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tomorrow. And what is criticised today may be praised beyond measure tomorrow! Who knows what tomorrow will bring? Today's enthusiasm can be tomorrow's evil doings. Such political and value changes only brought a loss of sense of security and ideals: tomorrow became a permanently shadowy unknown. This effect was true for local cadres, educated youth, and all citizens alike.

The many experiences of local cadres—Communist Party and government workers—in the storms of political change made them crafty and experienced. They came to believe that “it is better to have one less affair than one more.” They would not work too hard or be too enthusiastic—in everything they became reserved. They deemed this apathy a relatively safe and secure political life. Some, knowing the insecurity of the future, strove to gain position and authority today, to have some self-protection and material gain while they could. This approach created a serious problem of corruption among the cadres, still a big problem in Chinese politics today.

Yet some educated youths have not abandoned communist ideology and its utopian ideals of the future. That they have not totally given up on Marxism is shown by some of their underground journals. But they profess deep disappointment in, and suspicions about, the party's performance over the past decade. Their attitude has been to trust in Marxist ideas, but be skeptical about the absolute power of the party. They are searching for a new absolute in classic Marxism, a system without one party dictatorship or individual hero worship. These young people may seem immature, but they may be able to lead China away from Mao's strict communism.

For the Chinese, the painfulness of recalling the past and the loss of confidence in the future means that they can only live for today. Therefore a desire for immediate sensual and materialist pleasure has become widespread in China. At the same time, the uncertainty of the future has brought a revival of traditional Chinese superstitions especially in the rural villages.

CONCLUSION

To what degree and in what directions have the worldviews of the people in China really changed over the last thirty years? It may be that the changes summarized in this article could pass quickly from their minds. For underneath the immediate tensions, the Chinese mentality remains today much as it has been for thousands of years, [P. 69](#) in the world's longest cultural tradition. As Christians, let us pray that during this time of change in China, there may indeed be a lasting change—a change according to the truth of scripture.

Milton Wan, a former research associate of the Chinese Church Research Center, Hong Kong, is now completing his D. Phil. at Oxford University, England. [p. 70](#)

China Today—An Evangelical Perspective

Arthur F. Glasser

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The most important questions about China have no absolute answers. Differences of opinion and judgment exist even among the best-informed China specialists, and there will be continuing debate about China's past and future (Terrill 1979:xiii).

This being so, it is particularly incumbent on missiologists that they interact freely and continuously with all who would presume to interpret the present state of the Christian movement in that vast and troubled land. *Missiology* salutes the *International Bulletin* for its serious effort to bring China back into focus among Christians in the Western world (April 1981 issue). We would encourage all *Missiology* readers concerned with China to read carefully each article in that special issue.

And yet, because these articles largely reflect but one perspective—largely dominant within conciliar Protestantism today—it is felt that a non-conciliar viewpoint is needed to enable the current missiological “conversation on China” to achieve better balance. When serious issues are glossed over, when sweeping judgments are made, and when party-line emphases are loudly trumpeted it is inevitable that some will howl in dismay. Now, it is not the function of *Missiology* to howl back, but it is hoped this editorial will supplement what has been said—and perhaps serve to call for an ongoing dialogue in which all three segments of the constituency of our society participate freely and are accorded the respectful hearing they deserve.

Frankly, I was disturbed when I counted over 20 negative references to “making converts” in one article alone! After all, I was one who went to China to “make disciples” of Jesus Christ in obedience to his explicit command! So in this editorial we shall seek to describe what non-conciliar evangelicals are thinking about China and the complexity of the Christian presence in its midst. It is hoped that *Missiology* shall be able in the near future to publish a comprehensive Catholic overview and thereby further balance the conversation. Indeed, to deny oneself exposure to any particular perspective on China today is to confess albeit tacitly to possessing a distorted and incomplete understanding of what is admittedly a very complex matter. [p. 71](#)

SPIRITUAL HUNGER AND THE GOSPEL

We begin with the dimension of evangelistic concern in the face of the spiritual hunger of the Chinese people. The postulate behind this is the expressed will of God that no individual or people should perish, but that all should come to know the Creator who in Jesus Christ has become the Redeemer. When evangelicals face the Chinese people of this generation, their overriding concern must be: “How shall they hear? ... Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” ([Rm. 10:14–17](#)).

