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Disciplinary Responses to Theology Brief Preview

LOVE, REPRESSION, AND RIGHTS STRUGGLES IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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Professor O'Donovan's Preview opens up a new line of approach to my research on struggles for basic legal freedoms in 21st Century China. Re-reading my field notes through the lens of love reveals a finely textured mosaic of love's manifestations. These are apparent in the lives of China's leading Christian rights lawyers and their heroic struggles for justice, rule of law, and political liberalism in the Peoples' Republic of China. Professor O'Donovan's insights add further layers to my initial effort to discern core concepts of faith in the challenging milieux in which they are called. [1]

1. When Prof. O'Donovan writes of "ordered love", of love conforming "to the order of reality," I was impelled to map the social realities in which the Christian rights lawyers are embedded and to discover what, if any, manifestations of love might be salient to each. I discovered that the lawyers themselves speak of love—and its obverse (hate, indifference, etc.)—in relation to the Communist Party, the security apparatus, civil society, their lawyer peers, the vulnerable and oppressed whom they defend, their churches and families, and the powerful sisterhood of lawyers' wives, among others. Certain virtues attach to particular expressions of love, such as bonds among fellow activists and Christian believers that fortify endurance or bolster courage.

2. It is also appears to be the case—to be explored in my later Disciplinary Brief – that in the lawyers' minds various forms of love have a different affinity with their social objects.To explore these more deeply I would welcome a more explicit listing of the various forms of love by Professor O'Donovan. For the lawyers, agape seems prominent, eros does not (although my understanding of eros may be too restrictive), friendship features, but then other relationships hint at further varieties of love—"sisterhood" among wives who band together in support of their "disappeared" husbands, solidarity among beleaguered rights' defenders, among others.

3. The Christian rights lawyers constantly couple justice and love. Some insist that love bolsters their courage and persistence to bring about a just legal system in China; and that justice is a means of

loving one's neighbor by preventing the "many tragedies" experienced by hundreds of millions in contemporary China. It would be helpful to learn more about the tensions that can arise between love and justice to which Professor O'Donovan alludes in his closing comments.

Endnote

[1] Terence C. Halliday. 2021. "The Bible in Contemporaneous Struggles for Basic Legal Freedoms." In **Oxford Handbook of the Bible in China**, ed., K.K.Yeo. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 657-674.

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