

Our History

Our Origin and Development

The CCCOWE Movement and World Evangelization

— Thomas Wang

In church history, we see how God has raised up spiritual movements in different times and places. According to the unique context and needs, God used these movements to rally His people, the Church, and to bring the Gospel to the world in different ways.

CCCOWE is a spiritual movement that God has raised up in the 1970's in the Chinese Church, calling the Chinese churches worldwide to unite in spirit and in truth to proclaim the Gospel to the world until the Lord returns. CCCOWE is indeed a unique gift from God to the Chinese Church. She is the only movement in the world that is an organized ethnic movement with a network of communication and a vision for world evangelization. How can we not give thanks to God!

We who receives special grace from God must at the same time remember what Scripture teaches: "for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48). In light of God's special grace, the Chinese Church must make further efforts to the task of world evangelization.

The Spiritual Significance of the Chinese Church in Diaspora

The evangelical Gospel came to China only 182 years ago, but God has allowed her to be tested severely several times. The Boxer Uprising of 1900 saw western missionaries and Chinese Christians alike martyred. In 1937 the Sino-Japanese War broke out. Japan occupied the coastal provinces forcing thousands of Christians to move inland. China experienced another change of government in 1949, and thousands of Christians emigrated abroad.

As we look back on the first two trials, we know God had his special plan. The Boxer experience solidified the faith of the Chinese Church. The Sino-Japanese War forced Christians to give up the ease and comfort of life of the coastal cities, and to move to the hinterland where they established churches and spread the Gospel. What about the third trial? What is God going to accomplish through the Chinese Church?

Before 1950, there were very few overseas Chinese churches. But today they number at least 6,000. Take Hong Kong for example, the number of churches has increased from 110 in 1950 (see *Chinese Churches Handbook*, Gail Law, ed.), to over 800 in 1988. From statistics for North America compiled by Dr Wing-Ning Pang, we see that in 1955 there were only 66 Chinese churches in the United States and 22 in Canada; by 1988, there are more than 800 Chinese churches in North America. This is totally unprecedented growth!

God has dispersed the Chinese Church in over twenty countries. What is the meaning of this? Perhaps we can surmise God's will through the story of Joseph.

Joseph was sold to Egypt by his brothers, and then was maligned and ended up in jail. What a misfortune! Yet God was with him, and through interpreting Pharaoh's dreams he was elevated to be the Prime Minister of Egypt. He not only helped Egypt go through the famine years, but also spared his own father and family from starvation. Through a family tragedy, God foreordained Joseph to leave Canaan and go to Egypt to store up food for Israel.

It was indeed so, as Joseph said to his brothers upon their reunion: "Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 45: 5, 7-8)

God has placed Chinese churches in many countries around the world, not only that fellow overseas Chinese may come to Christ, but people in the host countries too may be led to a saving knowledge of our Lord--just like Joseph helped both the Egyptians and his own kinsmen. The

mutual responsibility of the overseas Chinese and the people in their host countries to serve God is something the overseas Chinese Church today must strive to assume and be committed to.

The Formation of the CCCOWE Movement

CCCOWE is not merely a spiritual movement. It is also a missionary movement; it is an indication of the response and action of the Chinese Church to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

Of course, the International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974 was a major impetus for the CCCOWE Movement; but in fact, the Asia and South Pacific Conference on Evangelism (1968), and the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Missions Conventions held at Urbana, Illinois (triennial) were also very important to the inducing of the CCCOWE Movement.

In "The CCCOWE Movement--Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," Rev. Samuel Tang said, "When we trace its origins, CCCOWE seemed to have begun at the North America Congress of Chinese Evangelicals (NACOCE); it was there that the blueprint was conceived. In 1974, during the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, NACOCE took the opportunity to galvanize the Chinese delegates from all over the world, and gave birth to the First Chinese Congress on World Evangelization in 1976." (*Chinese Churches Today, January 1984.*)

Brother Kim-Sai Tan, Sister Ee-Suen Wong and Brother Timothy Lam have all written on the origins of the CCCOWE Movement. They traced it back to the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. CCCOWE does have a missionary burden, and wants to have the Spirit of Edinburgh!