One has only to review what has transpired in China since the inauguration of the People's Republic in 1949: the euphoria that marked the expulsion of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists; the early reign of terror coupled with sharp losses in the Korean war; land reform and the collectivization of agriculture; the Hundred Flowers campaign and its abrupt suppression; the Great Leap Forward and the “Anti-Rightist” campaign; the subsequent relaxation of commune life only to be followed shortly thereafter by the “wasted decade” of the Cultural Revolution; the Red Guard violence and the “Anti-Confucius” movement; the sudden turnaround—the abrupt arrest of the “Gang of Four” and the elevation of Teng Hsiao-p'ing with his modernization program, climaxing in the recent silencing of the “Human Rights” campaigns and the posthumous rehabilitation of Liu Shao-ch'i.

Never have a people experienced such wild swings of the revolutionary pendulum. Never have so many individuals been such tormented pawns of “leftists” and “rightists” in violent struggles for personal power and/or ideological purity. Never have a people been so abused by the “stupid cruelties” of politics. Fairbank’s assessment rings true:

The Chinese revolution since 1949 has been the greatest in history, measured either by the number of people involved or by the extent and rapidity of the changes made. To the outside world it has also been the least known event of modern times. Frenzies of joyful enthusiasm and vengeful hatred of organized effort and self-sacrifice, depths of terror and exhaustion, prolonged frustration, ardent self-discipline, new hope and pride, have been experienced among a population rising from 600 to 1000 millions (1979:358).

We would not be so uncharitable as to deny that China has experienced national regeneration as a result of its socialist transformation. Primary schooling, public health and medical services, improved agriculture, better food distribution and industrialization—all these [p. 72](#) have come to rural China. Much success has been achieved in liberating the Chinese from their agelong bondage to extreme poverty, hunger and disease. For all this Christians can be thankful. However, quite apart from the frightful human cost at which this measure of progress has been achieved, Jesus Christ would have us remember that the person “does not live by bread alone” ([Dt. 8:3](#); [Mt. 4:4](#)).

Pondering the present state of the Chinese people one is reminded of Pablo Picasso who proudly affirmed, “I went to Communism as one goes to a spring of fresh water.” Millions upon millions of Chinese—especially idealistic youth—went to Communism with the same thirst and the same high hopes of satisfying their innermost longings for meaning in life and satisfaction of heart, only to leave Communism “as one clambers out of a poisoned river strewn with the wreckage of flooded cities and the corpses of the drowned” (Koestler 1955:42). Young Chinese by the millions were told that whereas they might fail, the Party could not—it embodied “The Scientific Revolutionary Idea in History”. The Party pontificated:

History flows toward her goal ... she knows the way; ... she makes no mistakes; ... who has no absolute faith in History does not belong to the Party’s ranks ... The Party’s course is sharply defined, like a narrow path in the mountains, ... the slightest false step, right or left, takes one down the precipice ... The air is thin; ... who becomes dizzy is lost (ibid:43–44).

“Lost”! During recent decades millions of Chinese gave themselves to the direction of their Party leaders. They struggled to become blank sheets on which the Revolution wrote its orders. “Ta kung, wu szu”—“Everything for the public, nothing for one’s self.” This familiar slogan from the past was bent to justify any vileness in high hopes of exterminating all supposed vileness. The mandate seemed to be: “Sink into the mud, embrace the butcher, but change the world—it needs it!” In the late ’60s over 15 million Red Guards generated a nightmare of uncertainty and incessant madness, terror, confusion and anarchy—what Leys called “the most gigantic frenzy China had ever known since the Taiping rebellion” (Lyll 1980:110).

