



Who can tear down the cross, one that has been firmly planted in the hearts of people?



### **Who Can Tear Down the Cross in Our Hearts?**

© **Thomas Tang (General Secretary)**

I just received photos from some workers in the mainland, the title being “XX City Christian Training Centre Capping and Cross Erection Ceremony”. I thought that this photo was self titled by the sender. But looking carefully, I found that it was actually the title on the banner suspended in the square in front of the worksite where the celebration was held.



Why was there a “Cross Erection Ceremony” today? I was not in attendance and dare not make a wild guess. Yet in my mind, I see scenes, too often seen recently, of crosses being torn down and burnt. The cross has always been a sign of suffering, reminding believers that the Lord Jesus was nailed to death for the forgiveness of the sins of people.

The cross is the symbol of the victory of grace too. It is the glory of all who have a new life in Christ.

“In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever, till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river.” Those who lose and regain learn to treasure what they have. We should cherish it.

In these days, where things seem smooth, the danger lies in the quiet moments of life, like when a frog is being slowly boiled alive. This subtle creeping is more frightening than a thunderous and violent pillaging.

Only in having our spiritual lives rooted firmly in the words of our Heavenly Father, in allowing teachings of the Bible to be a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path, can we have the correct spiritual values. With these values, we can see through those deceitful and

bewildering theories and philosophies which seem true but are actually false. We can discern right from wrong and stand firm for the truth which we must never compromise.

The incidences of cross demolition that happened in Zhejiang Province, whether they are hidden agendas from the government, or just local authorities taking matters into their own hands, has brought many reminders and revelations to the local church leadership. Two of these stand out in particular:

### **Always be Prepared**



The evil one of this age will use all kinds of ways to attack the Church God has built. Mainland churches had, from the middle half of the last century (50s to the end of 70s), received all kinds of persecution for long periods of time. Churches were even closed and destroyed in places. However, the life of church leaders and believers has become strengthened rather than weakened. They have become very sharp in discerning spiritual realities because everyone was always prepared in their hearts for all kinds of external pressure. The economy took off and the churches reopened since the Chinese economic reform. The number of believers increased and the mainland churches enjoyed a period of stability that it seldom had in the past. The negative side of this slowly started to appear: people pursued comfort and their

hearts became undisciplined. The lives of people became very secular, while their spiritual lives became very uneven. Through the persecution of cross demolition, the churches are reminded to remain vigilant and to always be prepared.

### **Strengthen the Spiritual Roots of Believers and Biblical Learning**

As this storm of cross demolition subsides, some areas have seen lawlessness and extreme violence. What catches most attention is that, in many of the churches where crosses were threatened with demolition, the pastors and believers were united and self-motivated in defense. It was because of the united concern of the church and the good foundation of the believers' spiritual life. Thus, church leaders have come to see the immediacy and need for these three aspects: strengthening the nurturing of new believers, discipleship training, and the systematic study and implementation of biblical teachings

according to age and audience.

“Lead from the heart. Change the world.” This tells us what a spiritual leader should focus on, that is, to lead from the heart and change lives with our own lives. This way, we can change this world, which has long been polluted by all kinds of deceitful thinking and philosophies.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” (Proverb 4:23) Our Heavenly Father has long ago clearly revealed the secret of how to nurture leaders.

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## **What Can We Do?**

### **– Support the Pastoral Staff Working in Hardship**

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Rev. Wang has just completed Bible training in Northwest China. He feels sad upon hearing that the lack of pastoral staff in a county in the region already caused the closedown of three churches. To his understanding, there is yet another church in which only four Christians remain in its gathering. After praying,



according to what God puts in his heart, he has decided to visit the church shortly to organize training for the Christians who no longer have a pastor. He hopes to help them learn basic hermeneutics, build the church on the basis of biblical truths, and equip them with capabilities of self-learning and self-support, so as to enable the church to persevere. He persists in supplication in front of God: “O Lord, the church is so desolate. What can I do?”

