Some Things Left Undone

Zhang Xianyong

Though a democratic system had not yet taken shape, and sometimes in his early governance of the people of Israel Moses tended to run everything without consultation, yet once he was corrected, he readily accepted good advice, said farewell to the past and opened up great prospects for future generations. The essence of Moses "new governance" may be said to lie in "some things left undone"...When one is a servant of God and a co-worker with others, some things must be entrusted to God; for others, one must rely on one's colleagues. Moses did not abuse God's gifts. In serving God he learned the lesson of knowing his subordinates well enough to assign them jobs commensurate with their abilities. He also knew himself and left some things undone precisely because he wished to allow God to accomplish even greater things in him!

--a sermon on Exodus 18: 13-27,
The Chinese Theological Review: 1991

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Religious Leaders Meet In Beijing

The Committee on Religion of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) met on September 2 and 3 in Beijing. The meetings were attended by national leaders of China's five religious groupings, namely, Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The China Christian Council and the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee considered the two-day conference to be important enough for them to be represented by five key leaders, including Bishop K. H. Ting, head of both the CCC and the TSPM; Bishop Shen Yi-fan, General Secretary of the CCC; Mr. Luo Guanzong, Secretary General of the TSPM; Dr. Wenzao Han, Executive Vice-President of the CCC; and Mr. Shen Derong, Vice-Chair of the TSPM.

The main thrust of the conference was to consider from the standpoint of grassroots religious groups how the principle of religious freedom can be better implemented. It was agreed that the implementation of the principle has brought about many positive results. However, religious leaders noted that improvements are still needed, especially because many cadres are new in their jobs and because "ultra-leftist" prejudices are still lingering in certain quarters. Education is therefore necessary on the importance of respecting people's religious affiliation, practices and feelings. Without religious freedom, religious believers cannot be mobilized to actively participate in nation building. In summary, Bishop Ting said that "the conference fulfilled the dual responsibilities of the CPPCC, namely, political consultation and democratic supervision."

The conference was chaired by Mr. Zhao Puchu, President of the Chinese Buddhist Association, and Bishop Ting. The conference was called at the suggestion of Bishop Ting, who also serves as Vice-Chair of the CPPCC. [ANS]

CCC-General Secretary Reports On Visits To Fujian, Sichuan And Shaanxi Provinces

In an interview with the national Christian magazine, Tian Feng, Bishop Shen Yifan, General Secretary of the China Christian Council, recently spoke about his spring visit to churches in Fujian, Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces. He was pleased that greater attention was being given to "running the church well" and to the promotion of younger church leaders, in the spirit of the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference.

Shen reported that Fujian Theological Seminary now has a new building which houses not only students of the two-year courses but also lay workers who are participating in a one-year training class. These lay workers have many years of evangelistic experience and take to studying with great enthusiasm. Sichuan Theological Seminary has just finished a new seven-story classroom and dormitory building, reportedly the tallest seminary structure in China. The seminary will now be able to accept a new class of students every year and to hold more training courses [Over]
for lay workers, including minority Christians, from the southwestern provinces. Shaanxi Bible School is still functioning under very difficult conditions. Short of funding, it is located on the grounds of Sanyuan church where living and teaching space is very cramped. As there is a great need for more theological training in the northwest, Shen said he hoped that the bible school could eventually become Northwestern Theological Seminary, training church workers for the whole region.

Asked about problems he encountered during his visit, Bishop Shen cited the lack of a democratic work-style in church administration, difficulties in relationships between individual churches and Christian organizations, and tensions between church workers of different denominational backgrounds. He added that a strong effort was needed to overcome these problems.

Shen confirmed that there have been indiscriminate closures of Christian meeting points in some places. The CCC has already been in contact with government leaders about this. It is hoped that the new "Regulation on the Supervision of Places for Religious Worship" would help resolve the situation. However, during his visits to the three provinces, Shen found that while some churches and meeting points had already received government approval, others had not. Some church workers were now worried that when the new regulations came into effect, meeting points which had not already received such approval would be unable to register.

Bishop Shen disclosed that the CCC and the TSPM had made several suggestions for changes in the draft regulations, and that some of these changes had been incorporated into a revised draft. He expressed the hope that registration of worship places would be open and fair, that illegal activities in the name of religion would be curbed, and that normal religious activities would be protected. [ANS]

ANS 92.5.3

Three Hundred Sixty-seven Graduate From Chinese Seminaries

According to the Theological Education Committee of the China Christian Council, 367 theological students graduated from China's 14 theological institutions in 1992. This includes 38 graduates (21 men and 17 women) and seven voluntary church workers (six men and one woman) from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Two Nanjing graduates will stay on to teach at the seminary, while the rest will assume positions in other seminaries and Bible Schools; work in the national or provincial Christian bodies or return to work in the churches from which they came. It is estimated that since 1985, more than 1500 students have graduated from Chinese seminaries, 1300 of whom now serve in local churches. [ANS]
Bible Production Continues At Amity Press

Bibles keep rolling off the Amity press in large numbers. The total production as of 31 August was 4,428,460 Bibles and New Testaments. Almost 250,000 Bibles were printed during the hot summer months of July and August. The Executive Committee of the United Bible Societies expressed its congratulations and thanks to the board and staff of the Amity Press at its September meeting in New York, and agreed to extend its joint venture contract with the Amity Printing Company to the year 2008.