And with what result? In late 1980 China’s state radio broadcast to its revolution-weary people the disillusioning line: “We must not sing praises of any saviour again ... The reason is very simple—... there has never been any saviour.” Jonathan Mirsky, a specialist writer on Chinese affairs, commented in the South China Morning Post,

Statements like this attacking Mao’s hitherto unassailable position in history are part of a current campaign in China to reduce the late Chairman to human size. They are printed

and broadcast all over the country, [p. 73](#) from Mao's home province to far-Western Xinjiang.

What does all this mean? What happens when one's leaders are discredited and their integrity is publicly questioned? Bitterness, resentment, disillusionment, cynicism—John King Fairbank and other Sinologists cannot find language vivid enough to describe the depths of the apathy, skepticism and suspicion with which the Chinese are currently reacting to all political slogans.

Seldom has faith been frustrated on so vast a scale ... The initial enthusiasm of the revolution has been spent (1979:415).

Great numbers of Chinese have by now realized that they have been manipulated and exploited by those who pressed them to sacrifice and struggle for romantic mirages and impossible dreams. The revolutionary spirit has so evaporated in the countryside and the fabric of China's society has been so broken that community spirit and mutual trust are rare. Only with a guarded sense of relief do they welcome the nation's present apparent stability, the relaxation of petty restrictions and Peking's official toleration of a measure of personal freedom. Imagine, however, their fear that the "leftists" will again stage a comeback and drive the populace into another artificially-generated revolution. Visitors (Chinese) to China almost uniformly speak of encountering an all pervasive sense of anxiety concerning the future.

What is significant is that this anxiety has generated a growing spirit of religious inquiry throughout China that is increasingly apparent to the discerning. Many Chinese are beyond the reach of any slogans boasting that people unaided shall perfect human society. That dream has died. They now "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one" ([Heb. 11:16](#)). Overseas Chinese Christians who visit China today speak in glowing terms of encountering a widespread and dynamic "house church" phenomenon (some put the number higher than 20,000!). They find Christians who are increasingly courageous and vocal in their witness to Jesus Christ. Visitors are challenged by their experiential conviction that the gospel is truly "good news". Many are being drawn by the quality of their lives, by the warmth and support of their fellowship groups, and by the "life in Christ" they corporately share. But all who have contacted these "house churches" are appalled at the dearth of Bibles and Christian literature that characterized all Christian gatherings in inland China.

Here's where we come in: China's acute moral and spiritual vacuum and the growing religious inquiry of its people is a challenge to the church outside China. We should be grateful for those Christians [p. 74](#) in the West who have been responding to this challenge for some time. We do well to embrace their priorities: 1) Their widespread pattern of organized prayer in their churches for China and its rulers; 2) their efforts to get Bibles and other Christian literature into China; 3) their sacrificial giving of hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years to broadcast the gospel into China. I'm fully aware that Bishop K. H. Ting, the chairperson of the *Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement* along with the *International Bulletin's* "Focus on China" issue frown on all this, but evangelicals cannot but think otherwise (Ting 1980–1981:148).

In recent months the five broadcasting stations outside China participating in this ministry have reported a tremendous increase in the mail response to their programs. It is now abundantly confirmed that the sacrifice that made possible more than 260 frequency hours per week of evangelical broadcasting into China has not been in vain. I would not be so naive or uncritical as to endorse everything that goes under the name of evangelical broadcasting into China, but a careful examination of many programs uncovers a surprisingly creative, relevant and culturally-conditioned use of radio to

commend the gospel to the Chinese people. Reading the Scriptures at dictation speed; providing extended expositions of major books of the Old and New Testaments along with detailed training in personal evangelism; discipleship formation and group Bible study; ministering comfort and exhortation to isolated Christians—the range is wide and varied.

It needs to be kept in mind that about 63 per cent of the 800 million rural population of China are connected to the rediffusion network, i.e., one receiver for every five people. Since a radio ministry is flexible and can reach all levels of people, we do well to call churches in the West to augment their giving and praying, and encourage broadcasters to co-operate among themselves to strengthen their signals and continue to enlarge the range of their programs, especially those of a pre-evangelism nature.

