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**Love is the Conclusion: An Interview with Rev Kwok Nai Wang on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of His Ordination**

Interviewers and Editors: Poon Lok Man, Mak Ming Yee

Translator: Connie Au

**Without Rev Kwok, the Hong Kong Christian Institute (HKCI) would not have existed. The HKCI was founded in June 1988, an epoch-making contribution in his pastoral life.**

**Rev Kwok was the founder and the first General Secretary of the HKCI. It seems to be a long time ago; however, as far as the staff, Managing Committee members of all terms, and members of the HKCI are concerned, he has never left the HKCI, not even for one day. We are privileged to know him and consider his comments on the incidents within and without the church still very weighty.**

**Rev Kwok’s pastoral life reached the fiftieth year in June. It goes without saying for a man of 77 years old the meaning of 50 years. Haven’t yet found a gratifying present for him, we decided to have an interview with him—to record his present and the significant moment in the last 50 years of his pastoral life. This article serves as a gift for him and we praise God for him. We know that he will definitely like it because words have never been separated from him.**

**The interview was taken place in his tranquil flat, from which we could view the mountainous scenery. Before we met him at 4pm, he had had an appointment with his doctor to collect medicine, ready for his trip with Mrs Kwok to visit their daughter’s family in the United States in the follow days.**

**The Recent Condition of His Illness**

We started the conversation by talking about his illness. Rev Kwok was diagnosed of lymphoma last May and has been treated for a year. How is his current condition?

*The haemoglobin has increased to 11.9 while the normal rate should be 13-17. It once reached 12 in recent years, so this reading is relatively high. It even dropped to 9 at one time and I needed blood transfer to cope with it. The high level of cold agglutinin has been my fundamental problem. It is an antibody in the blood. For normal people, the rate should be between 0 to 40. In my condition, it has decreased recently but is still close to 24,000, which is still extremely high. Since the cold agglutinin attacks the erythrocyte, which is produced by marrow, I have got lymphoma. Now the cancer has been under control after injecting eight targeted therapy drugs, but the cold agglutinin remains a long-term problem. My doctor recommends chemotherapy, but after repetitive discussion with my wife, we declined it due to the vigorous side-effects. If I am to do it, it would start eight months later—after being infilled with happiness (Editors’ note: Rev Kwok is going to visit his grand-daughter, who makes Rev and Mrs Kwok overwhelmingly happy).*

*I am very thankful. This disease is absolutely not easy, but not too harsh. I have had the appetite and have slept tight since last year. I still go swimming every day, which I have been doing for 30 years. I guess because of my stamina, I can cope with the treatment. Every time after I finished the targeted therapy, the doctor asked me if I felt unwell and I said no. I always say that it was too late for me to learn to swim at 47 years old, so I encourage my peers and the younger generation to do it; but none of them kept it up. The best one only kept it for one year. Anyway, good health is the most important and I am thankful.*

**Retirement**

Rev Kwok has been retired for 17 years, but for him retirement is not equivalent to dropping off pastoral work; quite the opposite, he has been doing more.

*During my retirement, I taught at the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) for 15 years. I conducted one course for one term; if there is a short of teacher for the evening courses, I do the teaching as well. I taught five courses altogether. Other ministry…I definitely do not accept preaching invitation except special cases. Christians’ faith is very shallow and narrow, which is of course a pastoral problem. I reckon that there are many pastoral methods, but the most important event is Sunday service because it is almost the only chance to see the entire congregation. Unfortunately, nowadays Sunday services cannot help church members as the liturgy cannot reveal the real God—the Trinitarian God who works in history. Therefore, I have been focusing on services and liturgy in the last years.*

*It is meaningless to say ‘concern’, isn’t it? Therefore, I volunteered to be the pastor for the Kowloon Union Church for a period of time. 30 months later I worked in Taipo Kwong Fuk Church, then Kwai Chung Chuen Yuen Church, Shing Kwong Church, Kei Wan Church; now I work in Tsing Yi Chuen Yuen Church. It has been difficult to introduce a liturgy which can truly reveal God. I also have to demonstrate it myself and to do evaluation with others. It is tiring.*

*Another work that I did after my retirement was to pastor the pastors of the Church of Christ of China’s Council in cell groups. Around eight to ten people were in one group and we had seven groups at the most. I worked very hard to prepare for each meeting, so it took me quite a lot of energy.*

*What makes me most satisfied is the companion of the church musicians for three years; now is the fourth year. We have excellent fellowship together. They are more apprehensive than ordinary pastors, perhaps it is because they do not have their burden.*

