



Essay

Pannenberg and Sino-Christian Theology

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On 4 Sept, 2014, an intelligent brain stopped thinking - the renowned German Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg died at 86. He not only left behind a group of grieving people, but also more than half a century of theological legacy. As his successor Gunther Wenz, Director of the Institute of Fundamental Theology and Ecumenism at the University of Munich, wrote in the memorial article, "He points out a new direction for Protestant theology of the 20th century."



There are many things that can be written about Pannenberg's life. He wrote many works involving all aspects of Christian theology, and spent his later years completing the three-volume magnum opus *Systematische Theologie* (In recent years I have been invited to translate the work). What made the Chinese academic circle enamored of him even more is that Pannenberg combined his Christian theological studies with a strong interest in exploring secular culture. He was not only committed to applying the ideas of the Christian faith to different disciplines, but also to learning how these could be resources for the Christian faith. His works cover almost all aspects of Christian theology and are often interdisciplinary in their approach.

Pannenberg spent his early years in Basel, where he was educated by the master of modern German theology, Karl Barth. But he was not satisfied with his teacher's theological emphasis solely on the Word of God to the exclusion of philosophical and humanistic concerns. He particularly disagreed with Barth's theology, which opposes natural knowledge to the revelation

in Christ. Out of this disagreement came *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (1961), which he edited with the cooperation of a few like-minded souls. Here he claimed that "according to the biblical tradition, God does not reveal himself directly (e.g. in the Word) but indirectly through the activities in history." God's self-revelation in history occurred indirectly and more specifically in the resurrection of Jesus proleptically.

Theology should, therefore, start from the history of Jesus himself, from below up to the divinity of Jesus Christ; from the Jesus of history and human history developed up to God. Furthermore, the history mentioned here "is not confined to a specific historical event or a series of events. This can only be applied to the end of history. That is to say, all previous events are essentially united such that the whole reality is manifested." In Pannenberg's view, theology should thus not only be established on the basis of historical research, but also in conversation with modern human, social and even natural sciences. It should undertake the task of integrating all kinds of knowledge in a multicultural situation.

This meant that Pannenberg widely explored non-theological disciplines to the extent that interdisciplinary dialogue became a characteristic of his theology. For example, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie* mainly discusses the relationship between theology and science. *Was ist der Mensch? Die Anthropologie der Gegenwart im Lichte der Theologie* and *Anthropologie in Theologischer Perspektive* discuss the relationship between theology and anthropology. *Metaphysik und Gottesgedanke* and *Theologie und Philosophie: Ihr Verhältnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte* focus on the relationship between theology and philosophy. In his late work *Systematische Theologie*, Pannenberg's mature





reflection on God enabled him to work out a Christology “from above” that is nonetheless integrated with his approach “from below”. This work devotes plenty of space to dialogue with other disciplines.

Pannenberg lived in an era of increasing secularization. He was open to the secular rational attitude, which is not just one major trend in the history of Christianity, but also a feature of Christianity adjusting to historical developments. He moved with the times, thereby undoubtedly creating a far bigger space for the Christian faith. A question worth pondering is how Sino-Christian theology might make use of his thought to meet the challenge of a powerful secular Chinese culture.

The Antiochene School Still Continues as the Spirit of Jingjiao has lasted over a Millennium

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Mircea Eliade believed that divine time exhibits “heterogeneity”. In the sequence of time some moments are more important than the others. Therefore, ceremony more or less carries the meaning of revival or creation from the ontological perspective. This year marks the 1380th anniversary of Jingjiao coming to China. The Nestorian Stele was erected 1234 years ago and was discovered 390 years ago. Jingjiao documents at Dunhuang were discovered more than a century ago while Luoyang documents came to light a decade ago. In themselves these dates mean nothing. But given that they correspond to the first entry of Christianity into China, the establishment of the Nestorian Stele and the growth of Jingjiao from its infant stage, the dates provide an opportunity to look back and reflect on the last thousand years of academic history.



