

Chinese Theological Seminaries in Development – Thoughts on Theological Education

Rev. Wang Weizhou

Office Manager of Yanjing Theological Seminary

(With teaching duties in the theology of John Calvin and Pauline Epistles)

Introduction



In the first 17 years of the 21 century, the Christianity population in China keeps growing steadily. Yet, theological education in China has undergone structural changes with the advancing of time. In the mainland, there are 22 theological seminaries that are registered with the government and have official recognition(1). The seminaries and bible schools are divided into several levels based on their capacity: national, regional, provincial, and local(2).

Different Levels of Theological Seminaries

National Level Seminary: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary

Regional Level Seminary: Yanjing Theological Seminary, East China Theological Seminary, Sichuan Theological Seminary, North East Theological Seminary, Zhongnan Theological Seminary

Provincial Level Seminary: Shandong Theological Seminary, Zhe Jiang Theological Seminary, Anhui Theological Seminary, Fujian Theological Seminary, Guangdong Union Theological Seminary, Yunnan Theological Seminary, Jiangsu Theological College, Heilongjiang Theological Seminary

Bible Schools and Training Centers: Henan Bible College, Inner Mongolia Bible School, Hunan Bible School, Shaanxi Bible School, Jiangxi Christian Bible School



Provincial, Urban and Autonomous Regional Training Centers: Hebei Christian Training Center, Qinghai Christian Training Center, Gansu Christian Training Center

Changes in Theological Education

Apart from remaining within their class divisions, theological seminaries in China have experienced great changes in terms of their hardware and software as well:

Hardware

Firstly, in terms of campus facilities, each operated under two policies since the opening of China: “It is hoped that you will run theological seminaries well. You must think of all sorts of ways and use all sorts of methods to train successors [...] especially to run theological seminaries well”(3) and “Running high level theological seminaries and combining intermediate and junior level theological seminaries are the better method for accelerating the training of a new generation of pastors and theological researchers who love the country and the church”(4). Under these two policies, theological seminaries have begun to operate or reopen.



National Level Seminary

Today, all these theological seminaries all have their own new campuses, including Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Yanjing Theological Seminary, East China Theological Seminary and North East Theological Seminary. Secondly, some Bible schools have upgraded into seminaries. Jiangsu Bible School and Heilongjiang Bible School have both been upgraded to Jiangsu Theological College and Heilongjiang Theological Seminary respectively, with stunning campuses of their own. Thirdly, Shaanxi Bible College has been upgraded to a theological seminary, while Inner Mongolia Bible Training Center has become a Bible School.

Software

In terms of software regarding the teaching team, each theological seminary has had different levels of improvement. For example, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary has started recruiting doctoral students. Regional Theological Seminaries like Yanjing Theological Seminary boast having 20 fulltime teaching members in the faculty, with the awkward situation of fresh graduates teaching undergraduates no longer arising. Of the 20

full-time teaching members, 4 are doctors educated in Europe and America. Master degree holders bear degrees from Hong Kong, Singapore, the United States, Finland and Nanjing Union Theological Seminary itself. Most of these teachers were trained within the recent 20 years.

In terms of student level, 50% of the students recruited in 2015 had completed tertiary education, with the others having a high school diploma, or having graduated from a Bible School. Hence, insisting that graduates complete a thesis defense, and insisting that students' English levels reach that of other 4-year undergraduate programs for the sake of receiving their undergraduate theological degree has definitely increased the motivation of students in their four years. Situated in the national capital of Beijing, Yanjing Theological Seminary has come to the forefront of theological seminaries across the nation through taking advantage of available resources. Like Yanjing Theological Seminary, the other theological seminaries continue to improve their resources and faculty. For example, in December of 2007, Shaanxi Bible School was accredited as a 4-year undergraduate degree by the National Religious Affairs Bureau in writing. It was included in the list of intermediate religious training institutions of the National Religious Affairs Bureau, and it is hoped that it will become a high level theological seminary.(5) Doctoral and master's graduates are included in the faculty, while some teachers continue their education in theological seminaries and universities outside of the mainland. This institute will soon become the theological seminary for the five provinces of the northwest, training ministers for churches in more remote areas.

Rethinking Theological Education

We are moving towards a holistic theological education in the mainland, and must emphasize holistic theological thinking, remain rational and develop knowledge and spirituality equally. We must effectively combine the three things listed below:

1. **Personal Spiritual Training:** To help every theological student grow and develop spiritually, morally, intellectually, aesthetically and socially, guiding students to develop a spirit of deep roots and growth in theological seminaries.
2. **Healthy Developments in the Church:** In the four years or more of life at a theological



seminary, it must be insisted persistently that students join the local churches in the area. More important, however, is to maintain a good relationship between students and their mother churches. This is to put an end to the situation where a student has no relationship with any church. Only students who have been trained for years can return to their churches to take up the mandate of pastoring and teaching the truth.

