

Bishop Ding Guangxun's Theological Re-construction

(An abstract)

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Bishop Ding Guangxun (丁光訓) may be reckoned the most important Christian leader in China after 1949. He also holds important positions in the Chinese government. In his early writings in the 1950's, he already showed interests in political movements. Entering into the 1980's, he expressed a deep concern for the re-building of the Chinese churches, which had barely survived the Cultural Revolution. Subsequently, in the 80's and 90's, a trace of a conservative perspective emerged in Bishop Ding's theology. However, at the end of the century, when he led the church in a reconstruction of Chinese theology, he proposed that theology should reconcile with socialism. The main feature of this reconstructed theology is that it stresses reliance on God's love for salvation rather than on the justification by faith. In his interpretation of the parable of "the sheep and the goats" (Matt. 25:31–46), Bishop Ding concludes that only those who perform good work can have eternal life, and exemplary members of the Communist Party are such people. Another issue of his theology is the idea of "Universal Christ," meaning that Christ's salvation takes effect not only for a particular believer group but for the universal all. By asserting such a concept of universal

salvation and love, the Christian faith and its core value can be applied to all people in socialist China.

Bishop Ding understands that most people in China are atheists, and he believes that religion and socialism must accommodate each other mutually, in order that the Church may exist well in this country. For this, Bishop Ding shifts the focus of his theology from justification by faith to the ethical teachings in the Bible, stressing moral education as the supreme. This focus, however, is hardly in accord with that which is held by the majority of Christians in the mainland. Even leaders of the official TSPM/CCC churches do not all agree to it, not to say those of the house churches. In fact, most Christians in China hold a fundamental and conservative theology that comes primarily from the Reformation. Their views should be taken into account in any major theological re-construction done on the soil of China. Bishop Ding's work is well attempted, nevertheless, in reconciling Christianity with the atheistic ideology of communism, for the purpose of maintaining for it a good relationship with the national government.