Jesus Healing The Blind Man (John 9: 1-12)  
Papercut From The Amity Christian Arts Center, Nanjing

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Seminary Teacher: Divisions In Church Due To "Fee Collections" And "Unreasonable Rules"

Divisions within rural churches and the upsurge of sectarianism in the countryside are often the consequence of unreasonable rules and policies implemented by government authorities or enacted in the name of local Christian Councils and Three-Self Movement Committees, claims an outspoken article in the April issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng, written by Rev. Ji Tai, a young teacher at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

Ji, who has extensive grassroots experience, reports that in many rural areas churches have split up when groups of people left what they called the "worldly church" to form a truly "spiritual church." Ji says it would be too easy to simply blame "troublemakers" for such splits, as many of the reasons for these break-ups were attributable to the church or government policies.

Ji says that in some rural areas where the registration of Christian meeting points is now underway, fees demanded in the process often bordered on extortion. A basic 200 RMB charge for registration has to be paid by all meeting points. Those registered previously have been forced to re-register and pay up. Ji adds that there are all kinds of other fees: "A preacher certificate costs 50 RMB. If you want to run any kind of training class, you need to pay 30-50 RMB. And for a "baptism certificate" you also have to come up with a certain amount." Ji says he was not surprised that in the light of such economic pressure many Christians went in search of the "free gospel" in "unregistered churches." Since many Christians in the countryside have an annual income of only about 500 or 600 RMB, even a church with 300 or 400 members could hardly support a full-time church worker, let alone pay such exorbitant charges.

Ji says that many of these fees are levied in the name of the Christian Council, but that he was unsure whether the funds raised really went to support the church, or whether they constituted "an act of income creation" by cadres from the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB). Ji argues that if the church needed money for church work, believers would donate freely. But it was not right for such money to go to the government, because it already received taxes to fund its work. If the government needed fees to cover the cost of registration, then they should charge a few RMB instead of several hundred RMB.

In addition to this, Ji says that certain goings-on in churches cause serious Christians to call them "worldly", and with good reason. As an example he quotes a "patriotic" covenant adopted by an unnamed county Christian Council that prohibits Christians to go from house to house to preach the gospel. Mentioning that government regulations ban religious preaching only in public places, Ji cloaks his criticism in heavy irony: "The drafters of these regulations seem to think that the limitations set by the government are too wide, or they think that private houses are public places. It seems that only [OVER]"
Divisions In Church.../2

'not to encourage people to believe' can be counted as 'patriotic'! ... What kind of church does not allow people to preach the gospel?"

Another set of church regulations quoted by Ji stipulates that all donations to individual churches have to be passed on to the city Christian Council to be distributed from there. Furthermore, any expenditure exceeding 200 RMB must be approved by the Religious Affairs Bureau. Ji says that there is no legal basis for such a regulation, and quotes both Article 8 of the Government Regulation On Places Of Religious Worship (Regulation 145) and the Church Order For Trial Use to show that legally, each church should handle its own finances independently.

Ji closes his article by saying that he could quote many more such examples from sets of regulations he has seen. He says that these rules beg the question whether they were "really conceived by the 'Christian Council', or whether they were written by other people who then put the label 'Christian Council' on them." Ji says that such incidents had given the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement a bad name among many Christians, and that they had fostered the growth of sects and heresies and the splitting of churches. Ji calls on all local Christian Councils to urgently correct such problems. Since the government is now in the process of implementing rule by law, the churches should abandon such "lawless ways." [ANS]

ANS 95.2.2

Fujian Pastors' Delegation Visit To Taiwan "Deeply Moving"

The visit of nine pastors from Fujian Province to Taiwan in February this year (see also ANS 95.1.7) proved a deeply moving experience for both sides. This was reported in the church magazine, Tian Feng, in April. The Fujian delegation was the first ever group of pastors from the China Christian Council to visit Taiwan.

Besides meeting with pastors and lay people from different churches and church organizations, and visiting seminaries and Bible schools, the delegation had the opportunity to visit four churches on the islands of Quemoy and Matsu (Da Jinmen and Xiao Jinmen). These islands, very close to the mainland Chinese city of Xiamen (Amoy), had been subjected to heavy shelling by the mainland for many years.