*Besides these pastoral works, I conducted short-term courses and intensive workshops in Myanmar, Chiang Mai, the Philippines, etc.*

*Therefore, many things have been keeping me busy, but the most important thing is to see my grand-daughter twice a year, which is the happiest thing to do, but seeing pastors is the unhappiest thing.*

**Pastoring Pastors: The Biggest Discouragement**

Concerning this matter, we were wondering if we should ‘self-censor’, but Rev Kwok discerned our worry and said,

*You can write it; it is an open secret. I can start the conversation with the LTS. Many years ago I travelled on a school bus to get there. I heard students discussing the exam questions of the Book of Revelation. I said to myself, ‘What is the difference from the subject of the Sunday School?’ I adhere that theological education is to teach students how to learn, rather than the books. The knowledge in the books can easily be found on the internet, so there is no need to teach it. But it should be about teaching the future pastors how to learn—to think and to read. However, it is even more difficult to build up one’s character. Nowadays the greatest failure of our pastors is a lack of character; they have been swallowed up by the secular society. The most important thing is how the pastors perceive pastoral work. Pastoral work means ministering God’s word. ‘Minister’ means to serve, applying God’s word to minister to people, in Sunday services, liturgy and sermons. Unfortunately, they have done poorly in all of these areas. The task that they have proved themselves most capable of is being an affairs manager—to deal with trivial matters. Actually it is not the first time that I talk about it.*

That’s true. The majority cannot get out of the impasse.

*In fact, the students agreed with my criticism; their assignments were well-done. But when they work in the church, they forget about everything. The greatest problem is that they cannot stand up to be an example for others. If the director of a seminary cannot stand up for some issues but is ambiguous, how can the students learn from you? Haven’t they learnt ambiguity? Unfortunately, being ambiguous is the general trend.*

*I believe that pastors should be Moses, not Arran. Arran prioritises public opinion. When people want to worship the gold calf, he permits; but Moses leads the people to be transcended in God’s presence*.

Rev Kwok is a fruitful author, who has written countless articles and books in the last 50 years. After sorting them out in recent years, those worth preserving is as long as 15 feet when putting them all together! These include books, periodicals, interview, commentaries, etc. They will be given to the Hong Kong Baptist University for reservation and public use.

*Unfortunately, the effort I paid for the pastors and ministers of the CCC and the 15 years of teaching at the LTS have become rubbish, ready for paper recycle. I admit my failure. They cannot override their limitations. I feel powerless. I can’t help them at all.*

Pages of pages of handouts for pastoring seminarians and pastors in 15 years have become rough paper. As Rev Kwok pointed to his desk, we felt the pain and sorrow. To change the sad atmosphere, we switched the subject to the hot issues within and without the church and invited Rev Kwok to respond.

**On the Withdrawal of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui from the Divinity School of Chung Chi College**

Rev Kwok had a close relationship with the Divinity School. His comment is definitely not ‘gossip’.

*I began to teach in the Theology Division from the academic year of 1966-1967 to 1973 (Editors’ note: the former establishment of the Divinity School). Afterwards, I represented the CCC’s Council to be in the board. During the time of Bishop Kwong Kwong Kit, the SKH neither financially support the Theology Division nor sending seminarians to study. Those who graduated from the Theology Division, e.g. Ng Wai Tat, Lau Tze Yui, only had the chance to be ordained after Bishop Kwong was retired. So you can have an idea of their relationship.*

*The withdrawal did not cause the Divinity School any loss. Quite the opposite, considering that the SKH chose to withdraw in such sensitive time; the official initiated to release the news to the media; disagreed with the Director of the Divinity School condemning the abuse of power of the police force; the Divinity School supported the student, Lam Shuen Hin, the motivation was crystal clear.*

*If I were Director Ying Fuk Tsang, I would have also done the same for two reasons. First, since God is just, we need to be responsible for the God of justice instead of the political power. Second, the Director has to care for students.*

Regarding being responsible for the political power, it is natural to connect with different sectors in Hong Kong leaning against the Communists. Rev Kwong thinks that the Chinese Communists have successfully united the front in Hong Kong.

*Finance, accountancy, religion, academia, media, jurisdiction and other crucial sectors in Hong Kong have been ‘united front’. Hong Kong will fall in less than five years.*

Rev Kwok has observed a number of people surrendering to the political power and enjoying the honour of having connection with it. In the Protestant circle, the similar example is the ten seats of the Election Committee for the Selection of the Chief Executive for Christianity. It has been controversial on whether Christians should renounce or participate in it. What is Rev Kwok’s position? It is very clear!

