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living.*

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In [1 Cor. 3:9](#) Paul uses the pictures of a garden and a building for the church. He said ‘... you are God’s field. You are also God’s building’. A garden and a building need constant attention. Many Christians in our churches and people of our nation are searching for directions for their lives. I suggest that we develop a series of small booklets of between [10](#) and 20 pages on such themes as:- The Christian Politician, The Christian Business Man, The Christian Accountant, The Christian Soldier, The Christian Family, The Christian Student; Caring for Vehicles, Caring for Coffee, Caring for the Soil, Caring for Animals.

iii. *Strengthening Church Leadership*

If we are serious about the life of our churches then we need to strengthen those who are pastors and leaders. We can do this by combining seminars on leadership and pastoral care at the provincial level. Suitable handbooks can be developed out of these seminars.

iv. *Reaching the Unreached*

The church must continually remind itself that its primary task is to go out and make disciples of all nations. We must plan for evangelistic meetings in every way we can. Whatever we do we must coordinate our activities properly. [p. 72](#)

CONCLUSION

Much of what is presented here represents the deep concerns of my own heart. There is much I have not touched on, but I present this in the hope that, whether you agree or disagree with me, it will spark a response in you, and further thought and discussion will take place as a result.

Rev. Joshua Daimoi is Principal-elect of the Christian Leaders Training College, Western Highlands, Papua New Guinea. [p. 73](#)

Witness of a Suffering Church: The Chinese Experience

Jonathan Chao

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The author argues that suffering is central to the theological and missiological understanding of the Church. He traces the role of suffering in the experience of the Church in China since 1949 and pinpoints the years of revival and unbelievable Church growth. However, the article raises a number of important issues that need further elucidation. A wider definition of suffering is needed. Is it restricted to constraints imposed by an anti-Christian society or are there other realms of suffering experienced by those who live in affluent, free but morally corrupt societies? Is the dichotomy between the institutional church and the house church movement essential to the nature of the Church or is it

contextual? Does the failure of the Church worldwide to learn from the China experience mean that it is not possible to prepare one's own Church for times of persecution?
(Editor)

On the eve of his betrayal, Jesus said to his disciples: 'In the world you have tribulations; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world' ([John 16:33](#)). His disciples began to understand this truth most concretely after Pentecost. Paul, who once persecuted the church, authenticated his apostleship through the marks of his suffering ([2 Cor. 11:22-29](#)). Therefore, he could write to the Philippians: 'For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine' ([Phil. 2:29](#)).

Throughout the history of the Christian church, suffering has been an integral part of her life and work. In fact, the history of the church can best be understood through the history of her suffering. For it was in her suffering that the spiritual nature of the church has been made most manifest. In her suffering the church bore witness to the fact that she belongs to Christ, that she is destined for glory, and to the truth that no one can snatch her out of the bosom of her husband-lord, Christ Jesus. In the modern era this fact has been most vividly borne out by the church under Communist rule. It is not possible for me to give an overall analysis of all churches struggling under socialism, but the Chinese experience is one remarkable example with which I am familiar, and so I will briefly analyze the witness of the suffering church in the People's Republic of China. I will do so by p. 74

1. describing the historical shape of the suffering church in China during 1949–1983,
2. presenting the church's self-understanding of the meaning of suffering,
3. pointing to the witness of the Chinese church as a suffering church, and
4. suggesting some theological and missiological implications from the Chinese experience.

I HISTORICAL SHAPE OF A SUFFERING CHURCH

The history of the Christian church in China since 1949 may be divided into five periods which are determined by China's major political developments. When interpreted theologically, these five stages of the church's experience also reflect the suffering, death, resurrection of Jesus and the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit.

Church under Trial (1949–1958)

During the first nine years of Chinese Communist take-over, the Protestant church was brought under the full control of the state. This was done through the formation and work of the Three-self Patriotic Movement, a 'mass organization' created under the directives of the party to implement its religious policy among Protestant Christians.