The accompanying chart is a synthesis of the analyses made by the three authors. We hope it will help our readers to understand the origin and development of CCCOWE.

The Value of the CCCOWE Movement

If we take the first CCOWE in 1976 as the starting point of the CCCOWE Movement, CCCOWE is twelve years old. As we look back, what contribution has CCCOWE made? As a former General Secretary, I dare not pass judgement. Let me quote Rev. Paul C. C. Szeto, "CCCOWE's message is like the waves of Yangtze River pounding against the slumbering Chinese churches of the 20th century. This message is full of beauty, freshness and energy." (Chinese Churches Today, February/March 1985.) May CCCOWE throw up even more waves in the coming days, and the ministry of the Chinese Church may "be renewed this very day, be renewed every day, and be renewed day after day" (*Commentary of Tsang, Da Xue [The Great Learning] of Liji [The Record of Rites]*).

1. CCCOWE is not a council of Chinese churches, but a spiritual vision.

In the past twelve years, the greatest accomplishment of CCCOWE was the establishment of a worldwide communication network among Chinese churches. This came through the efforts of our voluntary colleagues in each CCCOWE district committee. Without their involvement and their liaison with local churches, this network would only be an appellation without substance.

CCCOWE is not an ecclesiastical council; she has no membership. The CCCOWE Centre and the District Committees have no formal structural relationship other than a spiritual one--that of fellowship in the Body of Christ. What maintain this network is our heavenly calling and our common goal--world evangelization until the Lord returns.

Only with this kind of non-structured network can the CCCOWE vision function and spread.

2. CCCOWE is not a narcissistic (or self-congratulatory) club for Chinese Christians. She is a Kingdom movement which seeks to incarnate herself in the world.

We cannot deny that as Chinese Christians we share two things in common: spiritually we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, and brothers and sisters of each other; physically we are Chinese, kinsmen around the world. Our dual identity intensifies our awareness of "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1)

However, our Lord Jesus has "sent" us to the world. His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.... As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. '(John 17:15, 18)

CCCOWE's task is to encourage, support, and help churches and Christians to break through the four walls of the church, to enter the world and identify with the masses, and to witness to Jesus as the answer to all questions of life with a Kingdom Gospel and a Kingdom ethic. Whichever nation we live in, we have the responsibility to witness to Jesus Christ to our neighbors and our society. The task of the Chinese Church today is to be a spokesman for Jesus Christ in the world.

3. CCCOWE must not become static in isolation; she must seek continuous renewal and breakthrough.

CCCOWE is a breakthrough in the history of the Chinese Church. If this breakthrough becomes stagnant, is her existence still worthwhile? Church history is filled with examples of movements which have dissipated. By the grace of God, may CCCOWE not be satisfied with what we have accomplished. May God grant spiritual discernment so that CCCOWE may truly be a watchman who stands "at the gap."

God has been gracious to the Chinese Church in many ways. Chinese everywhere have established their families, and have acquired an unprecedented abundance of knowledge and wealth. The responsibility of the Chinese Church today is not only to her own clan and people; it is global. What we need most is not manpower and resources, but a transcending heart, a spirit of renewal and the flame of revival. May God make us recognize our own weaknesses and shortcomings, and we may constantly seek renewal and breakthrough.

In the Old Testament, Mordecai reminded Esther, "yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Can CCCOWE follow Mordecai, and remind the Chinese Church of her present position and opportunity --global citizens with the responsibility of world evangelization?

Should CCCOWE cease to "proclaim prophetic messages, and be the servant of the Church," it would become worthless.

4. CCCOWE does more than slogan-chanting; she engages in concrete actions.

The prophetic cry is one important link in the ministry of CCCOWE: standing at the cutting edge of our time, providing prophetic insight into the needs of the Church and the world today, and sounding out the prophetic cry through various media. This cry in the wilderness is a heart-felt appeal and exhortation; it also points to concrete paths for action. It is totally different from the ordinary cry of mere words.