3. **Developing towards Society:** China’s economy continues to fly high, and Christianity cannot be removed from the context it is in. When we cannot provide help and learning to our context, the truth of our faith becomes ossified, or it becomes nothing more than outward rituals. In the midst of adjusting to Chinese culture, economics, politics and society, our theological seminaries and churches can fulfill their role as salt and light.

I am of the opinion that there are some shortcomings in Chinese theological seminaries (6), for example, faculty members becoming younger on average has resulted in a detachment between theory and practice. Graduates cannot lead church volunteers for short periods of time while maintaining pastoral responsibilities and accurate expositional preaching. The theological seminaries in China still have a long way to go. They need the hard work of seminarians to complete the task entrusted to them by God, to train up every God-pleasing seminary students for the churches of China.

Introducing “The Living Word Curriculum Series” to Theological Seminaries

Rev. Wang believes in the importance of training seminary students to be able to lead Christians to put Biblical truths into practice. In the past four years, he has been participating in “The Living Word Curriculum Series” training ministry. Using these teaching materials written by Chinese ministers, he mainly teaches theology students and church volunteers to help them resolve and integrate the three issues as written above. Rev. Wang has also introduced “Living Word” into classrooms in theological seminaries, hoping that students would be motivated to take the initiative in “increasing their storage of the Bible” by learning the word of God and connecting life to the truth.



Firstly, whether a seminary student or a volunteer elder, are taught to grasp the basics of hermeneutics, which is an inductive reading of the Bible. They must integrate observation, explanation and application, while avoiding copying someone else's commentary. Students are taught to avoid interpreting the scripture in an idiosyncratic or impulsive manner. Moreover, volunteer elders are taught to avoid using associative techniques in writing sermons. Instead, they must put Christ at the heart of the sermon. Thirdly, church volunteers and elders are trained to avoid unbiblical principles in church management. Trainees not only use the set of "Living Word" teaching materials, but can lead more seminary students and volunteers to use it as well.

Notes

- 1 CCC/TSPM: *2017 Devotional Notebook*, Shanghai: CCC/TSPM Press, 2017, p.149-150
- 2 Chinese Christianity Website (www.ccctspm.org)
- 3 Spoken by the Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee at the 3rd Chinese Christian National Conference. "Words of the Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee at the 3rd Chinese Christian National Conference." *Tianfeng*, no.2 (January 1981) page 21.
- 4 The words of State Council of Religious Affairs Secretary Qiao Liansheng at the CCC/TSPM Committee Conference, "Proceedings of the CCC/TSPM Committee Conference", *Tianfeng*, no.13 (January 1983) page 16
- 5 Shaanxi Christian Church Website
- 6 Including Hong Kong and Taiwan

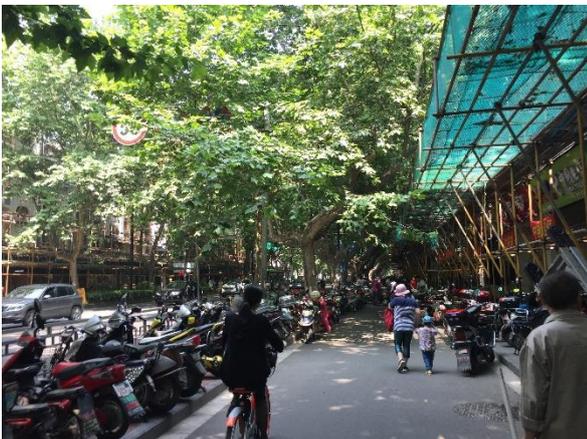
Publication of Resources: Learning the Living Word, Practising the Truth

© Matthew Fung Associate General Secretary (Publishing)

While I was still thinking about an article in the May issue of Pray for China(#288), on how we looked forward to the publication of 100,000 volumes of “The Living Word Curriculum Series”, we have already hit the 100,000 mark in just three months’ time, as more and more believers continue to learn and practice the “Living Word”. Glory to the Lord, as He put in our hearts a yearning for the Truth and a desire to live our lives based on the Truth. Let’s witness how mainland churches continue to use the “Living Word” to learn the Truth. This article shows how the church can grow healthily through grooming leaders who learn and apply the Word in their daily lives.



Meeting the Truth



Led by Pastor Liu, my fellow worker and I rode on shared bicycles through the busy town centre to a coffee shop several miles away, to listen to the sharing of her ministry. This bicycle trip was a memorable experience for me. It represents not only the application of new technology, but also the city’s quality management and civilized citizens. Pastor Liu has witnessed, in the past decade, the changes in the shepherding of mainland urban churches and how believers who

are university graduates and young workers have grown in their spiritual life and risen up to various life challenges.

Pastor Liu shepherds believers who were born in the 80s and 90s. In addition to responding to their expectations for more church participation and two-way exchanges, Pastor Liu also puts emphasis on teaching the Bible and living a life based on the Truth to train up disciples. She walks hand in hand with these graduates in overcoming temptations

of money and challenges in interpersonal relations. She practises the teachings in the “Living Word”, brings young people to the Truth, changes their lives, and helps them apply the Truth in their workplace and daily lives.