Similarly, with the literacy rate having grown from 20 to over 80 per cent during the past 30 years and with the government now permitting people to read non-Communist materials, Christian publishing houses must be encouraged in producing materials for Christians and non-Christians alike. Chinese Christians from overseas who visit China need to be encouraged to prearrange their movements so that they can share these publications with local Christians. It would be a terrible tragedy if the churches in the West were to fail to make the most of the spiritual vacuum currently existing throughout inland China. [p. 75](#)

RADICAL THEOLOGY AND THE TRUTH

This brings me to the second issue that evangelicals would interject into this conversation on China. I trust you will bear with the forthrightness with which it must be presented. It arises in part out of the inability of many non-evangelical Western theologians to interpret aright what has been taking place in China in recent decades. In the eyes of evangelicals the whole theologizing process has been tragically betrayed by those who have seen in Maoist liberation history the redeeming work of Christ. Not that any would charge them with deliberately misreading the signals. It is rather a matter of the basic presuppositions upon which they have erected their secularized approaches to *Missio Dei*. The hard data currently coming out of China effectively reduces to unmitigated nonsense some of their most cherished formulations.

I refer to the way in which a few years ago conciliar “China watchers” in their eagerness to read Mao’s China positively tossed biblical categories to the wind. Admittedly, we all “see through a glass darkly,” and the best of us knows only “in part.” But I am not unmoved when I recall the damage that has been done through the penchant for reducing “the good news of the Kingdom” to radical politics; for downplaying the inveteracy of human evil; for resisting the biblical priority of preaching the redemptive gospel and calling people to repentance and faith; for blurring the qualitative difference Christ makes between his followers and the world; for being silent about the holiness and righteous judgments of God; for neglecting the stark biblical witness that people can be lost forever; for regarding the Cultural Revolution as an extension of *Heilsgeschichte*; on and on.

Frankly, when one reviews the papers and reports of the Ecumenical Seminar held at Bastad (1974), the Ecumenical Colloquium held in Louvain (1974) and not a few articles in *China Notes* in recent years, one wishes their authors had been more tough-minded, more critical and more biblical in their orientation. I have no desire to single out for rebuke any particular scholar who sought to evaluate the Maoist revolution in millennial terms or who saw the “new person” emerging in China apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit or who saw “signs of the kingdom of God” despite the deliberate Maoist rejection of Jesus Christ the King. Frankly, I shared the indignation of the Catholic priest

who called one of these “China watchers” a blasphemer at the American Society of Missiology annual meeting several years back. But I am concerned. How can we have honest conversation on China today without being candid [p. 76](#) about what many wrote yesterday? I do not quite know how to deal with this problem. What about authenticity and credibility?

Fortunately, we have a prophetic model in the response of Princeton Seminary’s Charles C. West to such theologizing. He begins with the humble admission that the best of us is

tempted to be unfaithful ... It is so much easier to find the meaning of history in a human movement than to endure the tension of judgment and grace which always exists between the Divine purpose and human power. How much more satisfying if, instead of having to work with the mission of an imperfect church, we can find in Marxist theory and Maoist practice the true expression of our time of Christ’s saving purpose!

West then cites one of the abominable overstatements of a “China-Watcher-cum-theologian”:

The Christian’s task is not to judge or to justify, but rather to locate, recognize, participate and celebrate authentic human liberation wherever it is occurring. Mao’s China is certainly a place where during the last four decades God has been at work to liberate nearly a fifth of the human race from the clutches of “sin”.

To which West gives this devastating and necessary reply:

So, it does not really matter that the church is stifled in China and the Gospel is not proclaimed. The transformation of China by Communist Party leadership is itself the redeeming work of Christ. Mao’s thoughts are covert Christianity. All we Christians have to add is explicit appreciation of that fact.

Then West adds his punch line:

There is only one thing wrong with this: it is idolatry, not theology (West 1976: 39).

