. Every year, Israel receives about \$3 billion in direct assistance, roughly one-fifth of the US foreign aid budget. Israel is also the only country to receive a blank check from the United States, without restrictions on how it is to spend its aid.

The Christian Zionist Party has also been extremely successful in wooing the votes of Evangelical Christians, bringing George W. Bush to power in the 2000 elections with his "civilizing Christian imperialism...Christian supremacist vision, oil imperialism and the belief

²⁸³ Nur Masalha, The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-colonialism in Israel-Palestine (New York: Zed Books, 2007) 86.

that American-Israeli alliance is central to US domination of the Middle East.”²⁸⁴ Christian Zionist support for Israel also played a major role in pressuring the US government to go to war against Iraq in 2003. According to an article published by the Institute for Historical Review, “the crucial factor in President Bush’s decision to attack was to help Israel.”²⁸⁵ Jewish-Zionist plans for war against Iraq have been in place for years. In a policy paper written for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies pushed for “an effort [that] can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq, an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right...”²⁸⁶ While Iraq may not have posed a threat to the United States, it did pose a threat to Israel. In a paper entitled "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," John J. Mearsheimer, professor of political science at the University of Chicago, and Stephen M. Walt, professor of international affairs at Harvard University, wrote:

Pressure from Israel and the [pro-Israel] Lobby was not the only factor behind the decision to attack Iraq in March 2003, but it was critical. Some Americans believe that this was a war for oil, but there is hardly any direct evidence to support this claim. Instead, the war was motivated in good part by a desire to make Israel more secure... Within the United States, the main driving force behind the Iraq war was a small band of neoconservatives, many with close ties to Israel’s Likud Party. In addition, key leaders of the Lobby’s major organizations lent their voices to the campaign for war.²⁸⁷

In addition to wanting to support Israel, some Christian Zionists even see the War in Iraq as the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy of the fall of Babylon. Isaiah 13:1-10 can be interpreted as saying:

²⁸⁴ Ibid. 116.

²⁸⁵ Mark Weber, “Iraq: A War for Israel,” Institute for Historical Review, 2005, Institute for Historical Review, 06 April 2009 <<http://www.ihr.org/leaflets/iraqwar.shtml>>.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

I have commanded My sanctified ones [true Christians]; I have also called My mighty ones [leaders of America, Britain, Australia] for My anger—Those who rejoice in My exaltation.” The noise of a multitude in the mountains, Like that of many people! A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together [coalition of the willing nations, true believers from different nations]! The Lord of hosts musters the army for battle. They come from a far country [America, Britain, Australia and other countries], from the end of heaven [cruise missiles and G.P.S. guided bombs]—The Lord and His weapons of indignation, to destroy the whole land [shock and awe weapons such as M.O.A.B. and bunker-busters]. Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, Every man’s heart will melt, And they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; They will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; They will be amazed at one another; Their faces will be like flames. Behold, the day of the Lord comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine.²⁸⁸

According to Paul Wong, a Christian minister and President of ARK International, these events—the destruction of Babylon—manifested themselves during the air attacks on Baghdad. Thus, Isaiah 21:9 was also fulfilled: “And look, here comes a chariot of men with a pair of horsemen! And he answered and said, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen! And all the carved images of her gods He has broken to the ground.’”²⁸⁹ To many Christian Zionists, America’s victory in Iraq was in evitable for it was foretold in Isaiah 14:3-7:

It shall come to pass in the day the Lord gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve, that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon [Saddam Hussein], and say: "How the oppressor [Saddam] has ceased, The golden city [Baghdad] ceased! The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked [Saddam’s regime], The scepter of the rulers; he who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he who ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted and no one hinders [after Saddam and his regime are deposed]. The whole earth is at rest and quiet;

²⁸⁸ Paul Wong, “Understanding the War in Iraq through Biblical Prophecy,” Ark International, 2003, Ark International, 06 April 2009 <http://www.geocities.com/wariraq_ark/prophecy.htm>.

²⁸⁹ Isaiah 21:9.

They break forth into singing [after the total victory for America, British and the coalition forces].²⁹⁰

Thus, it is clear that the spread of Christian Zionism has had a major impact on some of the most important issues in American foreign policy. Nur Masalha, author of *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology, and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine*, argues that dispensationalism has also been used to give theological justification to racism, the denial of basic human rights, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their historic lands, the building of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, and religious fanaticism.²⁹¹ Theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether sums up these impacts well by saying,

This extraordinary theology, while ultimately anti-Jewish and genocidal, places these fundamentalist Christians on the side of the most militant of Jewish fundamentalist settlers who desire to settle all of the land, expel all Palestinians, and destroy the Muslim holy buildings on the Temple Mount in order to rebuild the temple, founding a strictly observant Torah state.²⁹²

Such uncompromising views have been a major impediment to the establishment of peace in the Middle East. Thus, one should certainly be concerned about the rapid spread of such an ideology within the underground church in China, a rapidly growing movement in a rising world power.

