

MY STRUGGLE AT UNIVERSITY (PART II)

By Pastor Yang Anxi

Edited & translated by Tony Lambert

We continue with the stirring story of the spiritual struggle of Pastor Yang Anxi, then a young student at Peking University in 1952. This period is little chronicled; however, it is vital background for understanding the present situation of the Chinese church. The campus Christian fellowship had been asked to sign the Party-backed Patriotic Covenant, but the fellowship felt, as a Christian body, this was a political act which they could not in conscience obey, although they were happy to sign as individuals. The struggle continues, in his own words:

“Other students and other bodies had signed, only the Gospel Fellowship had not signed. At first I had no idea what to do. The situation was very grave, because everybody in the meeting could turn round and see me in full view. They were investigating and studying this matter, and said many things that were critical of me. They had deliberately placed me there for everyone to stare at. Oh, how I sought God’s mercy! In this matter I felt I had the victory solely through the prayers of my brothers and sisters.

“In the Bible there is much teaching about individual believer’s relationship to the world. But the church itself is to be separate from the world. In the Book of Acts you cannot find anything to this effect [that the church should compromise with the world.] ‘As far as is possible live in peace with all men’: this is a general principle of our living in the world. But we felt this referred to personal conduct.



In the peculiar environment of the time we still held to having early morning and evening prayer meetings, and saying grace at meals, and when we went to the library we always read the Bible first for half an hour.

Many of God's servants took this view. All the brothers and sisters and preachers who were fundamentalists [jियाopai] ^[SEE NOTE 1] were of the same viewpoint. So were we.

"In 1949 I passed the entrance exam to Yanjing [now Peking] University and joined the Gospel fellowship on campus. This band of Christians was always spreading the Gospel on campus, so it was called the Gospel meeting. In the peculiar environment of the time [the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949] we still held to having early morning and evening prayer meetings, and saying grace at meals, and when we went to the library we always read the Bible first for half an hour. We had a radically different faith from the more than 200 students who were under the leadership of the Yanjing Theological Seminary, then still part of Yanjing University. Once a month we produced a Gospel broadsheet. It was posted up on the wall of the corridor at the entrance of the gate towers. [NOTE: So there was a tradition of wall-posters long before the Cultural Revolution!] Unexpectedly, one day in the autumn of 1951 some students from different faculties put up posters opposing our Gospel poster's statements. Because at that time Beijing was in the throes of the Land Reform campaign, they announced: 'The Gospel wall poster is reactionary.' The reason was because we preached the Gospel and said that all have sinned and need the precious blood of Jesus to wash away their sins, and can only then be forgiven and reconciled to God. They said this was reactionary. They quizzed us: Was it the landlords who were sinners or the peasants? As our poster said all have sinned, this was, they claimed, blurring the class divisions and hindering Land Reform. Thus, this was reactionary, and they called for a public debate

the following Wednesday to which all the student body was invited.

"As I was in charge of the fellowship, the university Students' Union sent a leader of the Yanjing Theological Seminary, a Mr Chen Zhinan, to present me a statement challenging me to a debate. Both Song Tianying and Song Tianzhen [daughters of the famous evangelist John Song] were then members of our fellowship. They were both very zealous, particularly Song Tianzhen, who prayed daily to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They often went to the Grace Seminary and the Spiritual Training Seminary to pray. They stayed there overnight on Saturdays and Sundays, only coming back on Mondays. So these sisters were the most close to the Lord in our fellowship at that time. There was also Sister Chen Baoen and Sister Ling Mingzhen who were full of love and like mothers to us students. So in our church we truly loved one another, and saw this as most important. Love covers a multitude of sins, thank God!

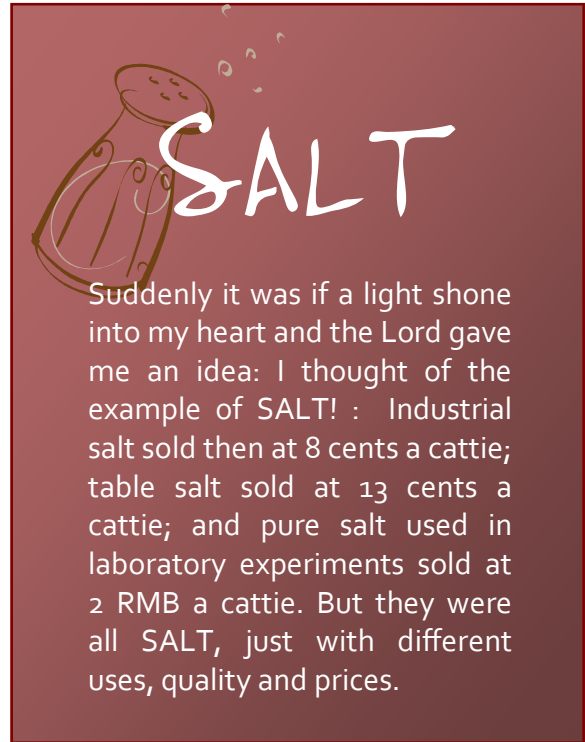
"On receiving this letter challenging us to a debate, I said to them: 'You go!' But they refused. Probably they had people fasting and praying for them, but they never said. All our members were greatly burdened, because our church had never preached a message like this [of liberal theology], and we had never before faced so great a challenge to our faith.