At a meeting organized by the Taiwan Christian Council (TCC), the delegation was greeted by the TCC chairman, Kuo Che. He called this visit "greatly meaningful" and said that he expected it to have a deep and lasting influence. The report in Tian Feng closes with the hope that there will be more such visits by delegations to follow. [ANS]
Bishop Ting Urges Congregations To Enter Registration Process

The registration prescribed for all local church groups in China is useful, and they should apply. This view is expressed by Bishop K.H. Ting, President of the China Christian Council (CCC), in a recent letter to Nanjing Union Seminary Graduates as well as in answers to readers' queries in the March issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng.

In his letter to seminary graduates, Ting states that registration "can bring underground churches above ground." Ting says it is not good for Christians to worship underground and in secret. Instead, they should come out into the open and let the people around see them. Ting says that the six simple preconditions that have to be met for registration clearly showed that the central government did not intend to use registration to suppress religion or create difficulties for believers.

Ting writes that there are some people in the CCC and the TSPM who would like to use the registration process to check on the qualifications of all church workers. Ting rejects this idea, stating that this would make the registration process difficult as well as overstrain the Christian Councils' resources. Declaring pastoral workers as unqualified would expose the CCC to criticism. Instead, Ting says, the Christian Councils' role in the registration process was to encourage and help church groups to comply with the registration procedures, and to make the churches' viewpoints and problems known to the government.

In answering readers' questions for Tian Feng, Ting deals with some of the false notions about the registration procedures. In replying to a query from a home meeting in Jiangsu Province, Ting insists that no group needs to belong to the Three-Self Movement to register. The group in question had refused to join the TSPM and had been told by local TSPM officials that they could not be registered until they did. Ting asserts that membership in the TSPM is voluntary, and that it is not among the six preconditions for registration set out in the registration regulations.

Commenting on a question from a Henan home meeting, Ting affirms that all groups can apply for registration, even those who have not been approved in previous registration drives. Responding to the worries of a Jiangxi-based group, Ting makes clear that congregations need not be led by an ordained pastoral worker to be eligible for registration. The regulations state that a venue for religious activities must have "persons who meet the requirements of the particular group to conduct religious services." Says Ting: "This clearly includes the large number of lay evangelists who oversee church work in the countryside."

In a final answer, Ting deals with the theological question of why the church as a spiritual body needs to register at all. Ting states that the church exists in an earthly form, and in concrete circumstances. "What is bad about churches registering and acquiring the right to be public and legal?" He asks. [OVBRA]
Ting Urges Congregations To Enter Registration Process/2

"Registration does not change our faith," Ting says, it does not alter the fact that the church is spiritual and protected by God. Ting also points out that all regulations make clear that the church administers itself, and that registration does not mean that it is run by the government. [ANS]

Bible Literacy Class Enriches Church Life In Fuyang

Kouzi Church in Fuyang City, Anhui Province, has about 2,000 believers, many of whom are very poor. To help believers who cannot afford to buy books, in 1992 the church set up a lending library of Christian literature with more than 100 different titles. Soon afterwards, illiterate Christians, who make up about one third of the congregation, began complaining that they were unable to use the library. After much deliberation, the church decided to start a Bible literacy course.

More than 100 Christians enrolled in the course, with the youngest participant aged 17 and the oldest aged 82. Most of them had had no formal education at all, while some had had a few months or a year of primary school. For a study fee of two RMB per term, the church provided each student with textbooks, pens and paper. As the study fee did not cover costs, the church subsidizd the class. Students met twice weekly and were taught by two experienced Christians.

After studying for 18 months, most students are now able to read and write more than 1,000 Chinese characters. With their growing reading ability, the students' spiritual life also became richer. Now, the Bible literacy class has transformed itself into a Bible study class that is still meeting twice a week. The group reads and discusses Bible texts, with the teachers providing introductions to the text and explanations of new words.

Other churches in the Fuyang area have now started their own Bible literacy classes, and have been supported in this by Kouzi Church. Over the last year, the church has provided more than 1,000 Bible literacy primers to such classes. [ANS]

ANS can be ordered from the Amity Foundation Overseas Coordination Office, 4 Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hongkong, Fax [852] 2366-2769. The annual subscription rate is US$ 18 for six airmailed issues. Checks should be made payable to The Amity Foundation, Hongkong, Ltd.
"Don't Just Look At Numerical Church Growth" - Zhejiang Church Leader

Chinese church leaders should not just rejoice about the strong numerical growth of the church in China, but realize that many new believers do not have a very clear idea of their faith, said Rev. Deng Fucun, General Secretary of the Zhejiang Christian Council, during a recent interview with ANS in Hongkong. Deng added that he was worried by the fact that while there were so many new Christians, the number of church workers had not grown at a comparable ratio.