The Party's policy was, and still is, to cut off the relationship between the church in China and the church universal on the ground that Christianity has been used by the capitalist imperialists to conduct cultural aggression. Thus to make the Chinese Church totally self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating was the declared aim of this Party-directed organization. But the real intent was to isolate the Chinese church from all of her former foreign influences. This attempt at separating the Chinese church from foreign imperialists was accomplished by (1) expelling foreign missionaries from China, (2) holding accusation meetings against all former missionaries and Chinese pastors who were at one time or another connected with foreign governments or the

Kuomintang or who were unfriendly to the Communist revolutionary cause. In this process mission schools, hospitals, and church boards were closed down or taken over. Many church leaders were accused publicly of imperialist crimes.

A second aspect of Chinese Communist religious policy was to make religious groups declare their support for the party and the new China. Early on July 28, 1950 a Christian manifesto was published by the first [p. 75](#) convenors of the Three-self Movement. Thereafter, all Chinese pastors and para-church leaders were required to sign this document to demonstrate their patriotism. Those who refused to sign it were condemned as anti-revolutionaries, and most of them were put into prison during 1955 and again in 1958. The Chinese Church throughout the land came under trial. The test imposed on all church leaders was whether to support the TSPM or not. Those who declared their support for the TSPM were considered patriotic, those who refused were declared non-patriotic and anti-revolutionary. Under such pressure most church leaders gave in and submitted themselves to political reeducation conducted by the officials of the TSPM. There were some who refused to bow down to the TSPM and even declared their opposition to such politicizing pressure. In that situation not a few Judases appeared. To save their skin, they betrayed their fellow Christian workers or believers. Those who were faithful to Christ were often left to suffer in their loneliness, and even their best friends, relatives, and co-workers forsook them.

Church Abandoned and Suppressed (1958–1966)

After 1958, Christianity in China existed on two levels: a few TSPM churches opened for public worship and closely supervised by the State through the Religious Affairs Bureau and the TSPM on the upper level, and small underground house churches meeting clandestinely on the lower level. The open TSPM churches could not do things according to the demands of Scripture, and the underground house churches could not do things openly according to their conscience. Such was the nature of things when Chinese Communist religious policy was operating normally. House church activities were considered illegal, and violators were prosecuted and often condemned to imprisonment. Those who were arrested were sent to reform camps where they were forced to do hard labour, forbidden to have visitors, and deprived of the privilege of Bible reading. They subsisted on a poor diet. Isolated from their friends and relatives, they suffered ten to twenty years of seemingly endless internment. A few Christians were roomed together with other believers in prison, but most learned to witness for Christ amongst their fellow prisoners with the result that secret prison fellowships emerged.

The families that these Christian prisoners left behind suffered similar isolation and hardship. Deprived of their menfolk and without income, wives and children of the imprisoned found themselves destitute. Often they were driven out of their parish houses when their [p. 76](#) churches were taken over by the State. In addition to these financial and physical hardships, their friends and relatives would shy away from contact with them because they were labelled as ‘anti-revolutionary families’. Under such situations of political and social ostracism, these families suffered hardships in extreme isolation. Only those who truly loved the Lord would stretch out a helping hand to share their meagre resources with them, at great political risk of becoming implicated. It was a time of testing the genuineness of Christian love.

Church under Suffering and Death (1966–1976)

In August 1966, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution broke out at Mao’s instigation. Young radical Red Guards sprang up and rampaged all over China. Armed with the little

red book and encouraged by the Chairman, they went out to destroy old ideologies, old customs, old ideas, and old systems, including the party structure and state machinery. They stormed city halls, police headquarters and university administration buildings and publicly humiliated and beat up party revisionists, intellectuals, and anyone whom they considered not totally 'proletarian'. In the sphere of religion, they destroyed temples, monasteries, and stormed the few churches that remained. They searched practically every believer's home, looking for Bibles, hymnals, and every other type of Christian literature they could find in order to confiscate or burn them. In Amoy, southeast China, the Red Guards gathered all the Bibles that they could find, piled them into a great heap in the public square, and set fire to them. Believers were rounded up and forced to kneel in front of that pillar of fire. In those days, both Christians from secret house churches and TSPM leaders were attacked, publicly 'struggled against', and forced to parade in the streets. Some of the believers were literally beaten to death. Others suffered permanent paralysis. Not a few house church leaders who secretly propagated the Gospel were arrested and sent to labour camps where they were further interrogated and forced to do hard labour.

