

Searching for the Boundary between State and Church in the East

Original article: [在东方，探求国家与教会的边界](#), on [ChurchChina](#)

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I. The Question of the Boundary between the Chinese Church and State

China today faces a question, that is, the question of the boundary between church and state. Our practice and our holding fast in this current age will have lasting influence.

Over 60 years ago, the forefathers of the Chinese house church, peers of Mister Wang Mingdao, preserved the truth and held fast to the true faith, even in the face of political remaking of religion. Today, we face a new situation, and our faithfulness to the true church will be determined by how we hold firm.

In current democracies, the principle of separation of church and state (now often “division of church and state”) is commonly recognized. The responsibilities of the government, and the existence, identity, rights, and responsibilities of religious bodies are clearly defined. But in China, to use the terminology of official academics, it has historically been a case of “government leads, religion follows;” or to use the words of popular scholars, we are “authoritarianists.” The government guides all aspects of societal life. In principle, it would not allow any social community or religious body—especially not a religious body demanding a high degree of commitment—to be independent from government control.

We are also a society focused on ideology, and on principle we would not allow a religious faith that could influence the lives of many people. The “five enters and five localizations,” (*wujin wuhua*) or the “Sinicization of Christianity” of recent years are attempts to ideologize religious faith, and so soften the government’s current worries concerning the Christian faith.

But the Christian faith pursues purity of doctrine and purity of the church. And therefore the house church that holds fast to the truth will not be politicized, will not allow doctrine to be remade by ideologies, and will not accept “government leads, religion follows” in church administration. From the perspective of political administration, this is the root of long-term tension between church and state.

For the past 40 years, the government has shifted towards leniency in their control of society, and there has been a trend of weakening ideology. But now the pendulum has swung back. The new “Regulations on Religious Affairs” is simply the product of this political pendulum. And so, the church cannot avoid having to face ideological pressures. Article 35 of the new “Regulations on Religious Affairs” seems to offer a break, so that religion outside the system can register as “temporary venues of activity.”

But rules were later released concerning application for temporary venues of gathering, and stated that temporary venues of activity must remain under the guidance of “religious bodies.” This means that if a house church were to apply to be a temporary venue of activity, they must accept the guidance of the Three-Self Church.

As this regulation seems to erase any space for the existence of unregistered churches, the church is nakedly displayed in the public sphere. Therefore, when we face the government, there is really only one posture we can take: the posture of carrying a cross. If we say that the church forefathers in the Fifties mostly carried their own individual crosses, then this time it is the church as a community carrying its cross. In the East, we need an ecclesiology defined by theology of the cross, so as to face the tensions between church and state over the next 10, or even 50 years.

II. Learning from History How the Church Might Exist Today

We can expand the title of this section thus: Learning from history how the church of the covenant of grace can exist in this age of Noahic covenant.

The principle in the West of separation of church and state can be traced from the unified Christian church-state system under the Millennial Holy Roman Empire, to the Reformation, to the Puritan movement and migration to the New World. These combined with the influence of secularization, caused the separation of church and state.

After the Reformation, church and state were actually still unified in Germany. As for Calvin’s experimentation in Geneva, it was carried out in an entirely Christianized society. A recognition of Christ was commonly acknowledged in this society, and so the theories of church and state by Calvin and other reformers were in a context very different from China. Nonetheless, Calvin laid foundations for the basic principles of separation of church and state. For example, the church—not the senate—had authority to stop someone who acted immorally from taking communion. Up until the time of the Puritans, they still faced a Christianized nation, where the English King was declared to be the supreme leader of the church on earth. In the beginning, Puritans sought purity in terms of church doctrine, administration, and ritual. But towards the end, some Puritans began asking, what right did the secular English King have to run the church in England, deciding church doctrine or ritual? Therefore, some people started moving toward separatism. It was not until the 1649 revolution in England, and the Puritan pioneers in America, that the principle of church and state was clearly established.

As for China, we face a thousand years of authoritarian tradition in the East, and only 200 years of history of a small and weak church. The church must have a clear understanding and discernment concerning the long-term nature, the difficulty, and the tension of a transformation to “separation of church and state.”

