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基督教文化研究所  
INSTITUTE OF SINO-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

## News

Spring 2019

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## Essays

### Sino-Christian Theology: A Christian Theological Discourse on the Modern Public Platform

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Project Leader of ISCS's 2018 Christian Theology and Interdisciplinary Studies Forum

Since the implementation of the Reform and Opening Up policies in the late 1970s, Christianity has experienced tremendous growth in the People's Republic of China. However, Chinese Christianity has also encountered the problem of religious "spatialization." As coined by Prof. LI Xiangping, this term refers to the inability of religions to make their voices heard in the public realm due to ideological structures.<sup>1</sup> This situation lends significance to Christian studies conducted within the university system by scholars from diverse disciplines. These scholars can engage in discussions of social and public issues, opening up the space for a public theology, which is why Sino-Christian theology has attracted so much attention and drawn so many participants since it first emerged in mainland China in the 1980s.

There is no denying that most of the participants in this theological qua cultural movement are not confessing Christians,<sup>2</sup> a circumstance that occasioned the so-called "Cultural Christian" dispute of the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> But several decades later, those initial misunderstandings and disputations have given way to numerous dialogues and co-operation



between scholars and institutes. Some of the "theological" contributions from Chinese scholars are unmistakable and have even attracted preliminary studies from international academia.

As its scholars come from a range of different departments within the humanities and social sciences, Sino-Christian theology is by nature an interdisciplinary study. Such interdisciplinary research is encouraged by many universities nowadays. But this broad interdisciplinary approach is in fact the only possible way to engage in theological studies within the contemporary mainland China educational system. Although some young scholars have dedicated themselves to genuine theological studies, they must conduct their research within one of the other disciplines, since there are no departments of theology in mainland Chinese universities. Their research results must therefore be framed as interdisciplinary studies. Even scholars trained in theological disciplines must explore their studies from the perspective of other subjects. Situated in those other disciplines, scholars must seek out their respective theological implications.

As time goes by, the proportion of confessing Christians in the movement has increased, but they are still in the minority. Thus, from the very beginning, being *extra ecclesiam* has been one of the key features of Sino-Christian theology. But, precisely for this reason, it is able to exert greater influence in mainland academia and in the public realm than can the institutional church. It has consequently attracted extensive attention. In light of this situation, we can understand why some scholars have paid attention only to what theology can contribute to public discourse, with little or no concern for its role in individual religious identity.

This kind of "public theology" is not the same as we

find in Western academia. From the very beginning, theology had no choice but to appear in mainland Chinese academia using a language the public could understand. However, if the religious or confessing dimension were to be suspended for too long, it could bring about an identity crisis and create a problem for the future direction of the Christians involved and even the theological movement itself. Therefore, for more than ten years, I have been focusing on the “social identity” of Sino-Christian theology.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, the locus of theology has been the church. But now most of the participants in Sino-Christian theology are not church members. How shall we understand the social identity of this academic community? Can we identify these scholars *extra ecclesiam* as a “faith” community, insofar as they conform to Christian values?

Needless to say, “faith” here does not refer to that confessed by any denominational churches, nor can this academic community be equated with the “Church.” From the perspective of social science, for Christian studies to exert influence in the public realm of mainland China, this academic community must share some common beliefs. At this point, the concept of “diffused religion,” coined by the Chinese sociologist C. K. YANG, is applicable. It is the opposite of an “institutional religion,” like Christianity, which has a solid organization and liturgy. Significantly, Confucianism basically belongs to the diffused type while Confucianism as an institutional religion has been in decline since the Sung dynasty.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Christian studies in mainland China are not directed by the church but are attached to the cultural and educational system. This phenomenon to some extent resembles the situation of Confucianism as a diffused religion. In this way, Sino-Christian theology seems to have already developed itself as an indigenous form of Christianity sharing a “public faith.”