After the first wave of the Cultural Revolution attack, all traces of visible Christian activities were removed from the face of Chinese society. China became truly what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called, 'a religionless society'. The institutional church under the Three-self Patriotic Movement was destroyed. All Christians had to go through the baptism of suffering and humiliation. For a while even clandestine house church activities were suspended. The church in China was dead and buried. [p. 77](#)

By 1958 all churches and Christian activities were brought under the tight control of the state through the TSPM. As the shepherds were attacked, the flock scattered. Throughout the country, churches were closed down in the name of unification. Pastors who declared their support for the TSPM and the State were still removed from their ministerial positions. They had to engage in constant political studies until the situation was so unbearable that they themselves requested to work in the factories or on the farms.

During this initial period, the Chinese church was severely tried by, and before, a court of atheists. The church was abused and humiliated; arrests and imprisonments were the order of the day. Faithful pastors and believers were literally like sheep before their shearers; they were utterly powerless and helpless, and God let them suffer in their desolation. It was as if God had abandoned them.

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But the glory of God did not depart from his people in China. His Spirit overshadowed them. Out of a valley of dry bones, a great spiritual p. 79 army began to rise up. It was a slow process which began after the initial waves of attack during 1966–1969. A few servants of God, moved by the situation of spiritual desolation that characterized the church, began to pray for a revival. They started to search for every believer and urged those they found to rise up from their fears and to call upon the name of the Lord. Twos and threes began to meet secretly to pray and to encourage each other with God's word. Gradually these small groups grew into Spirit-filled house churches. Deprived of ministerial leadership, lay leaders rose up to lead prayer meetings and to minister to a growing number of God's people. The Spirit of God was at work all over China, silently but surely house churches sprang up in every city, town, and countless number of villages. Out of suffering and death, a new Chinese church was born.

Church Experiencing the Power of the Resurrection (1976–1980)

After the death of Mao Tse-tung and the arrest of the 'Gang of Four' headed by his widow Chiang Ching in 1976, China began to change. Politically China moved away from Mao's radical leftist line of continuous revolution to a new programme of socialist modernization, which implied a more open attitude toward the West. 1976–1980 was an era of transition from the rule of Hua Kuo-feng, Mao's designated heir, to the rise of Teng Hsiao-p'ing, China's present strong man. By the end of 1980, Teng's power was well established. During the first two years of the transition (1976–1978), Chinese society began to deice, and underground house churches began to surface into semi-clandestine activities. Since March 1979, the Chinese Communist Party began to restore its religious policy of limited toleration under the united front policy, namely, a policy of friendly cooperation with ideological enemies in order to enlist the support of the religious mass for the Four Modernizations programme. This was followed by the restoration of the Three-self Patriotic Movement in August 1979 and the re-opening of churches under the TSPM in the large cities. The TSPM was not fully reconstituted on the national level until October 1980, when it held its third national conference in Nanking. Thus during 1979–1980 the house church movement enjoyed a short period of unprecedented freedom, especially in the countryside. Politically, Chinese Communist cadres adopted a laissez-faire attitude, and religiously, the TSPM was not yet fully organized to implement control.

It was during this period of power transition before the control apparatus was restored that the house church movement grew in size and number. The church that suffered so long was able to enjoy a p. 80 temporary season of peace, and the people of God took advantage of this unusual season of grace to preach the Gospel. As the Spirit of God descended upon them, the people of God freely experienced the power of Christ's resurrection on a large scale. God worked signs and miracles among them: the sick were healed after much prayer, demons were exorcised in Jesus' name, even the dead were raised up. Witnessing the saving power of Christ, even atheistic Communist party and Youth League members believed. Christians in China called 1978–1980 a period of revival.