I agree with the principle of separation of church and state. However, this is simply a concept. It is not sufficient in helping us face complicated church-state relationships. We must carefully, diligently study the Bible. How is the church to exist in this world? This touches on the relationship between the Noahic covenant and the covenant of grace.

In this world, whatever governmental system we have—whether monarchy, constitutional monarchy, dictatorship, republic, or democracy—it is all a product of the Noahic covenant, and is one of the governmental systems God has established for the world.

The church is an heir to the covenant of grace and is a gospel community. The church is a gathering of people called and chosen out of the world by God's gospel. This community holds as their highest belief an acknowledgement of the gospel, declaring to the world that Jesus is God's son, declaring his death and resurrection, and declaring his return and judgement. This community has a responsibility to submit to the government God has established for them through the Noahic covenant, whatever system that government may be. But this community refuses any changes to their beliefs imposed by ideology. This is an apolitical and non-ideologized community.

As for the relationship between the Noahic covenant and the covenant of grace, we can say that God has laid the foundation within the Noahic covenant for our generation through all generations. And so, God will always leave within the Noahic covenant room for existence for the community of the covenant of grace—that is, the church. In other words, within the Noahic covenant, God has prepared room for the Abrahamic covenant.

For example, during Luther's Reformation, the pope held complete political and religious authority in Europe, and Luther may have been burned at the stake at any moment. But in Luther's late medieval Europe, he could complain through the medieval synod tradition. Through the pope, Luther can complain to the synod, and he could be protected by his own religious order because of the system of religious orders. According to medieval tradition, he could also debate at Leipzig. What ultimately played a decisive role was the electoral system in the Holy Roman Empire, and the protection of political figure Elector Frederick. This provided the historical necessities for Luther's Reformation to happen. This displays how space is made within the Noahic covenant for the covenant of grace.

We might say that the eastern political system completely lacks the traditions faced by Luther in late-medieval Europe. The eastern political authority has always controlled everything. Chinese people either sit high in the court, or retreat into exile.

With this understanding, we cannot neglect or take lightly the historical experience of the Chinese house church. When they were faced with the severe political cleansing of

the Fifties, they retreated into the home. The home is the final bastion for the gospelization of China under God's Noahic covenant.

III. The Nature of the Church and the Eschatological Kingship of Christ

In our country today, the boundary between church and state has never been clearly defined.

Therefore, the state's tolerance of the church is the tolerance a court shows to outlaws. The existence of the house church in China has never received any legal recognition. However, the church of Jesus Christ is established by God, is a holy nation, is the body of Jesus Christ, and so her existence has a natural legality. The legality of her existence is greater than any law on earth.

We need a clear understanding regarding the nature of the church, so that when we face the government, we know what we must hold fast to, and what we can tolerate or compromise on.

1. A couple core themes of the church

In the Bible's definitions of the church, there are a couple points that grab our attention:

1) The church is the body of Christ

This is the description in Ephesians:

“. . . That he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:20-23)

Jesus' fleshly body has already experienced the suffering of the cross and the resurrection from the dead, and has been transformed into a spiritual body and ascended into heaven.

And yet, Jesus still calls the church on earth his body, because the church on earth is intimately connected with Him. After Jesus' ascension, he sent the Holy Spirit to live in the church, and Jesus' words are with the church. Jesus' unfinished will—that the gospel is spread all over the world—will be accomplished through the church on earth.

Therefore, the church on earth must have Christ as their ruler in heaven. The Bible also says that Jesus Christ has become ruler of all things for the sake of the church on earth.

Ephesians also says:

“For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” (Ephesians 5:23-24)

Therefore, the church has responsibility on this earth to recognize Jesus as their highest ruler and to resist all evil acts attempting to invade or tarnish the church of Christ, and so display the church’s faithfulness to Christ. As the older house church preachers, Yuan Xiangchen for example, emphasized, “the church is Christ’s bride,” and this bride will not be tarnished.

2) The church is Christ’s kingdom

From many passages in the Gospels, we can tell that the kingdom of heaven points to the gathering of God’s people—the church.

