

On the Succession of and Innovations in Traditions: With the Wenzhou Churches as an Example

(An abstract)

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Traditions are pointers when we come to study history and discuss contemporary situations, and they help us detect the work of God in history. There are two approaches to find out how traditions evolve. One is to trace the origin through transmission history, and the other is to ask about how corporate behavior has come about, behavior as manifested in the cultural systems of rituals, customs, and alike. With these on hand, the author of this article looks into the situation of the Wenzhou churches in China. He begins with the interaction between Protestant churches and local traditions, which finds expression in regional affairs and evolving cultural features ever since Christianity was brought into the area. He then analyzes the inheritance and transformation of Christian traditions in China with a special reference to the situation in Wenzhou. Finally, in response to the question of how one should look at these traditions, which is currently a hot topic in China among circles concerned, the author brings forth his three viewpoints:

(1) The Wenzhou church tradition at present is a shared tradition with other local churches, with some features of its own. The tradition came about through three common traditions: evangelistic fruits of missionaries from

evangelical denominations, perennial immersion of Chinese people in traditional Confusionism, and survival of the church from three major traumas in recent history.

(2) As to the roots and resources of traditions, the church is built on the foundation laid by the prophets and the apostles. She must have her traditions formed within the tradition of the Bible. Traditions developed outside the Bible are but traditions of heresies. At the same time, the church needs to accept contemporary values as a resource for her in the pursuit of renewal. Instead of clinging tenaciously to the past, she should revitalize her traditions from time to time by integrating faith with practicality.

(3) The inheritance and transmission of traditions must take place on the ground of their primeval tradition. A break with the old makes way for the new to come. However, one may easily fall away in doing so. So we must take caution against forsaking traditional forms too hastily just to comply with present-day exigencies.