Church in Mission and in Spiritual Conflict (1980–1983)

In December 1980, the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee held a work conference to evaluate the progress of the four modernization programmes and to set new agendas after the dismissal of Hua Kuo-feng. Economically, the government sought to restore centralized planning and control. Politically, Teng Hsiao-p'ing restored political studies in all spheres of Chinese organized life. The party's new leadership was determined to eliminate those officials who had come to power during the Cultural Revolution and to re-shape the party with new ideals represented by the 'four insistences': (1) insistence on the ideology of Marxism, Leninism and the thought of Mao Tse-tung; (2) insistence on the dictatorship of the proletariat; (3) insistence on the leadership of the Chinese Communist party; and (4) insistence on walking the path of socialism. The spirit of the four insistences dominated the new constitutional revision of 1982 and also the Twelfth Party Congress (Sept. 1–12, 1982).

This tightening of political control, since early 1981, found its expression in the increased control of the Religious Affairs Bureau and the TSPM over house activities. As the TSPM became more organized, establishing branches at provincial and county levels, house church activities in both cities and villages were soon brought under control. Christians are now being urged to worship only in churches designated by the TSPM, and only designated pastors are allowed to preach, doing so only within designated districts. Under this new policy of 'three designates' (since Sept. 1982), house church

leaders are forbidden to do itinerant preaching, and churches not recognized by the TSPM were told to close down.

Yet the church of God, having enjoyed a season of revival, became bolder than ever to preach the word in season and out of season. As a result, many are turning to Christ, and the number of Christians in China has grown from less than one million in 1949 to nearly 50 million [p. 81](#) today. Desirous to see the whole nation turn to Christ, many house churches have organized evangelistic teams to do cross-country and provincial missions. These evangelistic outreaches have run into direct conflict with the restored religious policy of containing Christian activities within the four walls of the TSPM churches. As a result, many itinerant preachers have been arrested or are on the run because their names are on the arrest list. House churches in the cities are driven underground again, and those in the countryside are constantly being harassed. Those who continue to hold meetings are being arrested, beaten, and put into prison. After a short breathing space, the church in China is undergoing renewed persecution and suffering again. It is anticipated that in the days to come things will most likely get worse.

Hence the history of the church in China since 1949 has been a history of sufferings. Yet by going through different stages of suffering, the church in China has been transformed from a timid, 'foreign-coloured' institutional church into a bold, indigenous, institutionless church, and it has been changed from a dependent 'mission church' to an independent 'missionary church'. It is a church that has gone through the 'steps of the cross', following the footsteps of her Lord: betrayal, trial, humiliation, abandonment, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit. The historical shape of the suffering church in China indeed resembles the Face of the Servant of the Lord who suffered for her.

II CHURCH'S SELF-UNDERSTANDING OF SUFFERING

How, then, do Christians in China interpret the meaning of their suffering? In the 1950s suffering came upon them as a surprise. They were utterly unprepared for it. Even during the hey-day of the Cultural Revolution (1966–69), many Christians were perplexed by the extremities of their suffering. They could not help but ask: 'How long, O Lord, do we have to suffer? Has thou forsaken us in thy wrath?' Not until they were released from prison and restored to Christian fellowship during 1978–1980 did they begin to understand the meaning of their suffering. Some, of course, had already come to see the significance of their suffering during their imprisonment. From the many interviews that I have conducted with Christians from China and later inside China, especially those faithful servants of God who had suffered long years of imprisonment, I have gathered the following streams of their reflective thinking on why God allowed the church in China to suffer.

Suffering as God's Cleansing Agency

Most house church leaders, including some pastors in the TSPM [p. 82](#) churches, believe that suffering has been used of God as an agency for the cleansing of the Chinese church.

The institutional Protestant church founded by foreign missions from the mid-nineteenth century was, until 1949, a fragmented denominational church which reflected all the idiosyncrasies of Western individualism characterized by denominational divisions. Under the denominational structure, there was a divisive spirit at work which Chinese Christians found repulsive. Through the hands of the Three-self movement, denominationalism was for all practical purposes, eliminated.