“And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’” (Matthew 16:17-19)

Here the church is closely tied with the kingdom of heaven. The historic church is a gathering on earth, but the church also points to the eschatological, heavenly, imperishable kingdom.

And Jesus also said, “The kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” This means that the church, as a historic gathering of God’s elect, is a manifestation on earth of God’s kingdom. Therefore, the church is Jesus’ kingdom on earth. This kingdom will last throughout eternity. And when Christ comes again in the end times, at the wedding banquet of the lamb, the church will enter complete glory as His bride.

Therefore, Jesus is the king of the church. When faced with Pilate, the Roman governor:

“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.’ Then Pilate said to him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.’” (John 18:36-37)

Here, Jesus clearly declared that he has a kingdom, and that his servants—including the apostles and those who follow the apostles—all belong to this kingdom. The kingdom is in this world, but does not belong to this world. That is because the king of this kingdom entered this world through the Word becoming flesh. And through his death and resurrection, he has surpassed this world.

3) The New Testament church is an eschatological existence

Between the first coming of Christ and his second return, the church exists in tension: the church still exists in this age, but belongs to heaven. It waits for Christ's final return, so that he may take her into eternal glory.

With this perspective, the church is a heavenly kingdom, a spiritual kingdom, and Christ is the only head of the church. The church has been entrusted with the responsibility of the gospel, and entrusted with shepherding people's souls with the gospel. As for the government, it has been appointed by God to take charge of political authority in this age.

According to Paul's eschatology, the kingdom of this age is the world. It belongs to the earth, is temporary, and is stained by sin. As for the coming age, it belongs to heaven, is spiritual, is eternal, is holy. But, after Jesus died and was resurrected, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the eschaton has already arrived in a spiritual, inner sense. The coming age overlaps with the current age, which has not passed away yet. In his book *Pauline Eschatology*, Geerhardus Vos says, "The coming age is within the current age. It does not overturn the current age through shock therapy, but slowly nudges it towards the end."

Because of the overlapped eras of the spiritual kingdom and the earthly kingdom, when we look at the two kingdoms from an eschatological perspective, it is a 3-dimensional division:

The church lives in this tension between two ages, so we need to define what aspects of church life belong to the earth, and what aspects belong to heaven. Things belonging to the earth are not absolute, but can be relative. But things belonging to heaven are absolute, and we must hold true to this without yielding.

4) Suffering is the characteristic of an eschatological church on earth

In terms of suffering, the church is the body of Christ on earth. This is precisely Paul's perspective in Colossians 1. After describing the exalted, universal aspect of Christology in 1:15-18, Paul turns to describing the salvation through Christ in verses 18-19, and concerning the final glory, he describes how Christ causes all things to be ultimately reconciled to himself, therefore, "through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." I lean towards

understanding this passage as referring to the current progressing universal peace that will only be finally realized when Christ returns. That's when Christ will finally realize his universal kingship.

However, what catches our attention is that after this, Paul immediately offers an ecclesiology of suffering:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. (Colossians 1:24)

Even though the head of the church, Christ, is already glorified in heaven, the church continues here on earth, and continues to bear an unfinished suffering. The church's suffering and humility today is complete when joined with Christ's historic suffering and humility. This completeness of suffering was shown when Jesus told his disciples over and over again, "take up your cross and follow me" as he prophesied his own suffering and resurrection.

There are many passages in the New Testament that prove the church is the kingdom of Christ, and also make clear the church's eschatological suffering. For example, 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." This points out that the church shares the same dignity as Christ, who has been risen to a king. But following this, the end of chapter 2 and through chapter 3 point out, that this holy nation comprised of royal priests will enter this current age, face the authorities, and must in all ways submit and suffer.