In Northwest China (which is to the west of Xian: including Gansu, Ningxia as well as westbound, barren, desert-wide areas), the general living conditions are impoverished and the level of education is low. The wages of a pastoral staff can hardly be provided, at best maintained on a mere par with the lowest average income level in the area—not to mention

the provision of three basic insurances, which are normally required in China (medical, endowment and unemployment insurances). Facing the vicious cycle: unsustainable income, lack of insurance, outflow of pastoral staff, closedown of churches – O Lord, what can we do?



Rev. Wang also talks about a pastor from Inner Mongolia, who has served for more than twenty years, now having a chance to come to Hong Kong for further theological education under a scholarship. For a period of several years, she needs to call at the city twice a year to attend short intensive courses. After her first stay, she made feedback to the seminary, requesting a combination of the short courses so that she could come only once a year.

However, the seminary could not fulfil her special request. Her income is the problem—barely enough to support one’s livelihood, and she has great difficulty sparing expenses for traveling to Hong Kong. The seminary has provided tuition fee subsidies but the travel expenses need to be raised by the student. As a pastor experienced in and loyal to her ministry in an impoverished community, she has the goal to equip herself further to become a mentor of junior followers. However, in view of the financial hurdle in the way, whether she can still come to the seminary is never sure. O Lord, what can we do?

Living in the well-off region, we might have no idea of the pressure of living and spiritual torment faced by the pastoral staff in the poverty-stricken regions. Today, we vow to practice simple life style, reduce wastes, preserve earth resources and pursue sustainable developments. However, beside that, we should at the same time share the economic resources given by God with the pastoral staff in destitution. In the development of Northwest China, the government has invited overseas investors to pitch in construction investments. Amidst such efforts, how could we disregard the need for a host of holy force who oversees soul building works? O Lord, please guide us and let us know how to back up these courageous outposts in Northwest China.

### **Support Pastoral Staff in the Mainland**

This year, we will support the living of 25 pastoral staff in various regions including North China, Southwest China, East China and South Central China. From March to November, we have raised US\$44,000, but are still falling short of US\$72,000.



From now till the end of February 2016 (in about 3 months), donations up to US\$24,000 on average every month are required to top up the living subsidies of the pastoral staff.

We earnestly ask for your generous offering. Please contact us for details. Your offering can help us support their living effectively, allowing them to fully dedicate themselves to pastoral needs. Thank you.

## Prayers

### 1. The Needs of Pastoral Staff in Wintertime

With limited resources, some pastoral staff in rural churches are leading a hard life, e.g. without access to electricity. They have to keep warm by burning wood, but poor air ventilation in their houses means they could be harmed by the poisonous gas released during the burning.

**Please pray for impoverished pastoral staff in villages and remote areas, especially during this wintertime, when they need to be careful when burning wood. May the Lord protect them, and provide them with appropriate pastoral materials and the chances to have further study. May they serve Him without any worry.**



### 2. Publishing in the Mainland



The Simplified Chinese versions of pastoral and Bible teaching materials, including *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and *Be Series*, etc, have been a source of support for a number of pastoral staff. However, the publishing of the books in Simplified Chinese has hit a snag in recent months due to the tightening of mainland publication policies. Official approval for those books does not come easily.

**May the Lord open the way for the publication of Simplified Chinese materials. May He also bless Christian literature organizations so they can provide relevant**

materials for mainland church leaders through newer and more appropriate channels.

### 3. The New Two-child Policy



The fifth plenary session endorsed the two-child policy in light of the aging population and the need to increase the working population, but it means that parents may need more resources to raise more children in the future.

**May the Lord bless the society and families, that the new policy will have a positive impact on them.**

**As the number of children increases, may more attention be paid to the children left behind in villages by parents who have gone to work in the cities. May churches raise more Sunday school teachers and mentors who can have a positive impact on future generations.**

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