In the 6th century missionaries coming to China greatly enriched the multi-cultural landscape along the Silk Road. During that time Jingjiao became popular in China and there were many believers. Alopen and Adam, the two leaders of Jingjiao in the Tang dynasty, had travelled

a lot and translated many texts, thus creating a climate for transmitting Jingjiao. The Mongolian Empire was strong with a vast territory so that Jingjiao (Yelikewen) spread everywhere and became popular. During the Ming dynasty the Nestorian Stele was discovered and the study of Jingjiao started. The devoted efforts of both Chinese and foreign scholars were encouraged. These scholars included LI Zhizao, Emmanuel

Diaz, Henri Havret, YANG Rongzhi, A.C. Moule, Paul Pelliot, QIAN Nianqu, P. Yoshio Saeki, LUO Xianglin, CHEN Huan, and ZHU Qianzhi. Progress was made in the study of the Stele - its background, history and dogmas. Commentaries were written. Examination of the authenticity of the Nestorian Stele, exegesis of the inscriptions, investigation of the historical background of the events mentioned there and interpretation of Jingjiao doctrines all achieved fruitful results.

In the 20th century, the discovery of Dunhuang and Turpan literature, and the epitaphs along the Silk Road, further encouraged the international study of Jingjiao. Emerging scholars include figures from Europe and Japan (e.g. Moule, Pelliot, P. Yoshio Saeki, Haneda Toru) as well as Chinese scholars, locally and abroad. For example, LUO Xianglin and CHEN Huan examined the sources of historical materials, while LIN Wu-shu, RONG Xin-jiang and CHEN Huai-yu focussed on the authenticity of literature. WENG Shaojun and WU Changxing concentrated on exegesis, TANG Li translated the texts into English, while GE Chengyong studied Jingjiao art. Finally, WU Qiyu, DUAN Qing, NIU Ruji and others did research on the local Jingjiao Syrian literature. For more than a century of Chinese Jingjiao studies have emphasized textual research rather than focussing on the doctrines, theology, and liturgy.

Jingjiao comes from Assyrian Christianity or East Syriac Christianity, originating from the apostle Thomas. It is a traditional branch parallel to Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy. Classical Syriac is an important branch of Aramaic (Hebrew and Aramaic are both Semitic languages). From the 2nd to 6th century the structure of the Bible became stable and its translation mature. At the same time the church had furious theological debates around the doctrines of Trinity and Christology. Ancient Syriac became one of the major languages in discussions of the Bible and theology, and outstanding church fathers emerged. Tatian, Aphrahat, Ephrem were pioneers; Theodore of Mopsuestia and the whole Antiochene school contended with the Alexandrian School; the Edessa and Nisbis scholars were led by Narsai; significant thinkers emerged from this linguistic group over several generations. Because the Syriac language was close to the Aramaic that Jesus spoke, the literature in it had the unique feature of preserving primitive Christianity.

Sebastian Paul Brock, professor at the University of Oxford, is an expert in the field of Syriac thought. He focuses on many aspects of Syriac literature in his studies of the Bible, the church fathers and liturgy. He emphasizes the fact that many Greek fathers' works were translated into ancient Syriac. In some cases the only extant version is the Syriac, since the original Greek writings were lost. They include the works by Eusebius Caesarea, Hippolytus, Athanasius, Theodore, Cyril of Alexandria, and so on. He also points out that the Assyrian Church emphasized liturgy, producing many creative ideas that contributed a lot to early Christianity. Therefore the translation and study of the literature of Assyrian Christianity (Jingjiao) has important academic value.