Deng said that the number of Christians in Zhejiang Province had doubled since 1985 and now stood at 1.2 million. In the last five years, an average of 70,000 new believers had been baptized every year. Zhejiang now has the highest percentage of Christians in China, with 2.7% for the whole province. In some areas, like Wenzhou in the south, the ratio of Christians is almost 9%. There are now more than 2,400 churches and well over 3,000 meeting points in the province, with 1,200 churches concentrated in the Wenzhou area.

While Deng said he was overjoyed by the fact that many new believers were added to the church every day, that new churches were opened and many revival meetings were held, he warned that the church had to pay more attention to the training of pastoral workers. According to Deng, there are only about 130 ordained ministers in Zhejiang. In the last ten years, 355 students have graduated from Zhejiang Theological Seminary in Hangzhou, but only 13 of them have so far been ordained as pastors. (Of the eight women pastors in the province, five work in Hangzhou.) In addition, church workers in Zhejiang can also be ordained teachers (assistant pastors) or elders. Altogether there are now slightly more than 1,000 ordained church workers in the province, a number that is clearly insufficient, especially as most of them are of advanced age.

Deng said that due to the fast growth of the church and insufficient pastoral work, several sects had in recent years sprung up in the province. While their growth wasn't a serious problem, churches should not ignore them.

Deng also stated that the Zhejiang Christian Council was making a conscious effort to help Christian groups that had not had a relationship to the Council previously. He said that with the help of a US-based organization, East Gates Ministries International, Bibles and concordances had been distributed free of charge to such groups. Deng expressed his hope that all Christians in the province would grow together to form the one body of Christ. He rejected reports that there were large "underground churches." [ANS]
Church-Run Social Service Work On The Increase

Quietly and without much fanfare, churches in China have over the last few years begun to get re-involved in social service work. The extent of this involvement became visible at a seminar organized by the Amity Foundation on behalf of the China Christian Council in Nanjing in March, and attended by church representatives from 23 provinces.

During the 1930s and 1940s, churches and missionary agencies made a substantial contribution to social and medical work in China. But after the revolution, they were barred from all social involvement and limited to spiritual work. This changed only with the reform policies of the last few years, which have not only opened the way for the churches to again run hospitals, clinics, kindergartens and homes for the aged, but have also created a clientele of poor people in desperate need of help.

Stories exchanged at the seminar detailed how church social work is geared towards the poorest people in Chinese society. Many church-run hospitals and clinics, for example, do not charge registration fees and distribute medicines at subsidized prices or even completely free of charge. Doctors from the Lingui Aide Christian Hospital in Shandong Province have often performed surgery free of charge, and have given money and clothes to extremely poor patients. Several small church-run clinics and old people's homes have run into financial difficulties because they cannot charge their clients enough to cover even their operating budget, let alone finance necessary extension work.

Most church-run projects are small, like the Aihua Center For The Rehabilitation Of Children With Mental Impairments. Run by a young Christian woman with the help of some ten staff members, it has 30 regular attendees. Most projects are begun with little money, but in great faith, like the Hangzhou Christian Home For The Aged which started out with "no experience, no staff, no money, no furniture and no government permission." For quite some time, there was no pay, and no peaceful night's sleep either, staff members said, but today the home houses 31 residents, boasts a long waiting list, and has been commended by the Civil Affairs Bureau as being better managed than state-run homes.

Participants at the seminar agreed that the churches' service to society had an important moral dimension at a time when "money fetishism" and a "development complex" reigned supreme in China. They criticized many Chinese Christians for being more concerned about personal salvation than about helping others, and urged that steps should be taken to change this attitude. To this effect, a new column will be published in the church magazine, Tian Feng, to report on the development and service work of the Amity Foundation, local churches and individual Christians.

The Amity Foundation, which was entrusted by the CCC to host the seminar, started funding church-run social service [OVER]
Church-Run Social Work On The Increase/2

projects in 1986. Since then, eleven clinics in six provinces have received medical equipment as well as funds for new buildings, training and medicines. The biggest church-run project to have been funded by Amity is the Yangzhen Middle School in Longquan, Zhejiang Province, China's only Christian middle-school. Amity helped to finance a school building and a dormitory for boarding students from the surrounding mountainous countryside.