More than 7.3 million Bibles have been printed and distributed by the China Christian Council since October, 1980. [ANS]

Large Youth Camp Held By Zhejiang Churches

More than 500 young people from eight churches in Yuyao, northern Zhejiang Province, participated in a four-day mountain youth camp held in August this year. Speeches and seminars were given on such topics as "How Christians look at marriage," "Christians and the world," "Young people and the Chinese Church," and "How to read the Bible." In addition to the seminars, there was a choir competition and a biblical knowledge contest. Spring and summer youth retreats have become a tradition in Zhejiang churches over the last decade.

Other Christian youth camps were held in southern Zhejiang and in Fujian Province. [ANS]

Provincial Christian Conference Meets In Jiangxi

The Fifth Jiangxi Provincial Christian Conference was held in June this year. One hundred twenty-three delegates representing the more than 100,000 Christians in Jiangxi province met for three days in the provincial capital, Nanchang. The average age of the delegates was 50, with a large number of young or middle aged participants.

Under the guiding theme of "Building the church well according to the Three-self principle," the conference heard a work report and passed regulations for local churches as well as constitutions for the provincial CC and TSPM. Guidelines were also set up for a one-year course for church workers.

Twenty-three persons were approved for ordination as pastor, elder or teacher. About half of them are young and middle aged church workers who have already held responsible positions. [ANS]
"We Gave To The Glory Of God"

Building a church in China requires not only a great deal of faith, but also support from many quarters. This is revealed in a recent report from the Shecun Church in the northern city of Gong Yi, Henan Province. Their new church was completed in seven months, after land was provided by the local government. Church members contributed their own labor and funds for building materials. Christian workers Zhai Tongbao and Yang Jinzhou directed the construction by day, and stayed on site each night to keep watch, not returning to their homes even once during the 200 days it took to put up the church. Ms. Han Yuanding looked after the preparation of meals for the one hundred or more workers who were on hand each day. And when funds ran out for reinforced steel bars needed in construction, members of the nearby Nanshankou Church donated 13,000 yuan. "We gave not to you as individuals," they said, "but to the glory of God." [ANS]

Returned Theological Students At Work In China

Eight young people sent abroad for further theological studies have returned to China in recent years and have taken up responsibilities in teaching, publications, and pastoral work.

The first student to be sent abroad was Zhang Jinglong, who went to Canada in 1983 for studies at the Toronto School of Theology. He has returned to Nanjing Union Theological Seminary where he now teaches courses in Asian and Contextual Theology, and serves as Associate Dean of Studies.

Rev. Wang Zhenren spent four years at the Vancouver School of Theology. He was named to Standing Committee of the Third CCC, and also serves as Vice Principal of Zhong Nan Theological Seminary in Wuhan, where he teaches Old Testament and pastoral theology.

Rev. Zhang Xianyong returned from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago in the summer of 1989. He is currently Associate Dean of Studies at Nanjing Seminary where he teaches the History of Christian Thought. In addition, he serves as the Deputy Editor of The Christian Culture Review.

Another student whose overseas studies were undertaken in Canada, Kan Baoping, has returned to teach Systematic and Contextual Theology at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

Rev. Gao Ying completed her studies at San Francisco Theological Seminary and returned to work in Beijing in 1991. Following her ordination in January 1992, she became an associate minister at Beijing's Chongwenmen Church where she is involved in work with women and young people.

The only student thus far to have studied in Germany, Rev. Ji Tai, returned to China in 1991. He is now teaching courses in Old Testament Theology and German at Nanjing Union Theological
Returned Theological Students/2

Seminary. He was ordained in January 1992, during the Fifth National Christian Conference.

Li Yading studied at both Garrett Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary in the USA. He is now teaching Church History at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. He recently married another returnee, Peng Cuilan, the only student to have gone to Great Britain. She studied at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham. After receiving her M.A. in Old Testament Studies, she visited the Holy Land before returning to China in late 1991. She is now teaching Old Testament at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

Besides their teaching and pastoral work, the returnees have taken up positions on CCC national committees, assuming increasing responsibilities for the work of the church at large. [ANS]

International Exchanges

A six member delegation from "The Home of Christ" was in China in September and early October at the invitation of the China Christian Council. Led by noted Chinese-American evangelist Rev. Dr. Shih-yuan Kou, the group visited churches and seminaries in Beijing, Xi'an, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Fuzhou and Guangzhou. In each city, Dr. Kou met with pastors and church leaders, and spoke with theological students and grassroots Christians. He was also invited to preach and lead devotions in local churches.