**Rejection of the Church Insisting to Participate in the Coterie Election**

*From the beginning till the end, I am opposed to Christian churches participating in the Election Committee. Christianity must not be a political functional constituency; rather, it should transcend it. Why should we play this game? If somebody thinks that Christians should enter into the political system to change its ecology, I can only say that this thought is too naïve as far as the Communists are concerned. Let say, if you are able to find ten strong persons, they cannot function within it at all, because the Communist Party controls the entire event. They must know the result before allowing anybody to participate in it. What’s more, this coterie election is far from being fair, just and open. Churches’ political role should be neither distanced from nor closed to the political power so that it can monitor and criticise it.*

The authors mentioned that in the light of different voices emerging within the church, the Hong Kong Christian Council improved the mechanism of the selection of the ten representatives, and held seminars to explain to church members about the ten seats for Christianity. However, Rev. Kwok regarded these actions as ‘reinventing the wheels’ (superfluous).

*The premise is wrong; all the actions followed by are unjustified. Petty favours make no difference at all.*

**Resisting Acts and Christian Youths**

After the Umbrella Movement, more people have been awakened, have developed a stronger local awareness, and have been concerned about politics and other ‘fruits’; Rev Kwok are glad for these. As one of the ten initiators of Occupy Central, he admitted that in these one and half years after the Movement, he has not been able to do much. After all, he is now 77 years old. Nevertheless, he seeks the infinite God within the limit and does the utmost important things.

*Prayer is the only thing I can do, thus soon after the Umbrella Movement, I held a Monday prayer meeting at the Kowloon Union Church. Prayer is not an escape; rather, it is the most active move, to follow Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane to seek God’s will rather than our will to be done. Thus, prayer is an action, an action before all actions.*

Adults supported prayers, but youth…Rev Kwok quickly responded.

*You can come and join it. You will definitely see that the majority is young people, more than the middle-aged and the elderly!*

Rev Kwok was very excited as young people are willing to seek God’s will in silence.

Concerning young people participating in the resisting actions of different organisations, Rev Kwok ‘supports them whenever possible.’

How about the radical acts?

*I believe that violence will bring about more violence and cannot achieve anything, so I disagree. However, I will certainly not condemn the options chosen by the young people. If they are willing to bear the consequences, that is fine. For example, the biggest problem of Leung Chun Ying was that he demanded for special arrangements (for his daughter), but he did not apology; Leon Lai made a mistake and apologised. Couldn’t it be done like that?*

Unfortunately, some Christian youths encounter a situation where pastors cut off from them and condemn them as rioters; they also exhort other young people not to follow them. The way that pastors and adults adopt really hurt their hearts.

*The pastors made a mistake. It’s very clear.*

*For all matters, there are always people who agree and disagree. As long as we are clear about the reasons for the action and are willing to bear the consequences and responsibilities, then go ahead. In the last 50 years, I did countless things that upset people. Many people cut off from me, so what?*

**On the Progress and Regress of the Church**

Having been a pastor for 50 years and seen many changes in churches. On a whole, has the church moved forward?

*A friend of mine who has been a pastor for ten years said to me that the church has gone backward as the faith has become narrower. We say, ‘Do not conform to the patterns of this world’, but we have been dissolved by this world. Nowadays, churches are run by enterprise management, but human beings are not enterprise, aren’t that? It is hard for me to imagine what the church has done, which makes the staff bewildered. The staff are too timid to take up the leadership. These create a vicious cycle. Unfortunately, it is a dream to expect them to break this cycle themselves, so let’s start together! As Fang Lai Chi says, ‘Democracy is a not a gift; we need to fight for it.’*

*Moreover, pastoral staff care too much about their relationship with the employers. Employees generally obey their bosses, but this is being responsible to their bosses, rather than to God. Pastoral staff should be responsible to God for the people; but nowadays they are responsible to authority for themselves.*

Rev Kwok has had a special calling for the ecumenical movement. Regarding the development amongst churches in Hong Kong, he commented, ‘progress and regress’.

*For example, it is a huge regress for the Anglican Church establishing the Ming Wah Theological College and withdrawing from the Divinity School of Chung Chi College. Theoretically, it violated the ecumenical spirit; practically, it weakened their resources. Can money solve all problems? No, theological training requires so many things. For example, the quality of teachers is very important. Therefore, it reflects that generally the mind set of church leaders have gone backward. In contrast, laypeople have been progressing in ecumenical practices. For example, in my monthly meeting with Christian musicians in recent years, some of them are the alumni and lecturers of the Alliance Bible Seminary, some has a Baptist background. They are relatively conservative, but are willing to attend the Monday prayer meeting and to accept the catholic liturgy. Sometimes when we talk about the Catholic Church, they do not resist. Therefore, it seems that lay people are more open than before.*

**Beliefs and Values**

In the last fifty years, were there any beliefs and values that could not be compromised, but some could?