Likewise, the book of Revelation makes clear that Christ has been raised up, and the church will share in his glory:

"[Grace to you and peace] from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:5-6)

In this eschatological hope, the church is a partner in Jesus' glory through sharing in Jesus' suffering and patience in this life:

"I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 1:9)

2. Summary: Where is Christ's kingship manifest?

The church has its dimensions on earth—therefore, the shape and form of the church’s gathering, and even to some extent the administrative arrangements in terms of governance, will be constrained by the environment the church is in, and will be affected by the Noahic covenant. These are the areas that can be ordered by “the light of nature, and Christian prudence” according to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6).

But the nature of the church is spiritual, heavenly. And so any area within the church that is heavenly in nature—such as the pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, exercise of church discipline, church worship, fellowship of the saints, the Great Commission—must be kept absolutely free and pure, not controlled by any earthly authority. These are the very areas that display Christ’s kingship over the church today; and it is holding fast to this heavenly nature that displays the church’s faithfulness to Christ’s kingship.

Christ’s kingship will only be manifest as an outer, realized glory when he comes again. Before then, it is because of the coming of the Holy Spirit that he has spiritual kingship. The apostles looked forward to realization of Israel’s revival, but Jesus reoriented their hope in Acts 1, and pointed them to the coming of the Holy Spirit and global missions.

Of the six points I mentioned above concerning Christ’s kingship, pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, and exercise of church discipline (governance) are three marks of the true church as advocated by the Reformation. Worship, fellowship of the saints, and the Great Commission are three functions of the church (also referred to as three goals. Some people think of this as marks of a church as well). Because these six points relate to the core of Christ’s kingship in the church, we can say that the church truly glorifies Christ as king by holding true to these six points.

To discuss further the six points of Christ’s kingship:

1) The church’s pure preaching of the gospel cannot be restricted by [government] administration. Earthly authorities cannot interfere with or constrain the gospel declaration of the sin of mankind, Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, return, and judgement. As Christians ethics, this should be taught only according to the Bible. The ideologies and moralizing of this age should not appear at the church pulpit. The church should not support any particular ideology. And the church should reject being ideologized.

2) In Geneva and the early period of the New World, a person’s baptism and communion were related to his citizenship, so at that time sacraments were influenced by political factors. However, the church today no longer has the problem of communion relating to citizen rights, so communion being polluted by politics is a relatively rare occurrence.

3) In terms of church governance, pastors, elders and deacons should be appointed by the Christian community in accordance to their understanding of the Bible. No political powers outside the Christian community should be allowed to meddle. The church should also act according to the Bible in deciding whether or not a believer should receive church discipline.

4) There might be an infiltration of ideological content in church worship, or interference from secular authorities—for example, demanding churches to put up images of leaders or teach political values. To violate pure worship is to offend the spiritual kingship of Jesus Christ.

5) As for the fellowship of the saints, the church of Christ is called together according to the Bible and by God's authority alone. Once gathered, they cannot be banned by any political factor, and should not be forced to share fellowship with any other group that does not act according to the Bible.

6) Likewise, the Great Commission may face inappropriate restraints. Christ's commandment was that the gospel be declared to all peoples and all nations. The declaration of the gospel should not be restrained by a certain age, a certain place, a certain socio-economic class. Neither should people of any age, place, or class be considered outside the audience of the gospel.

The church's outward earthly form—such as the shape and form of gathering, and even to some extent the method of governance—would normally seek the most reasonable expression that reflects the church's nature, goals, and functions. But when pressed by the situation or state of affairs, whether or not a church holds to any particular form should be decided by each church according to their own conscience and liberty. But the reality of the six points listed above cannot be compromised. In holding fast to this reality, we necessarily have certain standards for the outward expression. Though changes are forced by our situations, we must hold fast to certain forms that expresses the real nature. In short, the church should be united to Christ's humility, on the one hand maintaining the church's spiritual bottom line, on the other hand submitting to authorities in power, suffering persecution and hardship in this age.

In the church's heavenly nature, the church is now united with Christ's exaltation. And Christ's kingship is expressed through the pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, exercise of church discipline, church worship, the fellowship of saints, and the Great Commission. The church is biblical when it holds fast to all these things in a completely pure manner, and experiences and awaits victory in faith and hope.

Looking at the boundary of church and state from this perspective, the church holds fast to its heavenly citizenship in a prominent manner, but holds fast to its outward rights in an inconspicuous manner.