The Chinese Protestant church before the 'liberation' was, by and large, a dependent church, a church which was dependent upon foreign financial support, leadership, and even ideas. This was partially due to an historical formation of dependency of the Chinese ministry under foreign missions, and partly due to the built-in structure of missionary control, especially through the 'employment system'. By the cutting off of the Chinese church from the Western churches and mission societies, she had learned to depend solely upon God. Suffering under persecution intensified that need to develop a total dependence upon God.

Since the early 1920s, the Church in China was plagued with the disease of theological liberalism which was transmitted to China through missionaries from the mainline denominations. The battle of theological controversy between the liberals and the fundamentalists was extended onto Chinese soil, and the Chinese church suffered many casualties. One good example of such casualties is the betrayal of fundamentalist pastors by liberal ministers when political pressure was put upon the church in the 1950s. By going through suffering in the 1950s and again in the late 1960s, Chinese Christians and pastors, both fundamentalists and liberals, had to reflect on what they really believed, and in the process re-adjust their theological priorities. Pastors and believers alike experienced a deepening of their faith and were able to sort out the essentials of faith which endures and the nonessentials which could be cast out.

The church in China prior to 1950 was a church dominated by professional clericalism. The institutional church was led by a group of full-time professional staff: missionaries, pastors, evangelists and Bible-women. Very few lay people took part in the ministry. The removal of ministerial leadership from the suffering church resulted in the formation of a people's church, commonly known as 'house churches' where 'body ministry' received its full development. The people of God were freed from their earlier dependence on ministers, while the [p. 83](#) ministers in prison were freed from their dependence on foreign missionaries. More than that, they had to learn to abandon their earlier status of honour and to accept humiliation and disgrace as concomitants of ministry. One evangelist said that through suffering he had come to see that all his earlier ministerial accomplishments were nothing but hay and stubble. Through suffering he had come to gain a new understanding of what the Christian ministry is all about: not to follow (church) traditions of men, but to do the work of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The church in China used to have many 'tares'. For many joined the church for material benefits: free medicine, free education, free assistance for studying abroad, or relief in times of natural disasters. They were called 'rice Christians'. It was a church of social convenience, a church of mercy without discipline, that offered a gospel of cheap grace. But the tightening pressure of persecution in the 1950s quickly separated the wheat from the tares, and the church was cleansed of such tares. Suffering soon separated the true disciples from the Judases.

So today most church leaders believe that the church in China has been thoroughly cleansed from these and many other evils. For this they thank God, even though it was painful for them to go through such prolonged suffering themselves.

Suffering as Training for Christian Maturity

Christians in China also see a positive aspect, in suffering, namely, that it has been used of God to test believers in the genuineness of their faith, hope and love, and to train them unto greater Christian maturity.

Christians in China feel that they were most severely tested in the following points:

1. To continue to believe in Jesus upon pain of suffering, imprisonment, and possibly death, or to recant their faith under duress. This type of severe testing came during the early days of the Cultural Revolution. One faithful Catholic was buried up to his neck. The question posed to him by a red guard was: 'If you continue to believe in your Jesus, I'll put a bullet into your head. If you stop believing in Jesus, I'll let you out. Which do you choose?' It was reported that he chose the former. The temptation was to confess Jesus in one's heart and to deny him verbally, hoping that 'God will understand'. But the demand of Jesus was to confess him publicly. Through suffering and persecution professing Chinese Christians came to [p. 84](#) discover whether their faith was real or just a matter of social or economic expediency. Once they had gone through such testing, they became more assured of their faith and treasured it more dearly.

2. To speak the truth or to bear false witness against one's fellow believers when put under pressure such as that staged during 'people's court' proceedings. The choice was to denounce an innocent brother and thus save one's skin or to speak the truth and face the consequence of self-incrimination, especially when the accused had already been charged as anti-revolutionary. Christians were encouraged to respond to the demand for incriminating information against others so as to receive lighter sentences for themselves in trial situations. The promise of food in a situation of starvation during imprisonment can also move one to betray another. It was very tempting, therefore, to save oneself at the expense of others. The test was to love or to betray. Not a few Christians played the part of Judas, while others came to understand the practical meaning of love.