For example, just take CCCOWE's motto, "May the Chinese churches worldwide unite in spirit and in truth to proclaim the Gospel to the world until the Lord returns." She is not chanting a slogan; there are concrete actions--establishing a communication network among Chinese churches around the world, promoting unity among Chinese churches, and providing the Chinese Church with evangelistic strategies through literature, conferences and research. All these assist the Chinese Church to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

5. CCCOWE is not ethnocentric; she seeks to assist the Chinese Church to adopt a proper worldview.

The ultimate purpose of CCCOWE is to unite the Chinese churches worldwide for world mission, to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom to every people and nation. A tremendous task awaits us! We must have goals and plans, so that we can blaze the trail step by step.

When Paul was sent to be an apostle to the Gentiles, although he began with Jerusalem, he knew that the final goal of the Gospel was "the ends of the earth." Not only so, it was "first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles." The Chinese Church should see mission in a similar way. Our sense of cultural solidarity is only our point of departure; it is only our beachhead. Our final mission field is the whole world. CCCOWE must stress the Heavenly Kingdom concept.

CCCOWE and the AD 2000 Movement

The Chinese Church has always been weak in long-term planning and concrete goal setting. Nonetheless, in the late 1970's the Lord laid this burden on many co-workers, and then CCCOWE began to work on a ten-year projection of the Chinese Church growth.

During the Second CCOWE in Singapore in 1981, God showed us the goals for the Chinese Church for the next decade or two. These would enable us to proceed in a systematic fashion towards world evangelization.

Let us review these goals and directions:

1976-1981: Renewal of Vision

Rekindle the vision of cooperation and evangelization.

1981-1986: Actualization of Vision

Stimulate efforts in joint ministry and evangelism.

1986-1991: Focussing on Growth

Quantitative and qualitative growth in the numbers of Christians, congregations and workers.

1991-1996: Evangelism to the Chinese

Evangelization of the Chinese worldwide.

1996-2001: World Evangelization

Cross-cultural evangelization of all nations and peoples.

What divine grace! Chinese churches can share a common direction and goal, our sights can be set beyond AD 2000, and we can proceed in our ministry of evangelization step by step. Yet, have we taken concrete actions according to these goals and directions? If not, goals are meaningless, and the vision can only remain in the stage of slogan-chanting.

In recent years, quite a number of churches and agencies, both in the West and in the Third World, have sensed the urgency of the task and launched various movements for world evangelization for AD 2000. Some movements are larger, others smaller; some focus on the people in their own locale, others are global in scope; some utilize the resources of one denomination or a single mission agency, others are joint efforts. We hope that by the grace of God, the Gospel will reach the whole world by AD 2000. This dovetails perfectly with the CCCOWE vision. We trust that this is not an accident, it comes from the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

According to a survey by David Barrett, author of the *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, there are presently about 230 plans for evangelization all aimed at AD 2000. Of these about one third are based in Third World countries. If all these movements can eliminate a turf mentality, and truly work together in cooperation, there is no doubt that the Gospel will reach the whole world by AD 2000. It can be done!

To this end, a group of coworkers from both East and West gathered in Singapore January 5-8, 1989 to share their vision and burden at the Global Consultation on World Evangelization by AD 2000 and Beyond. Through this opportunity for fellowship and mutual understanding, we have strengthened the cooperation and coordination between movements, and worked out ways to divide the task so that we can all work toward the same goal to fulfill the Great Commission of the Lord, bringing the Gospel to every people and nation.

It is most encouraging to hear that the churches in Hong Kong and Taiwan have responded to the AD 2000 Movement, and have developed their own evangelistic strategy. May Chinese churches in other regions respond as well, and set their goals and plans for the next twelve years to reach the Chinese and the non-Chinese peoples. May we all join in the mighty force for world mission!

The Chinese Church has grown into adulthood. She should no longer "speak like a child, think like a child and reason like a child." She must be of a new disposition instead--to take up the world as her concern, and to work with brothers and sisters from every people and nation for the evangelization of the world.

May God be gracious to the CCCOWE Movement and to the Chinese churches worldwide, so that we may fight the good battle and run the good race in this last age!

(Rev. Wang is the founding father of the CCCOWE Movement, and he served as the General Secretary of CCCOWE from 1976 to 1986. He is now the President of Great Commission Center International.)

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