Christmas Message

Once more we are a short while before Christmas.

The mystery of Incarnation fascinates the imagination of Christ’s followers of all generations and of all nations, bringing out old and yet ever new treasures to add to the adoration of the Christ born in a manger.

At this time our thoughts specially turn to Christians and churches worldwide, with thanksgiving for the triune God’s loving work of creation, preservation, redemption and cleansing, and for the prophecy and prayer that the whole humankind is to come to worship Him and to become one in Him.

May your Christmas 1992 be a greatly blessed one.

Christmas 1992
China Christian Council

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Bible Production Of "Greatest Importance" For CCC

Bible production and distribution are still of greatest importance for the China Christian Council, even though more than seven million Bibles have been produced and distributed in China since 1980. This was stated by CCC Executive Vice President Dr. Wenzao Han in a recent interview with ANS. "There are so many new Christians, and they need to read the Bible to get a proper foundation in their faith. Many others who aren't Christians also are interested to find out more about Christianity. Only if the Bible is available to everybody who wants one will our task be completed," Han said.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Bible printing became possible again in the early 80s. "We printed about three million Bibles, using different state-run presses," said Han. "But this was by far not enough." The Amity Printing Press, a joint venture with the United Bible Societies (UBS), was opened in December 1987 to alleviate the need for ever more Bibles. Having overcome initial problems, production at the Amity Press now averages about one million Bibles per year.

"Without the help of the United Bible Societies, this would have been impossible," said Han. "They were there whenever we needed them. They built and equipped the press, they sent personnel to help us run it, and they have subsidized the cost of Bibles because the thin paper we use is quite expensive." The UBS is also helping with translations of Bible parts into different minority languages.

Despite all these efforts, there is still a need for Bibles, especially in the countryside where even the subsidized price of 3.5 yuan Renminbi (US$ 0.6) for a pocket edition may be too high for poor Christians. Therefore, the CCC recently accepted an offer by the US based East Gates Ministries International (EGMI) to fund the printing and distribution of 1.01 million Bibles over the next five years. These Bibles will be added to those already being produced with the help of the UBS and will be made available to Christians all over the country.

All Bibles printed in Nanjing are sent out through four distribution centers which take orders from all areas of China. Individuals, home meetings and churches can order Bibles from these centers. Bibles are also distributed from there to Christians in home meetings that are not connected to the CCC and the TSPM. Large quantities of Bibles are regularly sent to 24 regional Bible distribution centers in various provinces.

Says Wenzao Han: "Recently, I was visited by a person who had been involved in Bible smuggling to China for a long time. Now he doesn't smuggle Bibles anymore - he says it's unnecessary." [ANS]
CCC Visit To Hong Kong Heralds "A New Era Of Mutual Trust, Reconciliation And Co-operation"

A 16-person delegation of the China Christian Council visited Hong Kong from November 24 to 30 at the invitation of the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC). Coming as Hong Kong Christians prepare for the return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the visit served to promote mutual understanding and strengthen ties between churches in Hong Kong and on the mainland.

This was the first Hong Kong visit by the CCC in 11 years, and the largest delegation it has ever sent anywhere. Besides well-known church leaders including Bishop K.H. Ting, Bishop Shen Yifan, Dr. Wenzao Han and Mr. Luo Guanzong, the delegation included pastors and lay workers from many parts of China. Six young people were among the CCC delegates, all of them recent seminary graduates.

The delegation met with many denominations and Christian organizations in Hong Kong for extensive discussions. Thirteen of the delegates preached in churches throughout the territory on November 29th. More than 250 guests participated in a "Dialogue With Chinese Church Leaders" organized by the Hong Kong Christian Council with a panel of the Chinese delegates.

Dr. Wenzao Han, Executive Vice President of the China Christian Council, expressed the hope that this visit would "herald a new era of mutual trust, reconciliation and co-operation" between churches in mainland China and in Hong Kong.

