

Reconstructing churches by reconstructing theological education

– A case study on Theological Education in China: a case study on NJUTS

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1. Introduction

The central theme is focused on the motive of reconstructing the theological education in NJUTS, an only national seminary in China. It means that we must make clear about the intention and the purpose behind of the historical events if we could consider the theological education as the historical event at the perspective of the Christianity in China.

It is obvious that the motive should be interpreted in terms of the growing of the Christianity since the 1980s in China as long as the political and social reform of Deng Xiaoping for opening China towards the modernization. *Ekklesia* is weakness of the Christian phenomena in today's China. The theological education is the most efficient way to prove this pattern, which was testified not only in the West during last 2000 years, but also recognized by the historical observations with the sociological analyses.

Thus, the central theme is that the growing of the Christians is showing the urgency of the theological education with the *ekkklesia* as the critical aim.

2. the historical background for the understanding and the interpretation

The legacy of the Western missionaries was historically significant for the Christianity in China in terms of the spirituality and the morality at the sense of the ethics, but the vital problems lie in the emptiness or in some extent at least very little at the field of the doctrines and the dogmas in Chinese before 1949. The socio-political situation since 1949 until today shows that the Protestant Church corps under the name of the TSPM/CCC is trying to persuade the churches and the believers to understand the faith at the confessional levels, especially since 1999 when Bishop K.H. Ting launched the theological movement with the terms of the Reconstruction of theological thought in China. His intention or purpose was to help the Chinese pious believers to explain their proper faith at the basis of the Bible with the correct effects at the actual social and courant life. The serious challenges of the theological reconstruction come from two resources, namely, one is the huge influence of the pietism originated from the missionaries without any works on the dogmas and doctrines. The variety of this tradition is very vague with so many isolated tendencies among the believers, especially de-alphabets. Or we can use the special terms “fundamentalists”. Most of the believers in the countryside could be defined in such a category. The second challenge is much dangerous for the Church in China within a long term. It is resulted from the syncretism and the religious relativism, which is simile as the Gnosticisms at the first two centuries against which the patristic Fathers combated without any hesitation for the purity of the *Fides ecclesiae*

by the *Regula ecclesiae* (initiated by St Justin Martyr, and officially by St Ireneus). More and more students and intellectuals in campuses have converted their faith of the life towards the Cross, at the same time, the phenomena of the Gnosticism at the patristic period silently but very strongly appear among the elites with the clothed of the Christianity and the Confucianism mixed with the modern theories and spiritual cults. The multiples orientations at the domain of the values are characteristic of our époque today. But the Church in China as well as over the world is envisaging of the menaces of the syncretism and the relativisms.

Thus, we must make alarm about these challenges for caring the normal and sound growing of the young Church in China, which is marching greatly in the economical and commercial senses toward the world power again since 1840.

3. The solutions to resoudre the problems in terms of the theological education since 1999

3.1. Three troubles have proved the urgency of the theological education for the Church in China.

For supplying the efficient solutions to the weakness of the Faith of Church or the ecclesial doctrines and dogmas in the Church in China, the only marvelous approach is to work hard and systematically in the theological education. First of all, we must prepare ourselves because of the three troubles which compose the difficulties to establish the proper theological holy works.

The first is the extreme nationalism functioned as a cancer of the conscience of the believers. It clothes so often the patriotic slogans. To establish the Chinese proper system of theology is reasonable and amazing but we must avoid excluding the universal value and catholic faith of the Christianity which surpasses the nationalist interest and value.

The second trouble is the pietism with the Donatist tendency. This position refuses the necessity of the norms of the faith by the rules and denies the usage and importance of the doctrines and dogmas even the three creeds of the historical Church. It emphases only the holy life of the individuals, and seeks permanently for the inner purity of the closed Christian community. The communication and dialogues among the civil society is very necessary for the theological awakens of the China in the temporal world.

The third trouble lies in the charismatic movements or the pentacotist mass movements without any restriction of the law and gospel.

A word, the common points of these three troubles is the ignorance of the importance of the rule of the faith or the grammar of the faith for the Church. At the end, it could prove the urgent necessity of the theological education for the Church in China!