As “theological studies” in mainland China will be dispersed across different disciplines for the foreseeable future, Sino-Christian theology will remain an interdisciplinary study. The disadvantage of this situation, needless to say, is that it makes it difficult for Sino-Christian theology to formulate a holistic approach and agenda. On the other hand, as contributors to a kind of theological encyclopedia, scholars of different subjects can dedicate their efforts according to their strengths, in a project that is well-suited for conducting dialogues across different disciplines and even religious faiths. As we are now living in an era without a single homogenous tradition and scripture, for Christian theology to establish itself as a constituent of contemporary Chinese academia, some kind of transformation will be necessary. If it is successful, then something similar to what happened to Buddhism in Chinese history may occur again. A new kind of Chinese Christianity or Sino-Christian culture may be formed, which can also benefit modern Chinese culture. To revitalize

Chinese culture has been the hope of Chinese intellectuals since the May Fourth New Culture Movement one hundred years ago. The attractiveness of Sino-Christian theology rests on this point. ■

1. LI Xiangping, “The ‘Place’ Centered ‘Space of Religious Activity’: The Changes of ‘Religion System’ in China,” in *Logos & Pneuma* 26 (2007), pp. 93-114.
2. Pan-chiu LAI & Jason LAM, “Retrospect and Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology: An Introduction by the Editors,” in *Sino-Christian Theology: A Theological Qua Cultural Movement in Contemporary China* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 1-17.
3. Cf. ISCS (ed.), *Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument* (Hong Kong: ISCS, 1997), pp. 96-196.
4. Jason LAM, *A Polyphonic View on Sino-Christian Theology* (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma Press, 2006), pp. 197-219.
5. C. K. YANG, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), Ch. 12.

## From Theodor Däubler to Konrad Weiß: On Carl Schmitt’s Way of Literary “Self-Interpretation”

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In recent decades, the thought of Carl Schmitt has received a lot of attention from Chinese intellectuals. But one subtle aspect of his thought remains unexplored: he not only read literary works throughout his whole life, but also elaborated his thoughts with references to poets, especially in cases where a more indirect means of expression would be preferred. In particular, he was greatly influenced by two contemporary poets, Theodor Däubler (1876-1934) and Konrad Weiß (1880-1940), who have now become obscure in the world of German literature.

Däubler had a profound influence on the early worldview of Schmitt. In 1916, he published a review on Däubler’s epic poem, *Das Nordlicht* (1910), arguing passionately and enthusiastically for Däubler, a much-neglected poet. He highly appreciated Däubler’s view of language and proceeded on this basis to his thorough and critical reflection of modernity.<sup>1</sup>

However, in his later essay “Zwei Gräber” (1946), Schmitt reconsidered his early interpretation of Däubler and judged it erroneous. Schmitt’s turn from Däubler to Weiß, a Catholic poet, was manifest in this essay and in his *Glossarium* (1947-1951). It was first evident in his explicit agreement with Weiß’s theological conception of the Word





(*Wort* in contrast to *Sprache*, language). For Schmitt, there was more *Sprache* than *Wort* in Däubler, but there was only *Wort* and hardly any *Sprache* in Weiß. The Word of God can never be grasped directly by humans, but can only be revealed by God to humans at particular times and in concrete situations. Däubler was in command of *Sprache* when he was thinking and creating in his poems, while Weiß was under the command of God's Word when he was expecting fulfillment and completion in his poems.

In addition, Weiß's subversion of the traditional understanding of the relationship between the brothers Prometheus and Epimetheus in his 1933 work *Der christliche Epimetheus* greatly influenced Schmitt. According to the common conception, Epimetheus is the dull-witted brother who considers consequences only after the event, while Prometheus is the quick-witted and heroic brother who has foresight. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Epimetheus accepts Pandora and her jar of gifts from Zeus: when the jar is opened, all evils and miseries are unleashed into the world immediately and only hope remains in the jar. Weiß reinterpreted this pair of Titans in a Christian way. For him, Epimetheus signifies a believer who passively accepts what is given and follows God's providential will, in contrast to Prometheus, who relies upon his knowledge and abilities and tries to save himself by his own power. Jesus can thus be regarded as a "Christian Epimetheus" who accepts unconditionally his own fate in the real course of history.