Rev. Tso Man King, General Secretary of the HKCC, underscored the importance of the visit when he said on the final day: "This visit not only helped improve mutual relations between Christians in China and in Hong Kong; it also opened the door of knowledge to churches in Hong Kong, showing us that there are many things we can learn from the church in China." [ANS]

Secretary General Of TSPM Calls For Better Implementation Of Religious Policy

Chinese government religious policy provides a functioning basis for practical cooperation between church and state in religious affairs. This was stressed by Mr. Luo Guanzong, Secretary General of the TSPM, at a "Dialogue With Chinese Church Leaders" held in Hong Kong on November 27. Recent government policy statements, which have been widely interpreted overseas as indications of a turn towards the greater restriction of religious activity, provide a good enough yardstick to defend the church against "Leftist" obstructions by local cadres, Luo added. He said that the church would face fewer problems if all cadres responsible for religious work properly implemented the policy of religious freedom as outlined in the 1982 statement known as "Document 19" and elaborated in subsequent government and Party documents. [Over]
...Better Implementation Of Religious Policy/2

Luo also criticized the so-called "three designates" policy (designated preacher, area, meeting place) which has been enforced in a number of provinces. In practice it means that a preacher is confined to a relatively small geographical area and not allowed to preach outside of it. Luo stressed that the church did not accept this policy, and that the China Christian Council was trying to get the rule changed.

Luo was speaking on the CCC's response to government religious policy at a seminar organized by the Hong Kong Christian Council in connection with the visit of the CCC delegation to Hong Kong. [ANS]

ANS 92.6.4

Anti-Christian Disturbances Stopped In Jiangxi Village

Anti-Christian disturbances that had gone on for several months were finally stopped in Hangqiao township, Duchang county (Jiangxi province). This was reported by the county TSPM committee.

The commotion was directed against a group of Christians gathering in the home of a family named Chen and started earlier this year, after a young woman in the neighborhood had died of leukemia. Villagers blamed the Christians not only for this death, but also for other misfortunes that had befallen the village. They charged that the Christians had driven out the "Earth God" (Tudi Gong) who had before protected the village. Local government cadres, instead of defusing these rumors, started to organize the villagers to drive the Christians out.

On April 26 this year, a group led by some cadres acting without authority broke up a worship service at the Chen family home, beat up several believers and ransacked the house. Although warned by higher level authorities concerned, the cadres continued their anti-Christian activities, publicly proclaiming that "whoever would not join in attacking the Christians would be treated like them and would receive neither gravesites nor forest areas for the cutting of firewood."

Immediately after this incident, the county TSPM committee took the matter up with the county United Front Work Department (UFWD), the party department concerned with relationships to religious believers. They called on party and government to honor the constitution and protect the citizens' freedom of religion. The UFWD decided that the Chen family worship gathering was a legitimate expression of religious belief and therefore had to be protected. Furthermore, everything that had been destroyed in the house should be paid for in full, and the local authorities should ensure that such an incident would not happen again.

However, this ruling did not have any effect, for local cadres still insisted that the home worship meeting point be moved away from the village. The county UFWD made it clear that the local officials were wrong, for the meeting point was legal and should be protected. A working group made up of the UFWD, the county government and the police was sent to Hangqiao to ensure that peace be restored and the meeting point continue. [Over]
Anti-Christian Disturbances Stopped/2

The Duchang County TSPM Committee reports that this decision was effective and was received with great relief by all Christians in the county. Christians in Duchang now meet in more than 50 home worship gathering points in 26 villages. [ANS]

ANS 92.6.5

Nanjing Theological Seminary Holds Fortieth Anniversary Gathering

More than three-hundred alumni/ae from nineteen provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions took part in the fortieth anniversary celebration of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, held in Nanjing from November 10 through 13. Graduates from the 1950s and 1960s as well as from the 1980s attended the three-day event, coming from as far away as Jilin Province in the north, the Guangxi Autonomous Region in the south and Gansu Province in the northwest.

The program began with an opening service of thanksgiving at the Mo Chou Road Church, the same church where the seminary held its first service of worship forty years ago. During the meeting, reports were delivered on the history of the seminary, theological construction, international exchanges and contemporary issues facing the church. Formal and informal small group discussions played an important role. Alumni/ae spent long hours reviewing their current work and their perspectives on the future. The overwhelming majority of seminary graduates from 1952 through 1992 are working in churches, theological seminaries and Christian organizations all over China. Many of the older graduates continue to work seven days a week with no thought given to retirement.

The alumni/ae were all in high spirits, and clearly showed great affection for one another as well as for their alma mater. One graduate from the 1950s used the words of Psalm 133 to express her feelings about the gathering: "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity." When one participant said that there should be a 50th anniversary celebration, several others added, "Why not have a 45th reunion instead!"

Bishop K.H. Ting told [ANS]: "I had not fully anticipated the depth of feeling that seminary graduates have for their alma mater. This meeting has helped to promote the unity of the church through the sharing of the faith and experiences among Nanjing graduates."