*Nothing can be compromised. I am very stubborn. For many years I have been upholding justice and love. In 1997, I was awarded the Gamaliel Chair in Peace & Justice.* Ming Pao *interviewed me concerning the causes for my insistence on justice. In 2000, I was retired and* Ming Pao *interviewed me again. The conclusion of the article stated that my insistence on justice was due to love. I find this comment very objective and appropriate. In 2010, the Divinity School of the University of Yale where I had studied granted me the Lux et Veritas Award which is to honour those who exercise Jesus’ love with the best way in any time. I am very moved. It represents my insistence on the care for human beings and upholding justice.*

*Have you ever been to Shek Kip Mei?* Rev Kwok suddenly asked.

*I am very thankful for my first job in the CCC Sham Oi Church. It nurtured the way I am for the next 50 years. The first resettlement estate in Hong Kong was founded in Skep Kip Mei. Grambling, prostitution, drugs and so on were all there. I learnt a lot there. For example, ordinary people did not intend to be involved in crimes, but because resources of the society were taken by a small group of people, the minority were not treated fairly and kindly. I cannot say that many members of Sham Oi Church are the sheep without shepherd, but they did have many practical needs, including the spiritual and material needs. I could only try my best to help.*

Rev Kwok served in Sham Oi Church from August 1966 to the end of 1977 for 11 years. He experienced lots of hardship and trials, but to look back, he sees God’s grace. Apart from Sham Oi Church, he had been offered several better and prestigious jobs, but the situation of the grassroots people really caught his heart. 50 years have gone, but Rev Kwok is still thankful for this first ministry which moulded his insistence on justice and love.

**Embrace My Faithful Wife**

DorothyWong is Rev Kwok’s wife for whom he is very thankful.

*In the last years, I am not sure how much I have helped her, but I am sure that she has been helping me a lot. She is not only my Chinese and English secretary, but also a huge spiritual support to me. You know, I am very poor, but she pays for all the treatments and accompanies me for every check-up. Many people say that we are the best couple. However, because of different job natures, our thoughts cannot completely compatible. She was a headmistress for 30 years, but I worked in an organisation, ‘walking around’ most of the time. Hence, our styles were different— administration cares about detail; ‘walking around’ is casual.*

But two of you can live together. Is it because Mrs Kwok accommodates you?

*I also accommodate her a lot! Haha, we just accommodate each other.*

**Things That I Want to Do**

*I want to retire, and to retire in order. One time my doctor asked me if I had found a successor. I did not understand what he meant. Few weeks later I saw two beautiful girls sitting quietly outside his office. He said that they were his medical successors who would inherit his expertise. At that time, I realised that he thought that somebody should inherit my work. But, hang on, before finding a successor, I should clarify what I want to pass on.*

Rev Kwok’s ‘retire in order’ means sorting out his literature first, then think about ‘what I should pass on?’

*Perhaps I will write a book on worship first, then prayer.*

Helping people to faithfully look upon and to trust in God is a challenge for pastors of all ages. We are very much looking forward to Rev Kwok’s teaching.

**The Conclusion of the 50 Years of Pastoral Ministry: Love**

In his 77 years of his life, 50 years were devoted to pastoral ministry. Are there any new insights about life?

*If I had been asked this question before the disease, I would have probably said, ‘Life is precious, given by God’. But after so many years, my understanding is that, whether it is up or down in life, are given by God. In other words, contexts are given by God and our responsibility is to make the best use of them. We always say ‘glorify God and benefit others’, but glorifying God is not the ultimate, rather, helping others. I have deeply understood that the greatest vitality is love. If I had not had this long-term disease, I would not have had this deep feeling. One time, my granddaughter sang a song to me and sweetly said, ‘Grandpa, I hope you feel better!’ Apparently, my daughter asked her to say it. She added by saying, ‘I love you!’ This is what I mean by vitality—being loved and accepted; to love and to accept. Therefore, I will not say these vague words any more, ‘life is given by God’, as I have experienced the concrete and real substance.*

Finally, Rev. Kwok said it again, ‘*I still believe that love and just are the most important’*.

The dawn reminded us that it was time to leave so that Rev and Mrs Kwok could have dinner and a good rest.

What are you having for dinner?

*Vegetable dumplings.*

Our gracious God, thank you for generously giving us so much. Please bless the food for Rev and Mrs Kwok’s good health. May you bless his family with your outpouring grace and happiness. In your name we pray. Amen.

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