Chinese Jingjiao studies thus need to be carried out at many levels and from many angles. Firstly, the roots of Jingjiao, including Yelikewen in the Yuan dynasty and their relationship, are to be studied. Dunhuang Jingjiao literature is estimated to have more than 100 terms with a Syriac background. These include some transliteration or translation of the sacred names as well as those of people, places, and theological terms. These terms have distinct Jingjiao characteristics, reflecting fully the intimate relationship between the Syriac background of the

Assyrian Church and their theological tradition. Secondly, compared with the Greek and Latin churches, the Assyrian Church has its own characteristic, which should also be investigated. The differences between the Antiochene and Alexandrian School should be studied seriously in terms of their roots in the classics, theology, and liturgy. Thirdly, in the process of transmission Jingjiao exhibited some features resulting from interfaith and intercultural encounter. Thus Chinese Jingjiao should be compared with other kinds outside China, and also with other religions at the time of its arrival in China during the Tang dynasty, such as the so-called “The Three Foreign Religions” and Islam. Fourthly, research should be done comparing ideas in Jingjiao and local Chinese thought. When Jingjiao came to China during the Tang dynasty, it tried to adopt terms and ideas from Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism to build its own thought system. Hence, there is a need to do in-depth and systematic research on the potential connections between the ideas of Jingjiao and these other religions.

In view of the above situation, the Center for the Study of Jingjiao and Chinese Religions at Tsinghua University hopes to participate in research on Jingjiao doctrines and comparative studies of the Chinese and Syrian contexts, so as to make a contribution to cultural exchange between Chinese and foreign cultures. Before the Center was founded, it received lots of help from friends and scholars in advance. In particular, thanks are due to ISCS director Daniel Yeung and research fellow Prof. Jason Lam for their support. We have invited more than 30 scholars from the mainland and abroad to Tsinghua University to give speeches on early Christian thought, Jingjiao during the Tang and Yuan dynasties, and on comparative studies of Jingjiao and Chinese thought. We venture to promote related research and hope you scholars and friends will continue to cooperate with us as before.

A Visit to Switzerland

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The 6th International Bonhoeffer Colloquium took place at the University of Zurich from 30 Oct to 1 Nov 2014. The same event is hosted by the International Bonhoeffer Society approximately every two years. Experts in the field were invited from various places, attracting many scholars and students to this three day conference. The theme this time was “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Concept of Theology”. Various related aspects were discussed. These included the difference between theology and Kulturwissenschaft during Bonhoeffer’s time, how his thought relates to the Barth-Harnack debate, the relationship between his theological anthropology and soteriology, whether theology is just a function of the church, and the relevancy of his thought to the contemporary situation and the non-Western

world. Eight speakers were invited from different countries. These included Prof. Clifford Green, Prof. Christiane Tietz, Prof. Michael DeJonge, etc. I was honoured to be invited to this event and was the first ever Asian speaker of the six congresses.¹ The topic of my presentation was “Sino-Christian Theology as a Test Case of Bonhoeffer’s Religionless Christianity”,² and I enjoyed the interaction with other participants.

The congress was hosted by the Institute of Hermeneutics and Philosophy of Religion at the University of Zurich, and took place in the building connected to the twin towers Grossmünster, the landmark of Zurich. It contains the largest theology faculty in Switzerland. In fact, ISCS has been connected with them for some time. In 2013 we met the director of the institute, Prof. Tietz, at the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Conference in East Asia, She was the keynote speaker. The faculty and students of the theology department also visited ISCS in Aug 2009.³ Thus I took this chance to talk with our guests then at Tao Fong Shan. Among them were Prof. Pierre Bühler, Prof. Christoph Uehlinger and Prof. Ralph Kunz (he was also one of the speakers of the congress). We decided there and then to enhance our exchange and cooperation in the future.

Apart from participating in the Zurich congress, I also



took this chance to visit the neighbouring city of Basel. The Karl Barth Archive is situated in his old house in this famous cultural

city. All his published works, some publications from various places related to him as well as some unpublished works are collected here, which is why experts and research students visit this place from time to time. I visited the archive partly as a pilgrim, but chiefly to meet the director, Dr. Peter Zocher. We discussed the frontiers of Barth research, and I also hoped to learn from the international experience of translating Barth’s works into other languages so as to facilitate our future projects for the Chinese Academic Library of Christian Thought.