Many are well aware of this issue and we should realize the extent and depth of growing evangelical impatience with the sort of “theology of liberation” that equates “salvation” only with social and political revolutionary change. Although a liberation theology has been desperately needed by both Catholics and Protestants in traditionally Christian countries, many evangelicals are rightly concerned to participate in the worldwide struggle for social justice and reconciliation within human society. They refuse to retreat from affirming that the primary task of the church’s mission of sacrificial service to the world is evangelism and making Jesus Christ known to the millions of people living today to whom he is still a stranger. This might mean tolerating (albeit with anguish!) the polarization of the church. Non-evangelicals dare not underestimate the depth of evangelical [p. 77](#) commitment to the evangelistic task.

In 1976 West was among the few in conciliar circles who rebuked these “China watchers” for the freewheeling hermeneutic with which they rendered the specific categories of Scripture as so many noses of wax to be twisted at will (or ignored). He was almost a prophet in speaking so pointedly. Today, China’s utopian facade has been far more completely removed and many are beginning to see China more realistically. Concerning this Lyall writes:

The overall picture of China under the Radicals’ domination, now that the strict censorship they imposed has been removed and the truth is known, is not a pretty one. Oppression, denial of human rights, ruthless suppression of religion, a great leap backward in

education, lawlessness, the deliberate retarding of industrial progress—and all in the name of ideological purity.

And he adds that even Bishop K. H. Ting, the best known church-person in the state apparatus, has “virtually repudiated the Louvain talk” (1980:141, 150).

In my view it is bad theology to confuse the spread of the Kingdom of God as described in our Lord’s parables with humankind’s technological or political activities—especially when the boast is that humans are making progress in history. Ellul concurs:

It is splendid to have rediscovered that God has revealed himself in the course of a history and in history. It is horrible to turn this humility of God into a theme of pride for the history of (humanity) ... The Bible expressly tells us that the history of (humankind) ends in judgment. It does not give place to the Kingdom (1972:20).

Has a new order come to China? Of course! Has this new order improved China? On certain levels, yes; on other levels, no! Should this new order be identified with the Kingdom of God of which Jesus spoke? Never! One shares in the Kingdom by confessing that *Jesus Christ is Lord*. This Kingdom is far removed from the development of a Marxist society. Humankind’s best efforts to create utopian societies all too often have ended in disasters. They have not marked progress toward the Kingdom, nor have they invariably been signs of the Lord’s action in history.

One shrinks from the analogy, but it must be said that these nonevangelical “China watcher” theologians have proved to be no more perceptive than those followers of Reich Bishop Ludwig Muller. The slogan of these ardent “German Christians” was “The Swastika on our Breasts, and the Cross in our Hearts”. Although they dominated large segments of the church in Germany during the early years of [p. 78](#) the Nazi era, who follows them today? We are solemnized when we recall the confidence with which they read “the signs of the times”. Their spokesperson, Pastor Leutheuser, uttered blasphemy when he said:

Christ has come to us through Adolf Hitler. He was the decisive figure when the people were just about to go under. Hitler struck out for us, and through his power, his honesty, his faith and his idealism, the Redeemer found us ... We know today the Saviour has come ... We have only one task, to be German, not to be Christian (Conway 1968:48).

Evangelicals who planted the church in China have been criticized as cultural imperialists. They failed the Chinese people and the Lord Jesus in many ways, and have confessed this. But now one would like to see some contrition on the other side. Many “China watchers” in their “ideological” theologizing on the Kingdom of God, on China and on the mission of the church have written much that is wrong and inimical to the proclamation of the whole gospel to the whole of China in our day. In so doing they have grievously contributed to the present-day polarization within the church.

Finally, conciliars should not again presume to tell evangelicals what to do about “China, the Church, and Christian Mission Today”. Although evangelicals should ponder the “Fifteen Theses” Donald MacInnis has drafted under this rubric as reflecting the current conciliar viewpoint (1981:77), they should not be blamed if their recollections of yesterday make them less open to persuasion today. After all, their sense of missionary mandate has a higher authority.

WHO SPEAKS FOR THE CHURCH IN CHINA?