3. To persist in hope or to give up for a quicker release. Christians who spent ten or more years in prison say that it was easier to die for Christ than to keep on hoping in situations of utter despair. Doubts about the reality and the faithfulness of God hounded them: 'Does God really care?' 'Is He really there seeing all that I am going through?' 'Am I believing in a real God or am I suffering just for a set of ideas?' In such situations, their hope in the promise of an eternal life was severely tested. Only the indwelling and inward testimony of the Holy Spirit could give them strength to maintain their faith and hope in a situation of hopelessness. Amazingly, it was often because they went through such hopelessness that they came to understand the reality of the Christian hope which gave them life, peace and joy.

4. To be loyal to Christ or to yield to Caesar's demands in situations of conflict. This testing is going on right now as the TSPM implements the Party's religious policy. Some Christian leaders, in spite of their earlier suffering, are giving in again and accepting a limited but legitimized ministry offered by the TSPM. Others are making a decided choice of 'obeying God rather than man' when they are forbidden to preach the Gospel freely. It is a test of lordship; Who is lord: Christ or Caesar?

The Christians in China, having experienced these facets of severe testing, have come to know how genuine are their faith, love, and hope. These experiences of suffering have trained them to grow in Christian maturity in the most cardinal elements of the Christian faith and life. [p. 85](#)

Suffering as Training in Obedience

Obedience is a hard lesson to learn. The human will is prone to follow its own promptings rather than those of the Holy Spirit. We asked one Chinese pastor who suffered fourteen years of imprisonment: 'What did you learn from such experience?' He replied: 'I learned obedience through suffering.' As Jesus learned obedience through the things that he suffered, so many Chinese Christians have come to learn to submit their

will to God's. For in prison situations, one experiences a deprivation of freedom, which is tantamount to a denial of one's will. Christians in prison had to accept the reality of their helplessness and learn to abandon themselves solely to the mercy of God. Such self-abandonment opens the way to a life of grace that flows from the love of God.

Christians in China testify that suffering in the flesh has enabled them to experience the power of God in overcoming the power of sin in them (cf. [1 Peter 4:1-2](#)). One house church leader in central China was formerly plagued with the sins of adultery and of stealing. After he became a Christian he still felt the urge to fall back into these sins. Later he was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel, and his prison experience cured him of the urge to lust after women and of his desire for stealing.

Suffering in Experiencing Union with Christ

1. Believers in China testify that suffering has enabled them to understand that they are 'called not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him' ([Phil. 1:29](#)). The Living Bible translated this passage as: 'it is given to us as a privilege to suffer for him'.

2. Christians in China have come to understand that they are called to share the suffering of Christ and bear his disgrace ([1 Pet. 4:12-13](#); [Heb. 13:12-13](#)). In sharing the disgrace of Christ, Chinese Christians have come to understand that they belong to Christ and must follow the way of the cross, i.e. self-denial and possibly dying for Christ. It was through their participation in the fellowship of his suffering that they came to understand the meaning of union with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. They came to experience the power of Christ's resurrection when, through the Holy Spirit, they overcame the power of sin in their lives, when they overcame demonic power in exorcism, and when they saw God delivering them from Satanic power at work through their oppressors.

3. Experiencing the power of the resurrection has enabled Chinese believers to experience more fully the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their [p. 86](#) lives: love, peace, joy, longsuffering, tenderness, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, boldness, etc., so that their lives shine more brilliantly in the midst of gloom and human despair.

4. Experiencing union with Christ's death and resurrection through suffering has enabled Chinese Christians to develop an intense love for Christ, a clearer vision of God, and a sure hope for the incorruptible inheritance which God has in store for them.

5. Longing for an early union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the midst of endless suffering has produced in them an intense hope for the imminent return of Christ. Through their hope we are enabled to understand how Christians in the early church hoped for an early return of Christ.