"If we refused to attend the debate, this was tantamount to admitting that our basic faith that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God', (Romans 3:23) and justification by faith (Rom. 3:27-28) were 'reactionary'. But if we lost the debate, this was tantamount to admitting before the entire faculty and all the students that not only our

Gospel wall poster but the Gospel of justification by faith itself was ‘reactionary’, and our basic Christian faith was also ‘reactionary’ [NOTE: then a very serious political crime.] Then it would be very problematic if our Gospel fellowship could continue to exist lawfully.

“Faced with this unavoidable challenge, all the Christians fervently sought the God of grace. I, especially, as I would represent all the brothers and sisters in the Fellowship in the debate with my fellow-students, felt a heavy responsibility. Every day I continuously sought God’s grace in prayer. At our morning and evening prayer meetings I asked for the others’ views, but right up until Friday nobody responded. So I had to tell them I would fast and pray. The brother in charge of our literature work also said he would fast and pray. But I had no light on the matter and everyone was in the same boat. On Saturday my prayers were even more urgent. I could only cry: ‘Lord, what shall I do?’ But I had no peace before the Lord and did not give the Lord time to reply as I was so overwrought. Then on Sunday morning I rose at 5 a.m. and went to the college chapel and opened myself up to the Lord in a way I never had before, praying that it was for God’s own glory and for the sake of the Gospel witness to a new generation. ‘Lord, today whatever happens please speak to me!’ My relationship to God was then not so deep, but I felt I had begun to get somewhere. I prayed until 10 o’clock. Suddenly it was if a light shone into my heart and the Lord gave me an idea: I thought of the example of SALT! : Industrial salt sold then at 8 cents a cattie; table salt sold at 13 cents a cattie; and pure salt used in laboratory experiments sold at 2 RMB a cattie. But they were all SALT, just with different uses, quality and prices.

“Similarly with the Christian doctrine [of SIN] : in land reform exploitation was the standard; the landlord was the exploiter and had sinned [or committed a crime], but the exploited peasant was without sin [by this standard]. We Christians not only did not oppose Land Reform, but we heartily supported it, because it was in line with the righteous demands of God. But the Gospel is about resolving the contradictions between man and God. We urge men to be reconciled (2 Cor. 5:18). It is sin which separates man from God. Sin here is judged from God’s standpoint: All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.



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“From this flows a terrible reality: no one would dare show their most secret thoughts as a film to everyone in public (as John Song’s eldest daughter used to say). We Christians are honest and would say in all conscience we dare not. But who among our fellow students would also dare? We believed not one, as the Scripture says men’s hearts from birth are only full of sin continually (Genesis 8:21) If our thoughts are full of things we dare not show other people, how would we dare stand before God? God searches men’s inmost thoughts. God is holy, righteous and jealous. The wages of sin are death. But in order to save mankind, God sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to be crucified. Without the precious blood of Jesus we cannot satisfy God’s demands, nor obtain eternal life. Today our Gospel wall-poster is proclaiming this Good News to everyone!

“I received all the above in my mind after much prayer, and handed it over as an answer to my fellow-students. I handed it to them on Monday morning, and the same afternoon I received notification that the debate was cancelled! They did not know how to reply. My heart was full of thanks to God for His grace.

“That evening the Gospel fellowship met and we were full of thanks to God. I felt moved to suggest my response should be pasted up as a wall-poster,

but some of the brothers and sisters were worried there would be further trouble. The majority felt we should let sleeping-dogs lie! Now when I recall this time I feel we should not be afraid. If God Himself has told you what to say, even if they still find fault, He will give you yet more things to say. We should trust God. But then I wrote no more. My faith was weak. I was no overcomer!”

NOTE 1: Pastor Yang uses the term ‘jiyaopai’, literally ‘fundamentalism’. Back in the 1930s to 1950s, Bible-believing Christians such as Pastor Yang, Wang Mingdao and Allen Yuan generally used this term to distinguish themselves from the liberals who denied Scripture and the basic tenet of the faith, such as the

divinity and resurrection of Christ, and the centrality of the atonement. It has an honorable history dating back to the publication of the ‘Fundamentals’ in the early 20th century in the United States, and the China Inland Mission, Inter-Varsity and other conservative missions & churches in China upheld the faith accepting the term. It has since become a label of abuse. Pastor Yang simply means ‘evangelical’ or ‘Bible-believing’, but I have kept the original word to be faithful to his own account. The Editor.

[The above article is translated from the Christian journal *Xing Hua* (Almond Flowers) produced in Beijing in the autumn of 2009.]