IV. Looking at the Church-State Boundary Through the Gospels

From the perspective of the Gospels, should Christ's church humble itself and hide in history, just as Christ humbled himself and hid in history? Or should the church be bold in its confession, just as Jesus was bold in his confession before the Pharisees, the priests and Pilate?

In Christ's life and ministry, there were many times when he left and hid himself. First, this avoids unnecessary conflicts with authorities. Second, he was concerned about the unnatural passion of his followers. "Jesus was not showing off his power. Nor was he promoting a popularly hoped-for political or military movement to declare and establish justice. Because of the majority's misunderstanding of Messiah's identity, Jesus had to restrain the passions that would lead down false paths." [1]

1. Jesus' discussion of church and state in the Gospels

In his third discourse in the Gospel of Matthew, that is the discourse in chapter 13, he explained that in this world there was only one power from the kingdom of heaven, that is the power of the Word, the power of the effective calling of the gospel. "As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (Matthew 13:23). Because of this, the master of the kingdom of heaven allows the wheat and the weeds to grow together. He was not concerned with overturning the order of this world, but he hoped that while "both grow together," the power of the gospel that calls people to repent and believe will overturn Satan's dark order within people's hearts. This emphasizes a principle, that the gospel is the only principle in the relationship between the kingdom of heaven and this world.

As Jesus was going to the cross, he gave this famous discussion about the relationship of church and state:

"And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, 'Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?' But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.' And they brought one. And he said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.' Jesus said to them, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they marveled at him." (Mark 12:13-17)

"Whose likeness and inscription is this?" When we set our name and our inscription on a place, we declare that we are the master of that place. The silver coin had Caesar's

likeness and inscription, and so Caesar was the master of the money. Of course, he had the authority to demand taxes.

But this seems to imply something. Mankind carries God's likeness and God's name, and so God has natural authority over mankind's souls. When we worship in spirit, that part of us belongs only to God.

After Jesus affirmed this basic reality, he made an earth-shattering declaration: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." This declaration by Jesus is equivalent to saying, people can fulfill their duty to their earthly governments, but should also fulfill their duty to worship God, and in this worship hold fast to complete purity.

This declaration is a declaration from heaven, and laid the foundation for the church's status under various different political systems in all following generations. While the politics and nations on earth are constantly changing, the church can still remain independent.

First: Christians have the responsibility to fulfill their duty of basic submission to earthly governments, whether this government honors God, worships idols, or holds atheistic views. Because God is the ultimate authority, he can establish any kind of government.

Second: However, this submission is limited. It is merely limited to submission in terms of what belongs to Caesar. So, what belongs to Caesar? That is, all civil responsibilities and the appropriate political responsibilities of the individual citizen.

God's likeness and inscription is within mankind, and so people's souls belong only to God. As a community that worships God, the church's spiritual authority belongs solely to God. When the earthly Caesars invade the realm of God's authority, God's people must fight fiercely against it all, so that God receives the glory he deserves.

2. A glorified church or a humbled church?

From the Gospels we can reach this conclusion, that the gospel is the only factor in deciding the boundary between the church and the government. The gospel defines that we hold fast to the nature of faith. The gospel also defines that we imitate Jesus' patient humility, and at the same time imitate Jesus' uncompromising stance. This is the path of the cross that the gospel has defined.

However, the Gospels leave a question. The church is the body of Jesus, and her outer existence is in this world, but her inner existence holds a heavenly, spiritual identity. And so, can the church extend her inner heavenly identity—that is her identity that comes from union with the resurrected and exalted Jesus—can the church extend this

identity into her practice of faith? Can she demand to hold the same outward, visible authority held by the resurrected Jesus—the ability to be completely free from interference in her religious rights?

In contemporary China, as we handle China's church-state relationship according to the principle of church-state separation, I believe we need to be careful of the following two points:

Firstly, in the East we do not have the thousand years of Christian state tradition that the West has, nor do we have a constitutional framework. We face a situation where the state controls all social life. This situation is very similar to Daniel's situation in Babylon, and is also similar to the early church's situation in the Roman Empire.