Thus, Christians in China interpret the last thirty-four years of prolonged suffering as a gift of God's profound grace to the Chinese church in cleansing her from her impurities, in testing the genuineness of their faith and loyalty, in training them for obedience and progress unto greater maturity, and in enabling them to gain a deeper experience with Christ.

III WITNESS OF THE SUFFERING CHURCH

How, then, shall we summarize the witness of the Chinese suffering Church? To whom did they bear witness? I think they bore witness to themselves and to the churches worldwide through their self-understanding of suffering described above. But equally important is the witness they bore on Christ's behalf to the Chinese people and to an unbelieving state in the following ways:

The Suffering Church in China has borne witness to the Chinese people in all walks of life of the reality of the Christian faith so that they have come to realize that Christians have something which they lack, something which they desire to have for themselves.

It was reported that Mrs. Wang Ming-tao helped many fellow prisoners who were sick, and her love testified to the grace of God. Fellow prisoners said that she was different from the rest, and this difference caused many to ask her how to have her faith. Thus the reality of the Christian faith as a supernatural power which gives life and hope to Christians in the midst of common human despair was most concretely recognized by fellow prisoners.

The Suffering Church in China has borne witness to an atheistic state of the indestructibility of the Christian church as a spiritual community. p. 87

The Party has come to realize more than ever that coercive measures not only fail to eliminate the church, but even contribute to her growth. The resiliency of the Christian church, in spite of repeated persecution and utter isolation, is bearing witness to the fact that the Christian faith is capable of growth even when totally cut off from 'Western imperialists.' The vitality and rapid growth of the church in China has negated all communist theories of religion as a form of superstition which would die out as human society progresses in science and socialism.

The suffering church in China has borne witness to the Chinese people of the supernatural power of God, especially through signs and miracles, through the conversion of Party and youth league members, and through the perseverance of the saints and God's preservation of them.

What seemed scientifically impossible, such as terminally ill cancer patients being healed, became possible through divine intervention in response to the church's prayers. What seemed ideologically impossible became a common reality when party members renounced their political privileges to accept a second class citizenship as Christians.

The Suffering Church in China has borne witness to the difference of Christian life style.

Through the practice of truth in a society of falsehood, Christians have demonstrated what is authentic existence. Through the practice of love in a society of hatred, Christians have demonstrated the superiority of the Christian way to the Marxist ceaseless struggle ethic. Through the establishment of authentic communities of love (house churches) in a society of human alienation, Christians have demonstrated the possibility of an authentic common life in Christ Jesus. Through the exercise of faith and hope in situations of disillusionment and despair, Christians have demonstrated the life-giving character of the Christian faith. All these Christian manifestation, truth, love, hope and authentic community are rare commodities in a society of endless class struggle. It is these spiritual attributes of the Christian Church which are attracting many non-Christians to seek after the Christ in whom Christians believe.

IV THEOLOGICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

What can the church universal learn from the experiences of the suffering church? What theological and missiological implications can we draw from the Chinese experience? **P.**

88

Theological Implications

The experiences of suffering and what suffering has done to churches under communism, show us that suffering for Christ's sake is central to the growth of Christian life and of the church. This implies that the New Testament teaching on the believers sharing the suffering of Christ and of the place of suffering in the process of sanctification ought to be given more attention in our theological discussions, especially in the doctrine of the Christian life. Some questions need to be asked in this regard.

1. If it was necessary for Jesus to suffer in order to obtain salvation for us ([Luke 24:26](#); [Heb. 2:10](#)), and he called us to follow in his footsteps ([1 Pet. 2:21](#); [Heb. 13:12-13](#)), then is suffering for Christ a basic necessity for us or a matter of voluntary choice? How do we feel with cases of obvious Christian escape from suffering theologically and pastorally? If suffering is an essential part of Christian union with Christ, which he intends us to experience, how do we explain the relative lack of suffering in churches in the rest of the world?