I have borrowed from Paul Ramsey, former Professor of Religion at Princeton University, the title for the third evangelical concern touching the Christian presence in China. You will recall that under this rubric Ramsey challenged the WCC penchant for issuing policy

statements on behalf of the church worldwide—without consulting it beforehand. But he also criticized the thesis that “the relevant contemporary knowledge of God and his claims upon us and the judgment and grace he enacts over humankind comes from ‘what-God-is-doing in the world’.” Ramsey regards this as “a fig leaf to cover the unseemly parts of a disintegrated Christian understanding” of the church’s mission (1967:21).

The issue before us is the Church of Jesus Christ in China. Where is it? Who speaks for it? The first question is far easier to answer than the second. Many are convinced that the church is alive and active and p. 79 that its Catholic section is to be found within the Patriotic Society of Chinese Catholics and among those Catholics who have not accepted PSCC leadership but have continued to affirm their allegiance to the Pope. Its Protestant section is to be found in the “house churches” and in the public worship gatherings of the Three Self Movement. In answering the second question, “Who speaks for the Church?” I will confine my remarks to the Protestant section.

Concerning Protestants in China Arne Sovik of the Lutheran World Federation has written:

The Three Self Movement is likely to have some difficulty in unifying the Protestant Community ... (It) tends to be seen by many groups as a political rather than a religious instrument. The tension that is the heritage of the accusation meetings, and of the differences between the “faithful” and the Christians who compromised or left the faith during the Cultural Revolution period has already created a problem reminiscent of the Donatist controversy of the fourth century church. As long as these memories last, there is likely to be either great reluctance to develop a unified Protestantism or a tendency toward something analogous to the Baptist churches of the Soviet Union, where unrecognized groups live in insecurity and some suspicion of the recognized church which has accepted government registration. If in the last generation the Western denominational differences have broken down, there seems to be evidence of a threat of other divisions, the result of theological differences to be sure, but also of different responses to the problem of life in socialist China (1979:65).

Dr. Sovik’s evaluation is widely accepted. *The China News Analysis* of June 8, 1979 carried an article, “The Clock Turned Back? Not Yet” which confirms this:

In all Christian Churches there is a deep cleavage between those who suffered for many years for their faith and those who collaborated with the government. The recent announcement of religious freedom has made it quite clear that only those under the guidance of the government will be allowed to practice—led by the same old figures that have been cropping up over the past 25 years. Those who kept their faith unblemished at the cost of great sacrifice will still rank as second-rate and suspected citizens, suspected, as the official text says, of disobedience to the law of the Party, suspected of counter-revolution.

Two of the “same old figures” referred to above are Zhao Fusan and Ting Kuang-hsun. It is salutary to read what they have been saying during the last two years. Zhao Fusan’s widely publicized 1979 essay on China’s experience with foreign missionaries in the light of p. 80 the Chinese Revolution disturbed many. His frame of reference was the anti-Japanese, anti-foreign Peking Student demonstration of May 4, 1919 (from which the Chinese Communist movement emerged). Because Christianity came to China from the West (which figured so prominently in China’s humiliation during the 150 years prior to Mao’s triumph in 1949), Zhao raised the question whether a Chinese can truly be a Christian and also be a patriot laboring for the socialist reconstruction of China. He particularly blamed American missionaries who “aimed at retarding” China’s social emancipation.

All this helps us interpret Bishop Ting's December 1980 article, "A Call for Clarity," which is an exposition of 14 points from Christians in the PRC to Christians abroad. What concerns us particularly is Bishop Ting's recurring observations on the house churches. He stated that the Christian movement throughout China today is considerably larger than it was originally thought to be. No accurate statistics have been gathered of this diffuse phenomenon, but he feels the house churches are of considerable importance although he resists the suggestion that they represent a grass roots movement. These house churches, he says, are largely evangelical in theological commitment, but Chinese evangelicals do not oppose the policies of the government's "United Front" as expressed through the Three Self Patriotic Association.