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At the invitation of the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland, a three person "China Christian Council Grassroots Pastoral Team" is visiting Great Britain to study the situation of local churches and to share experiences on pastoral work in the two countries. Team members are Rev. Lin Zhihua from Fujian; Rev. Yang Fangying, a woman from Inner Mongolia; and Shandong pastor Rev. Wu Jianyin. They will be in Great Britain for six weeks.

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Bishop John V. Samuel, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), together with CCA staff Tosh Arai and Clement John, and accompanied by Hong Kong Christian Council General Secretary Dr. Tso Man-kung, visited Nanjing and Shanghai from September 10 - 13. They met with leaders of the China Christian Council and the Chinese Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee and discussed the work and witness of the CCA and CCC. The CCC is not at present a member of the CCA.

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Two Christian artists from China -- Ms. Fan Pu and Ms. Zhang Guijie -- participated in "The First Asian Women's Christian Artists' Consultation" in Hong Kong in September. Organized by the Asian Christian Art Association and the Women's Concern Committee of the CCA, the conference brought together forty artists from different countries and regions in Asia. The conference theme was "Creation and Spirituality: Asian Women Expressing Christian Faith Through Art."

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Correction: It was incorrectly reported in ANS 5 that Bishop Shen Yifan attended the conference on "Churches Of The Reformation In Countries Of The Reformation" in June. It was actually Rev. Shen Cheng'en, editor of the church magazine Tian Feng, who attended the June gathering in Germany. [ANS]
Self-Support And Christian Sharing

themselves often hard pressed. There is so much more that we could be doing, but are not doing, or are not doing well, because of inadequate resources.

ANS: We have heard reports that some provincial level Christian Councils, and even individual churches, are already receiving funds from overseas.

Ting: Yes, this is true. Many churches believe that this follows from China's emphasis on seeking funds from overseas for economic development. But the church is not only a social institution, it is the Body of Christ. We cannot put economic considerations above all else. We must instead see how we can best serve the needs of Chinese Christians in ways which are consistent with what we believe to be true about the nature of our church and our basic principles.

ANS: What is the position of the China Christian Council in this new atmosphere and changed situation?

Ting: There has been much discussion in our two national Christian bodies on the various questions relating to self-support. We see that a too rigid understanding of self-support will hamper our work in building up the church. Some churches and church organizations have even begun to run various enterprises in order to promote self-support. So, there is now new thinking and new openness to receiving funds from overseas, providing certain principles are adhered to.

We definitely will not abandon self-support. But after forty years of Three-Self, and in light of the friendly relationships we have developed with other churches all over the world, especially in the last twelve years, we believe that we can begin to talk about the sharing of support.

ANS: What will this mean for international Christian sharing?

Ting: We are now working on a theological approach to the whole question of self-support. We certainly do not want the church, by virtue of its overseas connections, to put itself in a position of economic superiority with respect to the rest of society. This was the situation we were in before 1949, and we will never return to that kind of dependency. It alienated us from our own people.

But the situation has now changed, both in China and overseas. Our church is no longer dependent on foreign mission boards. And we see that many Christians overseas want to share their resources with us. This sharing seems similar to what St. Paul spoke about in his correspondence with the Corinthians. We have seen this spirit of Christian sharing in our work with the Amity Foundation.

Insofar as the church is concerned, international Christian sharing can help to strengthen our oneness in Christ, because it arises from a spirit of love and mutual concern. We therefore [Over]
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want to broaden our understanding of sharing to embrace support for our churches, theological schools and other projects.

ANS: Have you developed practical guidelines for this?

Ting: Many of us are of the opinion that support for the church should only be accepted from friendly organizations or individuals overseas without any strings attached. Support can be designated for specific projects, although the implementation of the project will in all cases be under the authority of the Chinese church. Besides offerings at worship services, funds from abroad will not be applied to the day-to-day work of the church, or to the salaries of pastors and church workers. Local churches and church organizations are being encouraged to develop better standards of accountability, and also to consult with church bodies at a higher level as to the use of large contributions. Christian bodies at the provincial, municipal and autonomous region levels will be urged to report contributions above a certain amount to the China Christian Council.

ANS: Contributions can go to churches and Christian bodies at different levels. But will the CCC play a co-ordinating role?

Ting: The China Christian Council is not interested in becoming a centralized administrative authority. But we do want to promote the unity of the church, assist Christians all over China in running their churches well and advise local Christian bodies to the best of our ability on what we know of overseas donors. International Christian sharing is new to us, and we will need the support, the prayers and the suggestions of friends at home and abroad. We hope that our friends overseas will help the China Christian Council in the co-ordination of our efforts and the promotion of unity and church construction in China.

August 31, 1992
Nanjing

China
Provinces and municipalities mentioned in this issue

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Amity News Service

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Subscription Rates (January 1992 - July 1993)

Overseas Facsimile - US$ 75.00
Overseas Airmail - US$ 15.00
Hong Kong Facsimile - HK$125.00
Hong Kong Post - HK$ 75.00

Published bimonthly by Amity Foundation Overseas Coordination Office, 4 Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hongkong. (Phone: [852] 723-8011, Fax: [852] 366-2769)

Cheque payable to: The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong, Ltd.