It is clear from this chapter that the growth of the underground church in China has significant political ramifications. In particular, the underground church's emphasis on evangelism has caused it to mobilize in movements like the Back to Jerusalem Movement, which in many ways perpetuates cultural imperialism. Such missionary endeavors have provoked significant backlashes in many parts of the world. Moreover, with the spread of

²⁹⁰ Isaiah 14:3-7.

²⁹¹ Masalha 130.

²⁹² Ibid. 126.

Christian Zionism in the underground church, Christians in China may even seek to shape current events in the Middle East in the same way Christians in the United States have done. Such involvement and intervention will only lead to more violence and inequality between Israelis and Palestinians.

CONCLUSION

THE SPREAD OF THE AMERICAN KINGDOM

Thus far, this study has attempted to account for the rapid growth of the underground church in China. I argue that the popularity of the underground church relative to the Three-Self Church can be attributed to thirteen key factors: 1) its size, 2) its belief in healings and miracles, 3) its charismatic form of worship, 4) the growth of the Three-Self Church, 5) the effects of the Cultural Revolution, 6) its mobility and flexibility in the face of government pressure, 7) a “persecution complex,” 8) the level of commitment of its leaders, 9) its focus on training new leaders, 10) the efficacy of its organization and management, 11) its ability to network 12) its focus on evangelism, and 13) its adherence to Fundamentalist / Literalist interpretations of the Bible. From there, I delineate the theological differences between the underground church and the Three-Self Church. Led by charismatic leaders like Wang Mingdao, the underground church has generally relied on literalist interpretations of the Bible. In contrast, the Three-Self Church is based largely on the theology of Bishop K.H. Ting, whose religious thought is drawn from process and liberation theologies. This difference in theological thought has caused many Christians to leave the Three-Self Church on the basis that the Three-Self Church strays too far from the Word of God. In my final chapter, I outline

some of the social and political implications of the success of the underground church. In particular, I emphasize the underground church's colonial legacy, and its tendency to replicate colonial attitudes in its approach to evangelizing the "10/40 Window."

This analysis unveils two key paradoxes that remain to be answered. The first relates to the relationship between the underground church, the Three-Self Church, and Fundamentalist American churches. Both the underground church and the Three-Self Church claim to be indigenous movements that free the Chinese church from its colonial legacy. However, both churches have strong connections to both American patronage and American theological thought. In fact, the very idea of an indigenous Chinese church came from an American missionary. Realizing that the future of the Chinese church depended on the indigenization of Christianity, Henry Venn, General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, became the first person to articulate the three principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation.²⁹³ Later, Y.T. Wu adopted these principles for the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Since then, the theology of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement has been heavily dominated by the writings of Bishop K.H. Ting. Ting was trained in classical Western theology at a university run by an American Episcopal Church. He later attended Union Theological Seminary in New York. Much of his work is drawn from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French philosopher and Jesuit priest, as well as Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian liberation theologian. Though "liberation theology" may not be classified as "traditional Western thought," it certainly is not indigenously Chinese either. Moreover, Ting meshes his theological ideas with the Marxism of

²⁹³ Madison Trammel, "Marking Time in the Middle Kingdom," Christian News and Research, 2009, Christianity Today, 12 April 2009 <<http://ctlibrary.com/newsletter/newsletterarchives/2007-03-12.html>>.

the Chinese Communist Party. This combination leaves one wondering: what is “Chinese” about the Three-Self Church?