A new generation of leaders has been groomed after Pastor Liu’s ten years’ of hard work. These core leaders are in their 30s, and have become deacons in the church and spiritual leaders pastoring small groups. They serve with their heart and continue to train up disciples, bringing new vitality and energy to this century-old church. Pastor Liu’s church is not similar to another historic church in the vicinity. With the new generation of leaders leading a congregation of several thousands, a new ambience is emerging in the church.

Pastor Liu’s calling is to lead lives to the Truth, help people learn the Bible and live their lives in accordance with Biblical teaching.

Progress in the publication of “The Living Word Curriculum Series”

Book	Target for the year	Completion date	Fund raising target	Funds raised as of mid-June
Genesis (revised edition)	Publication and distribution	3 rd quarter, 2017	US\$96,000	Half of the amount has been raised, US\$48,000 is still needed
Acts	Publication and distribution	3 rd quarter, 2017		
Corinthians I, II	Drafting	4 th quarter, 2017		
Romans, Galatians	Drafting	4 th quarter, 2017		
Isaiah	Collection	4 th quarter, 2017		

We will update you on our progress regularly and continue providing information on the latest production schedule and funds required. You are invited to pray for us, learn about the progress of our ministry and provide us with the necessary resources. Let us join hands to produce appropriate teaching materials to meet the needs of mainland churches.

Prayers

1. Please pray for the cross demolition of Jiangxi!



A new round of forced demolition of crosses has swept into the Jiangxi Province. Does this implicate an unhealthy trend of imitation?

Although Xia Baolong, leader of the Zhejiang Province cross demolition, has already been sent into retirement, and his successor Feng Zhili has been transferred away from Zhejiang, those who

stood in opposition of the cross demolition have yet to be all released. One wave hasn't even subsided, another is already rising.

It has been said that this time, a few churches' crosses have already been demolished in Yugan County, Jiangxi Province. This is one of the regions where Christianity has developed the fastest in the past twenty years. Its situation is like that of Wenzhou, where the counties and cities with the highest population of Christians receive the heaviest blow. However, twenty-something years ago, there were some hundred churches that were demolished in Yugan County—yes, it wasn't crosses that were demolished back then, but churches. Even so, the church still continued thriving.



Let us pray for those who are in compression. Oppression from the outside will only expose weeds. May the Lord stop these atrocities, at the same time protecting and guiding true disciples such that they can withstand storms, such that the true cross remains standing firm!

2. Pray for Pastor Joseph Gu

Xie Bing Bing, Pastor Joseph Gu's defense attorney, finally broke her silence. She published an open letter, calling on "those in power to treat the incident of Pastor Gu with just". The letter not only revealed details of the case, but also included Pastor Gu's firm ground on five points, which were presented in court on 20 July. Those five points clearly reflect his loyalty and faithfulness.

The letter mentioned Pastor Gu voicing against demolishing crosses of official churches in 2015. He was arrested in early 2016. In these 19 months, 99% of his attorney's efforts have shown to be in vain, but she still fantasizes about that 1% of hope...

Call for prayer

1) "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (MT 19:26)

May the Lord have mercy, and grant that remaining 1% of hope, to let Pastor Gu regain freedom.

2) Pray that during his period in custody, Pastor Gu can still have a strong faith in the Lord, to rely in the Lord and listen only to His whispers amongst all noises around him.

3) Pray that the worry of Pastor Gu's family be converted in God's grace; that Ms. Xie's high stress be released for being with the Lord.



3. Integration of learning and spiritual growth



Despite some positive development in recent years, the education of mainland theological seminaries has gone in two extremes – an overemphasis on academic pursuits at the expense of personal spiritual growth, weakening one's personal relationship with God; or an overemphasis on spiritual growth at the expense of academic pursuits, weakening graduates' Biblical foundation.

May the Lord bless the theological education in China, that it can produce pastors well-grounded in Biblical truths who can effectively help believers integrate the truth with daily living.

4. Graduates entering ministry

In May, our book donation team finished the first stage of Mainland Seminary Graduates Book-giving Plan, distributing 4,500 book sets to graduates in 29 provinces, in support of their front-line work, covering Biblical tools, Bible commentaries, and other materials for Bible study, discipleship, apologetics, parenting and marriage/family related issues. As the graduates begin their full-time ministries, we are preparing the next stage of book-giving to help them serve wholeheartedly.



May the Lord guide them in teaching Biblical truths to believers, bless and protect them from undue distractions.

5. The need for healing



Following the implementation of a health and poverty alleviation action plan, the National Health and Family Planning Commission has by the end of May saved more than 2.6 million people. It also highlighted 5.53 million households involving 7.34 million people impoverished by diseases, after identifying 93 types of diseases that incur high medical costs and curtail the affordability of households.

May the Lord provide appropriate treatment and support for people impoverished by diseases, and that mainland churches will care for the spiritual needs of the poor and sick, and share the gospel of hope with them.

~ THE END ~