Another objective for visiting Basel was to see Prof. Reinhold Bernhardt, who also visited ISCS in 2009. He succeeded to the chair of systematic theology from Barth and Heinrich Ott at the University of Basel. Prof. Bernhardt’s expertise is in Paul Tillich’s thought, especially his interreligious dialogue, and he has known some



of the Chinese scholars in this area. Apart from sharing recent developments in Chinese and German theological circles, we also discussed the possibility of cooperation between our institutions. On the day of my visit Prof. Bernhardt hosted a

¹ In 2013 I also participated in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Conference in East Asia.

² The full paper is forthcoming in the symposium of the congress, and the Chinese version will be available in *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture* 33 (2015)

³ Cf. *ISCS Newsletter* 2010 Spring.

seminar for research students on “Toleranz: philosophische und theologische”, and he invited me to be the guest speaker. I took the chance to share with the students issues related to tolerance in the history of Chinese Christianity. The emphasis is of course on contemporary church and state relationship in China and Sino-Christian studies emerging since the 1980s. To our surprise the students’ interest and understanding of China exceeded our

expectation. We had very good conversations after the seminar. I really enjoyed the fantastic scenery of Zurich and Basel. But it was an extraordinary experience for a Chinese scholar to have this opportunity to talk about Sino-Christian theology and exchange ideas in the hometown and university of Karl Barth. It was a memorable event for me personally and also meaningful for Sino-Christian theology at the age of 20.

Special Report

Dialogue with Jürgen Moltman *Experts Seminar in Beijing*

The year 2014 marks the 20th anniversary of our journal *Logos & Pneuma* and the *Chinese Academic Library of Christian Thought*. Coincidentally, it is the 50th anniversary of the renowned theologian Jürgen Moltmann’s *Der Theologie der Hoffnung*. Since ISCS has been working with him continuously from the very beginning, Director Daniel Yeung invited him to visit Beijing as our guest professor to having dialogues with Chinese academics on several “big issues”.

Lecture at Peking University



In the morning
14 Oct 2014,
Prof. Moltmann,
accompanied by
Director Yeung and
Research Fellow Prof.
Jason Lam, delivered
a lecture on “Thinking

means Transcendence” at Peking University. The event was chaired by the head of the philosophy department, Prof. WANG Bo, and Prof. ZHANG Zhigang. Faculty members including Prof. WU Fei, SUN Shangyang, XU Fenglin, etc. attended the lecture. Attendance highly showed how highly the event was regarded. The vice president of the university, Prof. LI Yansong, welcomed Prof. Moltmann before the lecture.



Experts Seminar at Renmin University of China



On 15 Oct 2014 Prof. Moltmann had two rounds of dialogue with more than ten Chinese experts at Renmin University of China on “Political Theology and Contemporary China” and “The Theology of Hope and the Future of China”.

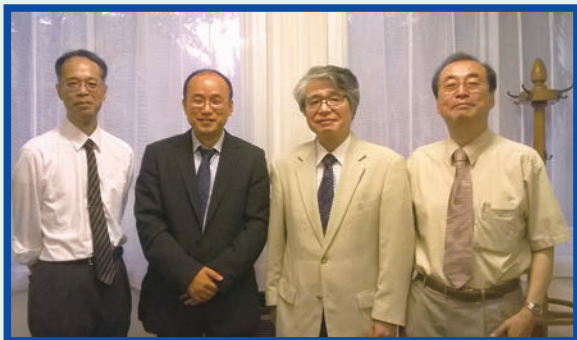
The former vice-president of the university, Prof. YANG Huilin, and ISCS founder and director, Daniel Yeung, chaired the morning and afternoon sections of the event respectively. Participating experts included Prof. LI Qiuling (School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China), Prof. ZHUO Xinping (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), Prof. GAO Quanxi (Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, Beihang University), Prof. PENG Xiaoyu (Department of History, Peking University), Dr. LI Bingquan (School of Liberal Arts, Renmin University of China), Prof. David Jasper (University of Glasgow/ Renmin University of China), Prof. ZHANG Xu (School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China), Prof. YOU Bin (Minzu University of China), Prof. Jason Lam (ISCS), Prof. ZHANG Baichun (Beijing Normal University). They exchanged ideas on the hot issues of religious studies in China, such as constructing a harmonious society and “the Chinese dream”. The audiences enjoyed the events very much. The day before the seminar, the president of Renmin University of China, Prof. CHEN Yulu, warmly received Prof. Moltmann and the organizing team.