Nanjing Seminary was formed as a union of eleven seminaries from different denominational backgrounds in the Fall of 1952. The faculty of Beijing's Yanjing School of Religion joined Nanjing Seminary in the late 1950s. After 1958, seminary activities were severely curtailed, and its doors were closed at the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. The seminary reopened with its first new class of students in February, 1981. Four-hundred men and women have graduated from regular seminary programs over the last eleven years, in addition to the more than 200 graduates from the 1950s and 1960s. [ANS]
First Thousand Correspondence Students To Graduate Soon

It is almost graduation time for the first group of 1000 students participating in the three-year Bible Correspondence Course administered by Nanjing Theological Seminary. They have been studying Old and New Testament, the Catechism, Evangelism, Church History, Pastoral Theology and other subjects since 1989. A second group of 1000 students is well into their studies, and preparations are now under way to admit another 1000 to begin their studies early next year.

The Bible Correspondence Course is designed to alleviate the dire need for trained church workers at the grassroots. As churches in China lack the means to train large numbers of students at theological seminaries, the correspondence course was begun in 1989 by a Nanjing minister with the help of several Nanjing Seminary graduate students. Later on, the Seminary seconded one of its teachers to be a full-time worker on the program. The course is organized into six terms of six months each, with three subjects to be studied each term. Teaching material is sent out at the beginning of each term, and a test is administered at the end. Students are mostly lay workers from rural churches and home worship gatherings from all over China, except Tibet, Hongkong, Macau and Taiwan.

Even this course is not sufficient to meet the training needs of grassroots churches and home worship gatherings; therefore, many local church work organizations have set up their own correspondence courses, making use of the materials from the Bible Correspondence Course and relying on students from the Nanjing course as resource persons. [ANS]

"A Golden Lampstand On The Shores Of Poyang Lake"

The new church in Henghu is not far from Jiangxi's famous Poyang Lake, near the provincial capital of Nanchang. It has a very special story, as ANS learned from a handwritten report recently received from Henghu, which we summarize here for our readers:

Up until the time of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), there had never been Christians in this peasant community of more than 20,000 people. Then a Christian couple from Hunan Province, Brother He Fengming and Sister Zhu Fengqi, were sent down to the Henghu countryside, and there they began to hold home worship gatherings with their neighbors, in secret. With the restoration of the policy of religious freedom in the late 1970s, the number of Christians began to increase. Yet the Henghu home worship gathering was still not recognized because of the "Leftist" orientation of the local cadres. They put all sorts of pressure on local Christians, and frequently called in Brother He for a "talk". They told him to change his ways and discontinue the worship meetings, suggesting that his job might be in jeopardy if he did not comply.

[Over]
"A Golden Lampstand..."/2

But Brother He and the local church held fast to their beliefs and the number of Christians in Henghu continued to increase. They witnessed to the community through their deeds, and people began to take notice. Christian families were more enthusiastic in turning in their grain levies, they didn't cheat, they were helpful to others, and their family relations were harmonious. Sr. Zhu and other Christians often helped the weakest members of their community. This model behavior and beautiful witness eventually moved the local cadres, causing them to change their impression of the church. The cadres again studied the government's religious policy, and now made a special effort to abide by its spirit and uphold religious freedom. At one point, a local cadre even moved out of his house so that the Christians would have a place to meet.

When Henghu Christians applied to build their own church -- a new church in a community which had never before had one -- they were immediately given land by the local government. The local Christians pooled their resources and prayed that they would have enough funds to build the church. Young and old, rich and poor, they all gave what they could. Later, Henghu church leaders contacted the China Christian Council for they still lacked resources. The Wonju Youngkang Church in South Korea learned of the story of the Christians of Henghu, and were so moved that it gave US$10,000 as a freewill offering to complete the building of the church.

The church building, which seats 300 people, was finally completed in mid-October. But the Christian community now numbers more than a thousand, therefore many Christians continue to meet in their homes. Christians and local officials came from near and far to take part in the opening celebration in October.

A church leader told those who had assembled: "In everything we have done, we have had faith in God, and we have relied on this faith to the full. The Lord has prepared the way, the Lord has led us, and the Lord has provided for us in abundance."

The Henghu Church now stands as a "golden lampstand (Rev. 1:12) on the shores of Poyang Lake." And, our report from Jiangxi concludes, in this place the light from the lampstand shines forth to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [ANS]

ANS 92.6.8

New Church For Maonan People

After meeting in homes for more than ten years, Christians from the Maonan minority finally have their own church again.

The Maonan nationality, with a population of about 40,000, lives mostly in Huanjiang Autonomous County, northern Guangxi. Mission work was begun there in 1897, and many Maonan subsequently became Christians. During the Cultural Revolution, their church was completely destroyed.