It was precisely by means of this concept that Schmitt found a possible way to apologize for his actions. In his "Gespräch mit Eduard Spranger" (1945), he referred to himself as a "Christian Epimetheus": "My essence may well be opaque; but my case can be called by a name a great poet has coined. It is the bad, unworthy and yet authentic case of a *Christian Epimetheus*."<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Meier observes sharply that, while the attributes "bad" and "unworthy" may express Schmitt's defenselessness concerning his Nazi past, what is essential actually lies in the attribute "and yet authentic," which implicitly conveys his self-defense and self-justification.<sup>3</sup> Schmitt considered himself a "theologian of jurisprudence"<sup>4</sup> and regarded his political actions during the Nazi period as the unconditional acceptance of the providential will at a particular time and in a concrete situation.

In fact, what is remarkable in his self-characterization is readily recognizable. A "Christian Epimetheus" never has to demonstrate that his "fate" and his "duty" are ethically honourable and legally reasonable. The only criterion at stake is the blind "providential will," which is subject to one's own interpretation. Such a "providential will" would place Schmitt within an extremely firm

protective wall, where all his past political actions can be interpreted and excused as his existential response to the "providential will" at a particular time and in a concrete situation. He might even call himself a "martyr" and regard all his political actions as the necessary sacrifice to be made by him, and him alone, as "the last, self-conscious representative of the *jus publicum Europaeum*, its last teacher and student in an existential sense".<sup>5</sup>

In his 1950 essay "Drei Möglichkeiten eines christlichen Geschichtsbildes," Schmitt summarized three views of history in Christianity: the eschatological view, the catechontical view, and the Marian view. Among these, the third view is the crucial one. It is actually a further development of his idea of the "Christian Epimetheus." Just like Epimetheus, Maria knew neither God's great plan in history nor her own role in it. She just submitted herself humbly and unconditionally to God's "providential will." This is not a matter of morality or dogmatic theology, but a matter of "the real course of history."

Schmitt's turn from Däubler to Weiß may be regarded as a case of his "friend-enemy distinction" after the Second World War. In fact, it is this most famous doctrine of his that testifies most clearly to his deviation from the orthodox teachings of Christianity. In his writings, the war between Christ and Antichrist was taken out of its original theological context and furnished with political concepts that are completely secular, in such a way that it became a political ideology to be exploited by fascist regimes. For Schmitt, the coming of the eschaton can be postponed only when the state is strong enough to suppress all its enemies. He thus combined the meaning of the state with the political meaning of religion. While it is very difficult to determine with certainty whether his support of the Nazi regime was based on his naive optimism or his strong sense of existential responsibility, it is nevertheless beyond doubt that his thoughts departed sharply from the dogmatic tradition of Catholicism and especially the true sense of Christianity. His doctrine is therefore a *theologische Politik* rather than a *politische Theologie*, for he injected theological axioms into political philosophy, but not vice versa. ■

\* Translated by LO Kwun Lam.

1. On Schmitt's understanding and interpretation of Däubler, cf. my essay "The Hidden Poetic Source of Carl Schmitt's Thought: Carl Schmitt and Theodor Däubler, A Spiritual Dialogue between Philosopher and Poet" (in Chinese), in *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture*, Vol. 33 (2015), pp. 136-159.

2. Carl Schmitt, *Ex Captivitate Salus: Erfahrungen der Zeit 1945-47* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 2010), p. 12.

3. Heinrich Meier, *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts: Vier Kapitel zur Unterscheidung Politischer Theologie und Politischer Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Metzler: 1994), pp. 204ff.

4. Carl Schmitt, *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947-1951* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1991), p. 23.