Relative to the Three-Self Church, one might argue that Wang Mingdao’s church comes much closer to an indigenous movement. Because of Wang’s negative experiences with both foreigners and missionaries, Wang believed that the Chinese church needed to distance itself from foreign influence. Thus, Wang refused to join any ecumenical church movements. Instead, Wang emphasized simplicity and a strict adherence to the Bible. It is this obedience to the Bible that led Wang to oppose the Three-Self Church, as the Three-Self Church would have limited his ability to carry out God’s command, preaching the gospel. Though much of Wang’s legacy continues to be felt throughout the underground church, his focus on indigenization and independence has been largely forgotten. In their desire to believe what’s “right” (as defined by a strict interpretation of the Bible), many house churches today seek theological training from abroad since only Three-Self seminaries are permitted within China. In fact, many house church leaders are beginning to study in Fundamentalist American seminaries for a few years before returning to China to minister their local churches. House churches also continue to receive financial patronage from both independent American churches and from major international missionary organizations such as Partners International, China Aid, and the Far East Broadcasting Company. Many house churches involved in the Back to Jerusalem Movement also have strong ties to missionary organizations that seek to evangelize through the 10/40 Window. Together with these organizations, the Back to Jerusalem Movement carries on a legacy of “colonial evangelism,” that is clearly influenced by foreign objectives.

Thus, it is clear that neither the Three-Self Church nor the underground church can claim to be truly independent, indigenous movements. This forces us to question: Is it possible for Christianity to become a truly “Chinese” religion? What does that even mean? Much Christian theology today has been shaped as much by Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plato as it has by the Bible itself. Does that mean that Wang was right in his claim that a true, indigenous Christian theology must depend only on the Bible? But isn’t the Bible enmeshed with the stories of the Jews, Greeks, and Romans? What is the value of having an “indigenous” theology anyway? Analysis of the theological paradox of the underground church and the Three-Self Church helps to answer these questions.

Given the demographics of the underground church relative to that of the Three-Self Church, one would expect the underground church to adhere to a liberation-like theology sooner than would the Three-Self Church. According to many studies, members of house churches tend to be poorer and less educated. In contrast, the Three-Self Church is urban-based and its members are relatively well educated. At face value, then, it seems inherently contradictory that the underground church would choose to adhere to a theology with a strong colonial legacy over a liberation-like theology that claims to work in its interests. It is equally puzzling that China’s Communist government would promote a liberation-like theology, while it simultaneously continues to deny citizens civil and political rights.

To address this paradox, I will draw from the writings of David Stoll who attempts to answer some of these same questions within the context of Latin America in his book *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*. Stoll asks: “Why should a religion that appears to work against the interests of the poor help them in their struggle for survival?...Why should poor people seek

miracles from religious figures who tell them to submit to oppressive governments?”²⁹⁴ Such questions are equally relevant in China, where the underground church encourages its members to obey the government in all areas except religion, for the Bible says, “give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.”²⁹⁵ In Latin America, Catholics are abandoning the Church in favor of Evangelical Protestantism at an accelerating rate. One bishop in Brazil has warned that Latin America is turning Protestant faster than Central Europe did in the sixteenth century. While the Protestant movement was relatively insignificant prior to World War II, today, it includes 10-20% of the population in Brazil, Chile, and Central America, and continues to grow rapidly. As in China, Stoll finds that Evangelical Protestantism has proved so successful that it has become a threat to liberation theology. In places like revolutionary Nicaragua, Christians who have identified most strongly with the Sandinistas have not managed to appeal to the poor as effectively as conservative evangelicals have.

Moreover, Stoll argues that the Evangelical church's ties to both the US government and North American financial resources are not sufficient to explain the Evangelicals' overwhelming success. For Stoll, such an explanation “suggests a deep distrust of the poor, an unwillingness to accept the possibility that they could turn an imported religion to their own purposes.”²⁹⁶ Instead, Stoll argues that Latin Americans may be moving closer to Evangelical Protestantism because of liberation theology's inability to speak to the actual needs of the poor, as opposed to an idealized version of those needs. “Liberation” contradicts the most logical way for the poor to deal with oppressive situations—through a combination of deference, foot-dragging, and evasion. Instead, liberation theology tends to encourage a form of defiance that

²⁹⁴ David Stoll, Is Latin America Turning Protestant? (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) 308.

²⁹⁵ Matthew 22:21.

²⁹⁶ Stoll xvi.

can at times be suicidal. Says Stoll, “given this fact of life out in the hard places where liberation theology must prove itself, the frequent assumption of the need for revolutionary upheaval indicates that more or less safely situated intellectuals have had an outsize role in its production.”²⁹⁷ Encouraging the poor to insist on their rights is equivalent to asking them to forsake the traditional function of religion as a sanctuary from oppression. Liberation theology demands a life-and-death commitment from the people who are supposed to be liberated. Says Stoll,