Those who do oppose this "United Front" Bishop Ting says are "not significant" within the total context of Christian life in China. Then when Christians abroad attempt to suggest that house churches constitute an organized movement defining itself over against the Three Self Patriotic Association, Bishop Ting feels "this is at best misguided, and, at worst, a deliberate attempt to foster such a split on the basis of theological and ecclesiastical differences which do exist." He concludes that the Cultural Revolution was "directly responsible for the deinstitutionalization of Protestant Christianity in China and for the emergence for the first time in Chinese history of a Christianity fully integrated into Chinese life" (it is "post-denominational" and "deprofessionalized"), and despite disagreements about; "holy orders" (ordination) and "initiation" (baptism), some sort of "United Church" structure should emerge (Whyte 1979:11-20).

Let me add some other characteristics: *First*, the leadership of the house churches is 70 to 80 per cent women. It has been more perilous for men to engage in leadership activity; not a few who were local leaders have been removed by the authorities. The government has about as much success in thwarting the informal though vital outreach of women as the USSR has had in nullifying "The Baptist p. 81 Grandmother" who is determined to instruct her grandchildren in Jesus and his love. (We must not forget the widespread and highly regarded activities of "Bible Women" in the churches throughout China prior to 1949.)

Second, the majority of those attending house churches are young people. Ting acknowledges this but does not evaluate its significance in terms of the apathy and cynicism created by three decades of bombastic revolutionary rhetoric and crass manipulation foisted on the people by their leaders. Young people are also much in evidence in the public worship services conducted by the older pastors of the Three Self Patriotic Association.

Third, the house churches are truly indigenous in every way, but is the Three Self Patriotic Association? Who pays the salaries of its leaders? Who sets the direction and parameters of its policies? And why does Bishop Ting discourage evangelistic activity?

Fourth, the strong rumour persists among house church leaders that those who preach in the former church buildings opened for public services are under considerable pressure, i.e., not to mention the miraculous activity of God through Christ in the Gospels and among Christians today (healing the sick, delivering the possessed, guiding and guarding the prayerful) and not to herald the Second Coming of Christ and his judgments. These themes were frowned on by the Three Self Movement in its earlier days. Fortunately, such a rumour, if false, can be easily dispelled by the Three Self Patriotic Association encouraging its preachers to speak forth on these matters so that "the whole counsel of God" might be shared with those who come to worship ([Ac. 20:27](#)).

Fifth, members of house church congregations make up the bulk of those attending the public services. Their motivation is to worship God in a public fashion and thereby establish contact with the larger Christian community. We can sympathize with their

yearning to break from house church isolation and seek identity with the historic continuum that is the Christian church. Even so, they would hardly feel that these “preaching points” represent the koinonia that should characterize the local congregation with its lay participation in policy matters, in the maintenance of its order and discipline and in its systematic study of “the apostles’ doctrine” ([Ac. 2:42](#)).

Who can speak with authority for this church with its thousands of house congregations scattered throughout China? Naturally, the government is desirous of controlling them. And it appears determined to use the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSM) to this end along with the parallel China Christian Council (CCC)—both of which are [p.82](#) headed by Bishop Ting. But before the TSM and the CCC can speak with integrity there should be an honest facing up to what these organizations have done in the past.

Those of us who were in China during the early days of the TSM and who have followed its activities over the years can all too readily recall its early triumphalism. Indeed, thousands of Christians all over China have long memories. How can they forget the “accusation campaigns” in the early ’50s so heavily promoted and supported by “Three Self” leaders? Did not *Tien Feng*, the official “Three Self” publication, endorse the vilification and destruction of many a godly pastor, and then justify this evil by identifying it with Jesus’ denunciation of the Pharisees? How can the TSM then justify its right to speak for all Protestant Christians in China today? Is not some public act of contrition and reconciliation in order?

And what about Bishop Ting’s reduction of all the faithful Christian witness by radio to inland China during the last 30 years to something “alarming and dangerous”? In his judgment it had but one objective: the “fostering of separatism within Chinese Christianity ... They send in money and secret messages and instructions and beam radio programs, all designed for nurturing opposition, carrying out smearing and splitting moves” (Ting 1979:101).