2. If suffering is the gateway to glory as it was for Jesus ([Luke 24:26](#)) and it is the pathway that leads us to the sharing of his glory ([1 Pet. 4:12-13](#)), has the church in the West and the rest of the 'free world' been deprived of a training course on the way to glory? Has the ministry in the free world failed to point people in the direction of glory?

3. In view of these considerations how should we understand the place of suffering in the training of discipleship? What place should suffering occupy in the *loci* of systematic theology and in pastoral theology?

Missiological Implications

1. The experience of the church in China has demonstrated that suffering has been one of the important factors contributing to the miraculous growth of the church in China. The testimonies of faithfulness to Christ under situations of suffering on the part of Chinese pastors in the 1950s and again in the late 1960s have inspired their flock to follow their example of being faithful to Christ. When these old preachers were released from prison during 1978-1980, their spiritual survival and testimonies further stimulated the young generation of believers to work harder for the Lord. This matter of faithfulness as a factor contributing to church growth is further testified to by the Korean experience in a positive way and by the Japanese experience in a negative manner.

2. Furthermore, the Chinese experience has also testified to the fact p. 89 that wherever the seed of the Gospel was sown, whether by missionaries or by Chinese evangelists, there house churches flourished and multiplied manifold. Persecution and suffering, deprivation of missionary or ministerial leadership and financial assistance did not result in the death of a young church like China but, as the seed died, in due time it brought forth fruit. This should give encouragement to missionaries that their work when done faithfully in the name of Christ shall bear fruit in due time, even though they might not see the results of their labours. Neither should they fear when God allows an atheistic state to remove them from their work.

3. If suffering is such an important factor in church growth, what should be its place in the missiology of church growth? There is a spiritual dimension to church growth which its students can explore from the experiences of suffering churches.

4. The churches worldwide have always demonstrated a keen interest in the welfare of the suffering church. Likewise, the churches in 'restricted areas' are also anxious to sustain a spiritual relationship with churches 'outside.' This desire for fellowship points to the need to develop a theology, a *communio sanctorum*, in relation to suffering churches, a theology that can give guidance to Christians, churches and para-church organizations which are engaged in ministry to churches under restriction. Secondly,

there needs to be developed a missiological structure for ministering to churches under suffering and for them to minister to churches 'outside.' Thirdly, the doctrine of *communio sanctorum* implies a sharing of spiritual, human, and material resources with the suffering church.

Concluding Remarks

Last year, an American Bible school student came to our Centre for a month's summer internship. Before he left America, he told a friend how Christians in China were suffering. His friend responded: 'If God loves the Chinese church so much, why did he allow her to suffer so much and for so long?' This youth had no answer. When he was in Hong Kong he made several trips to China and had occasion to have fellowship with house church leaders who had gone through much suffering and were zealously doing the work of evangelism. 'Now I have the answer to my friend's question,' he told me, 'I am going to reply thus to his question: "If God loves the American church so much, why doesn't He allow us to suffer so that our churches might be purified, our faith strengthened, and our relationship with Christ deepened to serve Him wholeheartedly?"'.

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Role of the Urban Church: A Black South African Perspective

Bonganjalo Goba

INTRODUCTION

One of the apparent weaknesses of theological enterprise in South Africa is the lack of interdisciplinary approach to the study of theology and in the life of the church. For many the notion of social science—particularly in the Christian community—is something which belongs to the profane secular world, which has no relevance to problems confronting the church. Most recent studies which have been concerned with the growth of Christianity, particularly among African people in South Africa, have been conducted by anthropologists whose orientation lacks a theological interpretation, with a few exceptions like Oosthuizen, who in his book *Post Christianity in Africa* attempts to relate the disciplines of theology and anthropology.

In this essay I will explore theological and sociological considerations regarding the role of the urban church—an attempt to develop an ecclesiology which is informed by both theological and sociological perspectives. It is not my intention to provide a theory for urban church research, although theoretical conceptualizations will emerge from what I say. Let me emphasize at this point that I believe the urban church has a unique role to play in urban areas. But it continues to be confronted by many problems—problems which arise from the peculiar pressures of city life, such as the emergence of