5. Schmitt, *Ex Captivitate Salus*, p. 75.

## “Risk and Hope: A Christian Theology and Interdisciplinary Studies Forum”

To promote the development of Sino-Christian theology and in keeping with its interdisciplinary nature, ISCS hosted the First Christian



Theology and Interdisciplinary Studies Forum in 2017. From September to December 2018, we hosted our second Forum, with the theme “Risk and Hope.” It was led by our Academic Officer Prof. Jason LAM, with participants from a range of different disciplines. Their expertise and research topics are listed as follows:

| Theology              |                                     |  |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Jason LAM</b>      | Institute of Sino-Christian Studies | Hope of Salvation in Risk  |
| Economics             |                                     |  |
| <b>PENG Rui</b>       | Nanchang University                 | Risk, Uncertainty, Game Theory and Religious Ethics                                      |
| Sociology             |                                     |  |
| <b>SHAO Tiefeng</b>   | Shenzhen University                 | Fear and Risk Society: Reconsidering Max Weber’s Interpretation of Protestant Ethics     |
| Law                   |                                     |  |
| <b>SHI Wenlong</b>    | Shanghai Normal University          | Risk in Biological Technology and Its Corresponding Ethical and Legal Responses          |
| Literature            |                                     |  |
| <b>YANG Junjie</b>    | Beijing Normal University           | The Ministry of Reconciliation: A New Interpretation of Risk Society and Its Discontents |
| Religious Studies     |                                     |  |
| <b>Naomi Thurston</b> | Yuelu Academy, Hunan University     | Harbouring Hope in China’s Mixed-Modern Risk Societies                                   |

In addition to the 6 participants listed above, our Guest Research Fellows and Visiting Scholars occasionally joined the Forum. They included Prof. XIE Zhibin, Prof. HONG Liang, Dr. HUANG Ying, and Prof. LU Chengren, among others. Through 2 rounds of reading sessions and seminars, the participants conducted an interdisciplinary dialogue, each offering his or her own perspectives on the topic of “Risk and Hope.” All of the participants found the three-month long forum, with its intensive exchange of ideas, to be very stimulating and thought-provoking. Coming from

diverse disciplines, they were able to learn a lot from each other. As the interdisciplinary forum has been well received and highly appreciated by the participating scholars, ISCS will continue to host it in the future. In 2019, the theme will be “Trust” and we hope that it will further the construction of Sino-Christian theology as an interdisciplinary study.

ISCS would like to express its sincere thanks to The United Board Christian Higher Education in Asia for their generous support to this project in 2018.

## 2018 Logos & Pneuma Research Student Forum



In order to promote and strengthen the dialogue and interactive exchange between expert scholars and young research students and to nourish a new generation of Chinese scholars in Christian studies, ISCS has been conducting the Logos & Pneuma Research Student Forum regularly since 2017. Expert scholars are invited to come and convene discussions, commenting on the research papers of selected research students.

The second Forum was successfully held in December 2018, with the great and great support from our friends and partners in Zhejiang University.

There were several rounds of selection for the Forum. 40 participants were first selected from 67 applicants from over 40 universities, based on their essay proposals. They had to complete their essays in 4 months before joining the two and a half day event. A group of 4 independent reviewers evaluated the completed essays in advance and also assessed the actual presentations by the participants during the Forum. The following 10 outstanding participants (listed in alphabetical pinyin order) were then chosen and awarded a merit award certificate and a cash prize: CHEN Gang (Nanjing University), CHEN Ningxin (Zhejiang University), DAN Yue (Beijing Normal University), FENG Li (Zhejiang University), LYU Feiyue (Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), NIU Yao (Wuhan University), TANG Lin (East China Normal University), WANG Dafei (Tsinghua University), XU Ruorong (Renmin University of China), ZHANG Xiaoyi (East China Normal University).