One wonders if Bishop Ting has listened to any of the evangelical broadcasts into China. His remarks hardly convey the impression of objectivity or fairness. True, these years of broadcasting have doubtless included some programs that contained more dross than gold, but those who have carefully monitored them have rejoiced that a witness to the biblical gospel has been faithfully maintained. Would that the bishop had some of the spirit that characterized the Apostle Paul. At times Paul was misunderstood and criticized by fellow Christians. When he was imprisoned and helpless, they sought to get back at him—and did so in their preaching. But how did Paul react?

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel (shades of Wang Ming-tao!). The former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice ([Ph. 1:15–18](#)).

But Bishop Ting doesn’t rejoice. He only repeats the tired line about the “shady aspects of Western Christianity and of the missionary movement with all its political complicity and compromises” (Ting 1979:101). Indeed, this sort of unrelenting criticism of the Western [p.83](#) missionaries who planted the church throughout China is not going to build up the unity of the Chinese church. Nor is it going to give the average Chinese evangelical confidence in the spiritual integrity of the TSM and the CCC. These Christians have experienced something of the “changeless, pitiless and fanatical” opposition of Communists to such matters as “world outlook, ... freedom of conscience, freedom of philosophic thought, freedom to create a spiritual culture” (Berdyayev 1960:169–170). They are bound to be suspicious of any religious agency in China (e.g., TSM or CCC) which

manifests today the sort of hostility to evangelical Christianity that yesterday sought the destruction of so many devout Christian leaders.

One has no desire to defend everything that Western missionaries did in the past. But the fact remains that China was made a better place because of their witness “by word and deed” to the gospel of Jesus Christ. John King Fairbank, America’s great China scholar, reminds us of this—and in so doing exposes the reason why those missionaries are so vilified today:

The Chinese Communist revolution of recent decades has stressed the spread of literacy to ordinary people, the publication of journals and pamphlets in the vernacular, education and equality for women, the abolition of arranged child-marriages, the supremacy of public duty over filial obedience and family obligations, increased agricultural productivity through the sinking of wells and improved tools, crops, and breeds, dike and road building for protection against flood and famine, public health clinics to treat common ailments and prevent disease, discussion groups to foster better conduct, student organizations to promote healthy recreation of moral guidance, and the acquisition and Sinification of Western knowledge for use in remaking Chinese life.

Missionaries of the nineteenth century pioneered in all of these activities. Little wonder that the revolutionaries of China since 1949 have resented them in retrospect. The missionaries came as spiritual reformers, soon found that material improvements were equally necessary, and in the end helped to foment the great revolution. Yet as foreigners, they could take no part in it, much less bring it to a finish. Instead, it finished them. But in the Maoist message of today, “serve the people”, one can hear the echo of the missionary’s wish to serve (one’s neighbor) (1974:2). p. 84

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Keeping His Commandments

Klaus Bockmuehl

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Klaus Bockmuehl discusses the extent the spirit of modern antinomianism has penetrated the Church and vitiated Christian discipleship and witness. He argues for the need to reinstate the commandments of God and clarify their function in relation to creation, redemption and the consummation of all things.

(Editor)

MODERN ANTINOMIANISM

1. Sign of our Times

Whoever today speaks about God's commandments is likely soon to be in hot water. He who thinks to say something positive about the law will be quickly met by contradiction. We live in a time when the tendency is not only towards practical, but also towards theoretical, conscious, intentional lawlessness, i.e., *antinomianism*, enmity to the idea of law as such. We hardly accept any restrictions of our own choosing, and none which come from the outside. Basically, every fence is a challenge to us, and the idea of "authority" is apt to disturb even the most peaceful of minds.

As with every other trend in our time, so also our lawlessness has had its prophets in the nineteenth century. Heinrich Heine, the romantic poet and friend of Karl Marx, wrote with respect to the pursuit of the enjoyments of life and with full theoretical clarity: "In order to do away with the idea of sin we had to abolish the law." As soon as man "became aware of his essential divinity," moral autonomy was the consequence, for, as Heine proudly said: "Every god is a law to himself." At the same time the Russian revolutionary, Michael Bakunin, discovered the political analogy to this program: anarchism, the programmatic destruction of law and order. Another philosopher, Max Stirner, in his