A new church building was completed this fall, with a big red cross on top that can be seen from far away.[ANS]
International Exchanges

The well-known Taiwanese preacher, Rev. Chou Lien-hwa, revisited China from October 15 to November 4, lecturing on specialized subjects in theology at seminaries in Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou.

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At the invitation of the CCC, the famous American televangelist Rev. Morris Cerrullo visited churches in Nanjing, Beijing and Shanghai with a delegation of five people. On several occasions, Cerrullo preached in church services and prayer meetings.

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Ken Peterson and three delegates from the Lutheran Laymen's League visited Nanjing and Shanghai from November 7 to 10 to assist with the production of audiotapes for new Christians which the CCC plans to release. Both sides expressed their hope for continued cooperation on this project.

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A six-member youth delegation from the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), including WCC President Ms. Priyanka Mendis and CCA Youth Secretary Chan Bing Seng visited Nanjing, Shanghai and Hangzhou in late November and early December.

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Dean Chen Zemin and Professor Wang Weifan of Nanjing Theological Seminary were among the speakers at a seminar on "Christ And Culture" organized by Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia (USA) in October. After the seminar, both visited other seminaries and churches in the USA.

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Rev. Lee Chee-kong, President of the Hong Kong Christian Churches' Union (HKCCU), is visiting China in December at the invitation of the CCC. Rev. Lee will be lecturing at seminaries in Hangzhou, Shanghai, Nanjing and Fuzhou. The HKCCU is a voluntary association of individual congregations in Hong Kong.

Abbreviations used in this issue: CCC, China Christian Council; TSPM, National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China; UBS, United Bible Societies; HKCC, Hongkong Christian Council; UFWD, United Front Work Department; CCA, Christian Conference of Asia; CITS, China International Travel Service.
Introducing Reverend Bao Jiayuan

On occasion, ANS publishes short biographical sketches of prominent Christians who may not be very well known overseas. Rev. Bao Jiayuan is the newly elected Deputy Secretary General of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Committee and Director of the Nanjing Office of the China Christian Council.

Reverend Bao Jiayuan was born in 1944 into a family that has been Christian since the mid-nineteenth century. His father is a minister, his mother an evangelist. Strongly influenced by the example of his father, Bao Jiayuan decided to study theology. He entered Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1962, at a time of decline for the church. Only 19 students were enrolled at the seminary when he graduated in 1966, shortly before the onset of the Cultural Revolution.

As all churches were closed during that time, Bao Jiayuan did not get a chance to work as a minister. He stayed at home for several years, caring for his bed-ridden mother and bringing in a little income as a tailor while his father was held by the Red Guards. During this time, the family home was ransacked and his father's extensive library burned.

In 1969, the family was reunited and sent to the countryside. The Baos spent six years in Dafeng county, a very poor area in northern Jiangsu. During this time, they had no contact with other Christians, but the family worshipped together using an English language Bible they had been able to save.

In 1976, the family was allowed to return to Suzhou, where they continued their family worship services. Bao Jiayuan found work as an electrician in a factory. In 1979, he was transferred to work as a tour guide for the Suzhou branch of China International Travel Service (CITS). It was only then that he could finally start to live his faith openly again. As churches started to reopen, his father resumed his ministry and urged Bao to come also to work in the church. For several years, the CCC tried without success to get Bao Jiayuan transferred from CITS. Between 1984 and 1986, he was even sent to Kuwait to serve as an interpreter in a construction project.

In 1987, Bao Jiayuan was finally allowed to leave CITS to join the Nanjing office of the CCC, where he has been responsible for overseas relationships. In 1990 alone, he organized and accompanied 48 international church delegations on their visits to China, not counting the many tourist groups that visit Nanjing Seminary and local churches. Besides these duties, he has, as of 1992, been serving as secretary of the CCC Bible Committee, overseeing Bible distribution and coordinating the work on new Bible editions and the production of calendars and daily devotional materials.

Bao Jiayuan was ordained into the ministry in 1988, 22 years after graduating from seminary. In 1990, he took part in a course at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey (Switzerland) on the theme of the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches, "Come, Holy Spirit - Renew The Whole Creation". "In my life, I never had very much time to study," Bao commented, "I always had to work." [Over]
Introducing Reverend Bao Jiayuan/2

At the Fifth Chinese National Christian Conference, Bao Jiayuan was elected as Deputy Secretary General of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Committee, making him the youngest member of the Chinese church leadership. [ANS]