After the event, the 10 outstanding essays were revised by the participants and reviewed by another group of expert scholars. The following best 4 participants (listed in alphabetical pinyin order) were then chosen and awarded the Best Thesis Award:



|                   |   |               |   |
|-------------------|---|---------------|---|
| <b>CHEN Gang</b>  | Nanjing University                                    | Ph.D. Student | Transcendental Univocity and Phenomenology of Separation: Duns Scotus and Emmanuel Levinas  |
| <b>FENG Li</b>    | Zhejiang University                                   | Ph.D. Student | The Image of “Gentile Woman” and Its Interpretation in Asian Context: From the Perspective of Biblical Reception History  |
| <b>LYU Feiyue</b> | Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences | Ph.D. Student | An Analysis of the Evolution and Transformation of the Student Fellowship in Church Schools from Religious Belief to Political Revolution in the Republic of China: A Case Study of the Yenching Christian Fellowship |
| <b>XU Ruorong</b> | Renmin University of China                            | Ph.D. Student | The Continuity in Erasmus’ Debate on the Free Will and the Spirit of Christian Humanism   |

The 4 awardees will have a chance of becoming our Visiting Students in Hong Kong in the coming semester. Their essays will be accepted and published in our journal *Logos & Pneuma* after a double-blind review process.

## International Workshop on “Religion in a Globalized World”



On 20 September 2018, an international workshop on “Religion in a Globalized World” was jointly organized by Institute of Religion and Culture of Beijing Normal University, Truth-Seeking

Foundation for Scholarship and Culture of Beijing Normal University, and ISCS. Prof. Miroslav Volf was the keynote speaker. He earned his doctoral and post-doctoral degrees under the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann at University of Tübingen and currently serves as the Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology and Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture at Yale University. He has written or edited more than 20 books and over 90 scholarly articles on a wide range of topics, including Christianity, religious dialogue, and religion and globalization. He received the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Religion in 2002. Respondents and participants of the workshop included: Prof. CAO Nanlai and Dr. ZHANG Jing from Renmin University of China, independent scholar Dr. CHENG Jing, Dr. KUANG Quan from Minzu University of China, editor of *Studies in World Religions* Dr. YUAN Zhaohui, Dr. YUN Changzhi from Central University of Finance and Economics, Prof. HAN Xinhua from Communication University of China, and Profs. LI Shaomeng, TIAN Shufeng and Thomas Xutong QU from Beijing Normal University.

The theme of the workshop was “Religion and Globalization.” Participants engaged in lively discussions on “Religion and the Challenge of Globalization” and “Conflict, Violence, and Reconciliation” and exchanged ideas on concrete issues such as the relationship between world religions and globalization processes, why religion is needed in the age of globalization, whether religion necessarily or inevitably leads to conflicts and violence in a globalized world, and how reconciliation possible is in a globalized world.

Prof. Volf argued that, while religions today are undergoing a resurgence in both their private and public dimensions under the conditions of globalization, they may sometimes breed intolerance and encourage violence. In view



of this situation, we not only need to pay attention to the relationship between religions and globalization processes and examine the relationship between believers and their religious traditions. We also need to ask whether there can be dialogue, mutual understanding, and consensus between different religions. On the other hand, world religions have played a very important role in the process of globalization. Engaging globalization with ordinary life and the transcendent realm, world religions can be both globalization’s sharpest critics and its most ardent supporters. The question remains how world religions in the age of globalization can continue to be agents of reconciliation and promoters of just peace, while contributing to authentic human flourishing and the global common good.

Prof. Volf had a very good discussion and exchange of ideas with the participants. The successful workshop concluded with applause.

## News Release from *Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology*

*Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology* has been a public platform for the academic exchange of Sino-Christian studies. It has also been indexed in the Scopus and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), both are important databases which contribute to the world ranking of universities.

According to the citation statistics of the Scopus index for 2017, *Logos & Pneuma* belongs to level H index 2. Among Asiatic religious studies journals we are ranked third; while among Christian studies or Chinese religious studies periodicals, we are ranked top in the region. We are most grateful to Chinese academia for this wonderful result.

The A&HCI officially announced that after June 2018, they would no longer produce the Journal Citation Report. The reason for this is because they recognized that literature

in the humanities may cite more books than periodicals, and that the citation time span is significantly different in the humanities from those in the natural and social sciences. Therefore, the way the impact factor was calculated in the past is not relevant to humanities