In Central America, as revolutionary conflict turned into a war of attrition with no end in sight, conservative evangelicals appealed to the traditional resignation of the poor in ways liberation theology could not. However much liberation theology spoke to aspirations for a better life, the escapism of the evangelical message was more compatible with the usual posture of the poor—fatalistic acceptance of the constraints on their continuous negotiation for survival. Under such circumstances, it was easy for liberation theology to fall out of touch with the people it claimed to represent.²⁹⁸

When the revolutionary movements died down in Guatemala, evangelicals took the opportunity to invite survivors into their churches. Unlike liberation theology, Evangelicalism offered to improve one’s life through simple personal decisions, which was much easier than trying to overturn the social order. Evangelicals provided a theology of personal improvement, allowing the poor to focus on circumstances they could change (breaking bad habits, for example), rather than ones they could not (the political order, for example). Calls for revolutionary struggle are unable to sustain the poor through long, hard years in the same way that evangelical beliefs can. For example, Pentecostal churches have grown particularly quickly because of their ability to speak to the heart of the struggle for personal survival, addressing issues such as health and reproduction through the powers of the supernatural. Stoll criticizes

²⁹⁷ Ibid. 313.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. 314.

the left for assuming that the intercourse of the poor with supernatural forces prevents them from understanding and acting on their situation of poverty. He says, “if the masses feel the need to protect themselves against evil spirits, then doing so is not ‘escapist.’ Rather, it is necessary, leaving the question of how it will be done and with what implications.”²⁹⁹

Stoll’s analysis ascribes agency to the poor. The poor are not simply manipulated into becoming Evangelical believers; rather, within Evangelical Protestantism, they find forms of empowerment that they do not find in liberation theology. For millions of Latin Americans struggling to survive capitalist development and botched social experiments, evangelical churches have become what Richard N. Adams calls “survival vehicles.” Where traditional social organizations have failed, evangelical churches constitute a new, flexible movement in which participation is voluntary and leadership is charismatic.³⁰⁰ This examination demonstrates that in many parts of the world, the ability of Evangelical Protestantism to provide stability amidst turmoil and to address people’s personal needs eclipses all other factors. Although Evangelical Protestantism may not be indigenous, and although it may not call for social equality, it is a religion with which the poor can identify.

In many ways, such an analysis is relevant to the case of China. As in Latin America, it would be much easier for Christians to adhere to a religion that calls for personal improvement than one that calls for social reordering. In fact, many Christians in China convert to Christianity precisely because it has inspired them to change their lives in one way or another. Moreover, having survived through the turmoil of the Chinese Revolution, Tiananmen Square, and the Cultural Revolution, it is likely that Chinese Christians are tired

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 317.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. 331.

of revolutionary talk and instead crave a religion that provides them with stability and reassurance. It can be for this reason that Christians within the Three-Self Church are more likely to be the “safely situated intellectuals” to whom Stoll refers. Moreover, Stoll points out that the emphasis in Evangelical Protestantism is on the *personal*—personal improvement, personal redemption, personal relationship with God. It is this focus on the “personal” that is lacking in liberation theology and that encourages and supports poor Christians through difficult times. In China, house churches are much more successful at forging personal relationships and promoting personal development than the Three-Self Church, if only because they are much smaller.

However, one key difference to note between the Latin American and Chinese cases is that in Latin America living according to liberation theology is risky. In contrast, in China adhering to liberation theology—the theology of the state—is safe, while attending an underground church could be dangerous. This risk factor only further highlights the theological appeal of Evangelical Protestantism with its emphasis on the personal. Fundamentalist Chinese Christians believe so strongly in their faith that they are willing to risk persecution. There may also be an “identity” component to this argument. According to Stoll, liberal religious life has run out of vitality and conviction as it replaces Bible study with pop psychology, evangelism with social services, religious faith with political causes, and God with man. These are some of the exact changes that the Three-Self Church seeks to make. According to William Willimon, this “indiscriminate openness to new trends had led to a crisis of identity. Many mainline churches had lost the sense of being a distinct community

with a distinct religious faith.”³⁰¹ This analysis has important implications for liberal and liberation theologies; if these theologies wish to remain relevant to the people they seek to “liberate,” they must reorient themselves in ways that reinforce community identity.

The growth of the underground church in China can also be seen as just one case within the global fundamentalist movement. In today’s technologically advanced world, there is considerable international receptivity to a fundamentalist Christian message as well as a powerful network for its spread. For example, “Proyecto Luz,” started by Pat Robertson, is a television revival that reaches over 60% of the Guatemalan audience. The revival engages thousands of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches throughout Central America. Likewise, healing revivals in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa draw daily attendance of over two hundred thousand people. The world’s largest church, the Yoido Full Gospel Central Church is located in Seoul, South Korea, and has over eight hundred thousand members.