More importantly, what theological premise is our principle of separation of church and state founded on? Do we pay sufficient attention to the eschatological nature of the situation in the New Testament?

If we do not clarify these points, we might emphasize the Lord Jesus Christ's absolute sovereignty over the church based on the principle of separation of church and state. We would then always emphasize the absolute sovereignty of the church—whether in pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, or areas of church governance—and we would absolutely refuse any secular interference. Then whatever political situation the church faces, it could always prominently emphasize its own religious rights. One possible result of such an ecclesiology is emphasis on the church's outward unity, and emphasis on freedom to practice religion. From this perspective, the church as God's kingdom is parallel to the governments as secular kingdoms.

I believe that we need a bottom line concerning our faith, and that is to distinguish between the above six points of Christ's sovereignty, and with the church's practice of faith. Rights relating to the practice of faith may be constrained by our world in some non-essential areas, but the nature of the faith cannot be restrained.

I admit that my research is lacking, especially relating to the Reformer's discussions about relationship of church and state, as well as their relationship with Christian states of the time. My research concerning the relationship between 500 years of the principle of church and state, and the historic constitutional movement are also lacking.

I worry that emphasizing the exaltation of Christ and making a direct connection between the exalted Christ's sovereignty and the current church's rights to faith—instead of making a direct connection with the nature of faith—is a theological crisis behind the current trends. If so, we neglect the church's current situation and Christ's eschatological sovereignty, and would result in practicing a glorified ecclesiology. What the results of such practice might be are not yet clear.

One more theme we must pay attention to is, under God's protection, what the interaction between God and his people looks like. The church-state relationship is one of the ways in which God actively interacts with his people. This method of interaction is very active and diverse, and is decided by whether or not God's people are acting within God's will. To churches, politics sometimes seems like persecution, sometimes like kindness, sometimes like oppression. God's will is sometimes to save, sometimes to discipline, and sometimes to refine.

Furthermore, from 1 Peter we can see that the public theology of God's people is often displayed as a passively suffering theology. When we are deprived of our religious rights, the most important public theology is that we follow in Jesus' footsteps. 1 Peter 2:23 says, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." When he was crucified on the cross, he willingly suffered, not attempting to argue what's right and wrong here on earth. Because we believe that God has his righteous judgements, we too should suffer willingly. The reason that some people can be at peace even though they are wronged—not seeking to avenge themselves or fight back—is because they believe that a higher power is watching, and that he will ultimately avenge. Through his hardship, Christ brings us salvation. And when we suffer, others will see from our life of doing good in suffering that we are followers of Christ. God will use this for salvation, and will also cause enemies to repent and be brought before God, reconciling with him.

V. Let the Cross Make Clear the Boundary Between Church and State

In this ancient kingdom in the East, the social changes that we face are a very long process. The encounter of the gospel and Eastern humanism is as remarkable an event as "the encounter of the gospel and Rome." Clearly, looking at the two kingdoms doctrine from an eschatological point of view will give us a perspective that transcends earthly systems, and so prepare the church well to survive and spread the gospel in the East for a long time to come.

According to the two kingdoms doctrine from an eschatological point of view, I am especially willing to explain as follows the New Testament discussion of "the church as Christ's body": Christ's body has been resurrected and exalted. However, while on this earth his body was crucified, cursed, and abandoned. The exalted Christ now sends down the Holy Spirit, so that the inner church has a heavenly status and identity. But the church remains on earth, so the church will not be unified with the exalted Christ in outward form. Nor will it be Christ's body by prominently emphasizing the church's outward religious rights. The outward church is united with Christ through humility in this age, and the inward church is united with Christ's resurrection and exaltation.

Under the premise of the two kingdoms doctrine as governed by eschatology, we as the church in this age need to be unified to Jesus' humiliation, hardships, and submission in our interactions with this earthly world. Therefore, we must strive to be submissive to

governments. But when political authorities cross over biblical boundaries—when the house church’s bottom lines are violated as explained above—we hold fast to “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

We can propose this view, that the church must remain absolutely pure in things that relate to its heavenly nature, that is in areas of pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, authority to govern, as well as pure worship, fellowship of the saints, and the Great Commission. In these things we must be absolutely loyal to Christ, and display the spiritual authority Jesus Christ holds over the church as king of the kingdom of heaven. In these areas, the church cannot allow governments of the world to interfere.