3.2. The demarches to realize the solutions

A. We have correctly set up the ideas of the theological education in Nanjing Union

Theological Seminary since 1999: to interpret the signification of the heritages of the patristic fathers; to introduce the meanings of the historic Church in order to prepare the ecumenical aim; to stress the necessity three creeds for the Church in China although they were written outside China by the western fathers at the ancient time; to explain the extreme importance of the legacy of the Reformation as the identity of the Protestantism over the world to decrease the negative impact from the narrow nationalism; to establish the ecumenical and catholic mind among the seminarists who are future pastors and leaders of the parishes and the churches in China etc.

B. We have renewed the curriculum:

The European curriculum, especially that of the university in Switzerland and Germany has been transplanted into Nanjing Union Theological Seminary since 1999 with the precondition to remain some special courses requires by the Church and the society, such as the modern history of China, the Morality and Duty of the citizens, the basic knowledge of the laws, the study of the Three-self and patriotic principles etc.

The six kinds of the obligated courses and the auxiliary course compose the curriculum of NJUTS today since 1999:

- 1) the biblical languages: Basic Hebrew of OT; Basic Greek of NT; Basic Latin for the patriology since 2003 by Prof. Rev. Dr. Miikka Ruokanen from Helsinki University.
- 2) OT.: Exegeses and Theology of OT besides the interpretations of each book of OT;
- 3) NT.: Exegeses and Theology of NT besides the interpretations of each book of NT;
- 4) Systematic Theology: Introduction; Dogmatics and Ethics; Dogmatic theology of Luther and Calvin;
- 5) Historic Theology: History of Christianity, History of the Christian Thoughts, Patristic studies; Theology of the Reformation etc. History of the Chinese Church etc.
- 6) Practical Theology: Christian Pedagogy; Liturgical studies (Worship; Sacred Music); Preach; Diaconia; and Psychology (Canceling of soul) and the theories of ministry etc.
- 7) Auxiliary course: a. Confucianism; b. Taoism; c. Chinese classic philosophy; d. Chinese classic literature; e. Western philosophy; f. German Classic philosophy; g. Introduction of Sociology; h. Introduction of Psychology; i. Introduction of the Law etc.

The advantage of the initiative regarding the Swiss in the history of the Christianity in China is to show quickly the requirements to improve the academic quality of the teachers and the students instead of the pietistic standards before. That is the following step: The continue formation to train the pastors and teachers.

C. The continue formation of the faculty and senior pastors in NJTS.

- a) The project to train the faculty members of NJUTS: Through the channels such as Bossey Institution of WCC/ COE, SEk(FEPS) Switeralnd, EKD/EMW/EED of Germany, FTE of USA, the Church of England, the Church of Finland etc., Seminaries in Hong Kong, Singapore etc., so many teachers of NJUTS have been trained systematically during the certain semesters or years. The quality of the teaching and of the research has been much improved. The programs of the Bachelor's degree and Master's degree in NJUTS are continuing very positively and constructively for serving the growing Church in China now.
- b) The project of the ministry training in NJUST: Since 2003, NJUTS opened the courses of ministry for the pastoral training. The students come from the senior pastors with the responsibility of the provincial Church. The courses have been designed in terms of the practical pastoral fields. The program is part-time during two years for thirty students. They gather together three times for listening to the lectures per years, each time for four weeks.

4. Conclusion:

To reconstruct the Church must be based on the construction of the theological ideas. The Church is growing up so rapidly in China, but the quality is worried while we observe the parishes and communicate with the believers. The fundamental ideas in the following will be composed as the red line throughout the whole theological research and academic consideration, on which the theological education could be normally explored: a. the academic studies of the Scripture; b. the heritages of the patristic Fathers; c. the principles of the Reformation; d. the open minds towards the knowledge of the human beings including the Chinese classical thoughts.

The three issues will be relative directly to the theological education with the ecclesiastical forms: a. the issue of the Law-Gospel; b. the issue of the Christology, esp. the doctrine of the Incarnation; c. the issue of the ecclesiology. To deal with these problems, it is very necessary to stress the ecclesial as the nature of the concerns and the considerations. Only in this direction, the reconstructing churches is possible through reconstructing the theological education, which has been testified by the practical initiatives of John Calvin at the time of the reformation in Geneva and the others reformers in the later centuries in the world.