What is even more notable, however, is that while Christian fundamentalism is going global, the Christian message is still predominantly American. When believers enter a church in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, they participate in a form of worship that can be found in Memphis, Portland, or New York City. In fact, it is likely that the message is a “charismatic product” marketed by Bible schools in places like Tulsa or Pasadena. Say Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose: “These Protestants disseminate beliefs that can comfort middle-class businessmen at a prayer breakfast in Rio de Janeiro and inspire the poorest of the world’s would-be consumers

³⁰¹ Ibid. 45.

at a Bonnke crusade in Lagos.”³⁰² This same trend is visible in China’s underground church, which clearly displays signs of American influence in both its theology and its religious rituals.

According to Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose, the success of the spread of American fundamentalism is intimately tied with the industrialization of many parts of the developing world and the commodification of everyday life. They argue that there is a connection between worldwide capitalist expansion and this new form of internationalized Christianity; the two go hand in hand. After all, Christianity has historically been the modernizing and Westernizing force that accompanies mercantile and industrial expansion, capitalism, and colonialism. Moreover, today, “Christian countries” overwhelmingly control the world’s productive resources and manufacturing, banking, and commercial institutions. They are also responsible for the dissemination of culture generated by scientific, academic, and commercial sources. Thus, Christian fundamentalism is successfully being sold along with everything else in the global capitalist system.

American fundamentalism is also gaining popularity because of its ability to offer stability amidst a rapidly globalizing and changing world; “the new fundamentalist Christianity offers them a variation of the disciplined faith that helped sustain daily life in previous periods of industrialization and urbanization.”³⁰³ American evangelists are marketing “a supra-national and supernatural solution to religious uncertainties.”³⁰⁴ Much of this stability is provided by an American “faith” theology that is equivalent to “prosperity theology.” By promising material blessings, prosperity theology has attracted a large part of the developing world. Thus, the

³⁰² Steve Brouwer, et al., Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism (New York: Routledge, 1996) 2.

³⁰³ Ibid. 8.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. 7.

American capitalist system first destroys traditional cultures, and then American fundamentalism comes in to sustain local populations through periods of social turmoil, which then serves to further perpetuate American cultural dominance.

Many scholars attempt to separate modernization and religious change into two separate movements, arguing that economic globalization (the modern phenomenon) is actually juxtaposed to cultural tribalism (religious fundamentalism). However, Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose show that religion itself is enmeshed in the process of modernizing and globalizing (led by the United States). In particular, the spread of Christian fundamentalism has resulted in a universalizing of the faith that intertwines with the homogenizing influences of consumerism, mass communication, and production. In fact, Christian fundamentalism can be called the greatest homogenizing force of all as it serves to perpetuate American cultural hegemony. Salomen Nahmad of the National Indigenist Institute of Mexico explains it even better when he says, “Those Americans are the Franciscans and the Dominicans of our time. They may not see it that way, but they are the religious arm of an economic, political, and cultural system.”³⁰⁵

Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose’s “prosperity theology” does not yet appear to have taken root in China. Here, Wang’s emphasis on asceticism and piety has led the house church to remain deeply suspicious of wealth. Wealth is often seen as a source of sin that leads believers into temptation. However, given the house church’s intimate connections to American churches, as well as China’s rising position in the global economy, it would be interesting to see whether or not such a “prosperity theology” will gain prominence in China in coming years. This seems especially probable given that in many parts of China, Americans continue to

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 11.

be regarded with certain respect due to their higher economic position. Such undeserved deference easily leads to an emulation of American culture and religion. Many Chinese Christians have already begun to argue that the growth of Christianity is good for China and good for business because without Christian morals, Chinese people will continue to lie, cheat, and steal when engaging in economic transactions.³⁰⁶ An adoption of “prosperity theology” would only bring the underground church one step closer to its American roots.

There is no doubt that American theology has successfully been “sold” to the underground church. What is even more alarming is that Chinese Christians seek to further spread American theology through its devout evangelicalism. This results in the perpetuation of American cultural hegemony. By attempting to convert entire ethnic groups in the 10/40 Window, the underground church acts as one of those homogenizing forces that Christianizes (Americanizes) the world. Chinese Christians in the underground church may find themselves acting as arms of American cultural, economic, political, and military power. In spreading God’s Kingdom, Chinese Christians are spreading the American Kingdom.

³⁰⁶ Brother Chang, Personal Interview, 31 July 2008.

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