This affects the church’s stance: as God’s possession, the church governs Christians’ worship of God, and therefore the church’s authority belongs solely to God. The church should reject any authority of Caesar that meddles in the church’s spiritual affairs. But of course, the government has the authority to manage the church’s outward aspects, such as fire safety, disturbance of civilians, security issues, etc. That is Caesar’s authority, and the church should not neglect its responsibility in this area just because they belong to heaven.

When it touches on the specific practice of faith, such as the size of worship, or the outward form of worship—whether it is a public worship of the entire community, or whether it is dispersed worship of smaller scale—such areas are in the realm of freedom of conscience. Each church should act according to what they receive and what they discern based on their outward situations.

The church should remain absolutely pure in terms of spiritual faith. But in terms of religious rights, the church should remain unobtrusive and patient. Unified with the historic Christ who humbled himself, the church should be humble and suffering in this generation, bearing witness for the gospel. Only such a path is the true path of the cross of the Chinese church.

But I believe that under certain circumstances, such as when the biblical church is completely banned, it becomes difficult to distinguish between holding fast to religious rights and holding fast to the truth faith. Under the current Regulations on Religious Affairs, any large gathering is illegal, and gatherings in houses are also illegal. Therefore, I believe anyone who confesses the gospel today and holds fast to the true church, is my brother. Like us, they are suffering for the same Christ. Their defense of religious rights as well as their defense of the true faith and the true church, is worthy of our respect. Each person can act according to what they receive. They will one day answer to God for their acts before him.

However, whether the theological stance behind the actions of each church and each pastor is biblical, as well as the bottom line they hold fast to according to such an

understanding of the Bible, are most important questions. They relate to the church's welfare, and as we are called to shepherd the sheep and watch over the church, we must be careful. After all, our understanding may be erroneous, or our human desires may be present.

If we represent this with a drawing, under the premise of holding to the basic bottom line of house churches, the public strategy of churches might differ. Many churches might appear in the public space. Some might be in the middle. Some are utterly hidden. But all are connected to the same cross. The basic theme is, whether they are loyal to Christ the head of the church, and whether they are loyal to the witness of the cross.

In closing, I will quote an excerpt from my meditations during the spring:

The church is unified with the glorified Jesus through being unified with the suffering Jesus.

When our faith is condemned or banned, that is when the church's glory is manifest. This is where the confrontation of the authority of earthly kingdom and the authority of Christ's kingdom happens.

The shame on the people of Christ's kingdom is a kind of mark, showing that they belong to Christ. "That you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering." (2 Thessalonians 1:5)

When the church is banned or is illegal, the mark of the true church as displayed in this age is pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, and fellowship of the saints. This is Christ's witness to this age.

Through this witness, the church becomes naked in this age. It becomes people whom the world is not worthy of. Through exercising his spiritual authority against this world, Christ also displays his kingship in this world, so that the worldly authorities surrender before the authority of the gospel, so that the hard hearts of people are taken out, and the peace of the gospel is accomplished.

In facing the Eastern political system, the church faces the government with spiritual humility, submission, and heavenly persistence. In this tension the church carries the cross, spreading the gospel of peace. The church's mission is to spread the gospel of peace to those in power while carrying the cross. The church's hope is that the authority of the gospel casts out the hardness of heart of those in power. The church's suffering is the channel through which God sets in action the power of the gospel. Therefore, when Christ's church faces the government while holding fast to Christ's eschatological kingship, the church must bear its cross. The cross-bearing church is the body of Christ. And when it meets with politics in a gentle yet firm manner, that is when the boundaries of church and state in China slowly become clear.

[1] Notes on Matthew 12:15-21, *Chinese New Version Study Bible* (The Worldwide Bible Society), 1487.