Alexander Chow. *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment,* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 248 pages. $90.

Alexander Chow's work on Chinese Christian thought combines careful sympathy, impressive ambition, and bold, insightful suggestions for future constructive projects.

The sympathy is evident in his thoughtful readings and vivid reconstructions of a panoply of thinkers, past and present. Chow's clear and concise presentations of the thought of Watchman Nee, T. C. Chao, and K. H. Ting, the central figures of analysis at the heart of his monograph, would, by themselves, well justify the publication of this work. Besides these, Chow's writing displays ample evidence of time well-spent ruminating on the works of contemporary Chinese thinkers such as Zhuo Xinping and Liu Xiaofeng as well as various theologians from Christian history—Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas are particularly important, but other voices from Tertullian to Teilhard du Chardin are kept alive in a running, coherent conversation.

The impressive ambition of the monograph can be gleaned from the range of this partial list of thinkers alone. Chow succeeds in tying together a number of rich traditions: Western or Latin Christianity, the Chinese Christian descendants of this Western tradition, contemporary Chinese intellectuals, Eastern Orthodoxy past and present, and the three great "Chinese religions"—Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism.

Chow manages this vast range of thought by maintaining a precise theological focus on his central constructive conceit, which also serves as the subtitle for his work: "heaven and humanity in unity," or *tianrenheyi*. While the development of this idea has a long history within the indigenous Chinese traditions, Chow convincingly shows that historical and contemporary Sino-Christian thinkers across the liberal-conservative spectrum have also found resonance and intellectual impulse in the merging of the transcendent and the human.

The three axes of sin, synergy, and union along which Chow analyses the contours of various presentations of *tianrenheyi* are judiciously chosen and heuristic. Historically, Chinese Christians have drawn on Western sources. They have thus been deeply affected by the Augustinian perspective, wherein fallen human beings must rely for salvation on divine initiative. Meanwhile, classic Chinese thought has offered a vision of omnipotent humanity, able to attain transcendence through self-cultivation. By closely examining their conceptions of sin, synergy, and union, Chow shows that the Chinese intellectuals who are heirs to both traditions have historically found creative ways to attenuate this tension. In so doing, he creates exciting, original spaces for future intellectual work beyond the supposed polar opposites of Augustinian anthropological pessimism and Chinese anthropological optimism. Chow also makes a compelling case that this ground has been well-furrowed by fellow travelers in Eastern Orthodoxy. In the mystical tradition of Orthodoxy, the doctrine of *theosis*, or deification, has played a dominant role since the beginning. One can only hope that Chow's suggestions will be taken up by future theologians and intellectuals with the promise of new insights and implications not only for China's future but the ecumenism of the church universal.

While Chow's introduction of Eastern Orthodox sources into the Chinese conversation is one the most original and exciting aspects of his work, his use of Justo Gonzalez's three categories of Christian theology as derived through the work of missiologists Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder sometimes feels forced. Gonzalez's three categories utilize Tertullian, Origen, and Irenaeus as exemplars of three types of theology, arbitrarily called A, B, and C respectively. Type A thinkers are primarily concerned with the theological theme of the law, type

B with truth, and type C with history. Chow claims that his subjects Nee (A), Chao (B), and Ting (C) exemplify these three types. Ting probably fits his category the best, but each of these thinkers developed an idiosyncratic, independently interesting approach to Christian thought. Since Chow is evidently such a careful reader, one wonders why he felt compelled to shoehorn them into these pre-existing categories. Indeed, Chow's hermeneutical honesty often has him qualifying the ways in which, for instance, Watchman Nee seemed to show traces of B and C type thought. In fact, Chow's placement of Nee as a "prototypical type A thinker" (61) may have blinded him to the ways in which Nee focused much of his energy on shifting the conversation among conservative Christians *away* from the merely legal ramifications of sin in favor of recognizing its deeper noetic and historical effects.

There is also a surprising lacuna in Chow's work. Chow mentions Witness Lee and is aware of Lee's later appropriation of certain Orthodox themes. Still, it is surprising that a book devoted to Chinese Christianity and *theosis* does not pay more attention to a significant Chinese theologian whose mature thought was almost wholly dedicated to the topic of deification. This neglect may simply be a reflection of the wider academic ignorance concerning Lee's work. Nevertheless, given Chow's admission that the "vast majority of Chinese churches… maintain fundamentalist or evangelical theological dispositions" (104), it is unfortunate that he does not spend more energy fleshing out the wider implications for sin, synergy, and union that can be found in the thought of more conservative Christians like Nee and Lee.

Neither of these critiques and none of the minor orthographic and stylistic infelicities of this book should detract from the admirable scope and aplomb of Chow's first monograph. I, for one, am eagerly awaiting the future efforts of this exciting new voice in Sino-Christian thought.

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