Academic Activities



Asia Lutheran Research Network Meeting



Prof. QU Xutong (ISCS Guest Research Fellow in Mainland China, Assistant Professor of the School of Philosophy and Social Studies, Beijing Normal University) attended the Asia Lutheran Research Network Meeting in Tokyo during 9-11 July 2014. This meeting was held by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Japan Lutheran University and Seminary. Five scholars who came from LWF (Switzerland), Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea participated in the meeting, at which they drafted the constitution of the Asian Lutheran Research Network, aiming to better promote Luther Research in Asia. With heated discussions about the related texts and topics on Luther's Theology of the Cross, they selected the research topics for the following three years in order to prepare for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017. The three topics are: (1) Luther's Theology of the Cross: Texts and Backgrounds; (2) The History of the Application and Interpretation of Luther's Theology of the Cross; (3) Luther's Theology of the Cross in Asian Contexts.

Besides attending this meeting, Prof. Qu visited Tokyo Union Theological Seminary on behalf of ISCS. He met the four professors who studied in Germany in the past and had very good discussions with them.

The Visit of the Summer School of Chung Chi Divinity School

On 11 Aug 2014, 63 teachers and students of the Summer School of Chung Chi Divinity School, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, visited ISCS, led by our Distinguished Professor Dr. Milton Wan. Because of the large number of visitors, the event was conducted in the Chinese-style Christ Temple at Tao Fong Shan. Our academic program coordinator Ms. HU Jing first introduced the history of Tao Fong Shan and



the 20 years' work of ISCS in promoting Sino-Christian Theology. Then Dr. WANG Ying (ISCS Visiting Scholar, Assistant Research Fellow of China Academy of Social Sciences) delivered a lecture on "Reichelt and Sino-Christian Theology" and was responded by Prof. QU Xutong (ISCS Guest Research Fellow in Mainland, Assistant Professor of School of Philosophy and Social Studies, Beijing Normal University). There was a lively discussion between the speakers and the audience.

The 10th International Symposium on "Theology and Humanities"

ISCS cooperated with Renmin University of China to organize the 10th International Symposium on "Theology and



Humanities" during 18-21 Sept 2014 in Yanji, Jilin Province of China. The theme of the symposium this year was "Comparative Literature and

Religious Studies", which also made a roundtable forum of the 11th Triennial Conference of CCLA (Chinese Comparative Literature Association). The keynote speakers included the long-term partners of ISCS: Prof. Marian Galik, Prof. Chloë Starr, and Prof. LIU Xiaofeng. Besides, many of the participants of the symposium, Prof. LIANG Gong, Prof. LIANG Hui, Prof. YANG Huilin, Prof. GENG Youzhuang, Prof. Benoit Vermader, Prof. SONG Xuhong and Dr. ZHANG Jing, are our close partners. Our Research Fellow Prof. Jason Lam presented a paper on "Are Texts from Different Worlds Comparable? Taking the Intertextuality of the Bible as an Example". He and Director Daniel Yeung were both invited to chair different sections of the symposium.

Director Visited Institutions in Beijing and Shanxi

On 29 Oct 2014, Director Daniel Yeung was invited to visit the Department of Philosophy of CCP Central School in Beijing and delivered a lecture on "Modernity, Social