According to Ting Yanren, Associate General Secretary of Amity and in charge of church-run projects, there are currently 18 church projects awaiting funding. They include 13 clinics and hospitals, one rehabilitation center, two kindergartens and two homes for the aged. These projects have been chosen out of about 300 requests for funding that Amity has received in 1994. As the foundation is unable to monitor a large number of small projects, it has intensified its contacts with provincial Christian Councils where projects are located, and has helped to establish an informal communication network between Christian NGOs in China.

While church-run projects only make up a very small part of Amity's work, Ting sees the rapid growth of church-initiated service work as a positive development with far-reaching potential and significance. He stresses that there are dozens of church projects that have never had any funding from outside, and that it would be unfair to only turn to Amity when talking about Chinese Christians' involvement in development work. These Christians "have done more for society, have sacrificed more, and have experienced more difficulties...We should not steal the limelight and get all the credit." [ANS]

ANS 95.2.7

Bishop Sun Yanli Dies In Shanghai

Shanghai Bishop Sun Yanli passed away in Shanghai on April 4. He was 81 years old. He had been consecrated as one of the two bishops of Shanghai in 1989, in the first post-denominational bishop's consecration in China. (The other bishop was Shen Yifan, who died in 1994.)

Sun Yanli studied theology at Jinling Theological Seminary and Chengdu Theological Seminary. He was ordained as a Methodist minister in 1941, serving as a pastor and a church district head first in Sichuan and later in Shanghai. In 1955, he became associate general secretary of the Shanghai TSPM.

Returning to church work in 1979 after 13 years as a factory clerk, Sun was appointed senior pastor of Mu'en Church in Shanghai and also served as vice-chair of the Shanghai Christian Council. From 1985, he was the President of Huadong Theological Seminary. In 1986, he was named chair of the Church Work Committee of the Shanghai CC, and ordained bishop in June 1988. [ANS]
Conflict Over Property of Shanxi Church

A Shanxi church has made public its conflict with local authorities about the return of its property, and asked for help in resolving this issue as soon as possible. According to the March issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng, the church in Daning County which had been established at the beginning of this century, had its large church building taken away at the time of the land reform in the early fifties. It was subsequently used for office space by different work units, which even after 1980 never considered returning it to its rightful owners. Recently, a large new building was erected on the site of the original church, and sold to a boiler company even though the county government was clearly aware of the fact that the church would not agree to this.

The church magazine reports that in the early eighties, the county government ordered the county civil affairs bureau to spend 4,000 RMB to find a suitable worship place for the Daning congregation. This small sum of money was just enough to buy two disused brick kilns, three ramshackle wood-and-mud houses and a small courtyard which together made available about 100 sqm of space for the church. But this place was far too small for the congregation, and hardly accessible because it was surrounded by a garbage dump. Therefore, the church pressed the county government to find it a better place. After taking the affair to a higher court, the county government was ordered to pay 180,000 RMB to the Christians for a new church building. According to the church, this sum is still insufficient, as the church is extremely poor and needs its annual income of about 2,000 RMB to give small subsidies to its four pastoral workers.

In October 1994, Christians in Daning were so angered by the inaction of the local government that they organized a group of some dozen people who forcibly seized and occupied four brick kilns. This seizure was ended in the same night when employees of the boiler company broke down two doors. Since then, the conflict has been simmering without a solution.

In a commentary following this report, the editors of Tian Feng criticize Daning County's work in implementing religious policy as "not good" and describe the selling of the church property as "an obvious mistake." The editors call on the Daning County Government to properly compensate the church for its lost building, and ask the Christians in the county to refrain from further rash actions which would only serve to fuel the conflict.

[ANS]

News In Brief

More than 5,000 believers worship in the three Sunday services at Sicheng Church, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province. According to the church's senior pastor, Rev. Sun Xipei, about 300 new believers are being baptized every year. While in [OVER]
the past many of the newly-baptized had been old people, these
days they were younger and better educated, Sun said. In 1994,
two university professors were baptized at the church. Sun added
that the average Sunday collections at the church netted about
15,000 RMB, and that the church raised about one third of the
annual funding of Zhejiang Theological Seminary.

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The Jiangdao Ji (Sermon Collections), published for all of
China by the Zhejiang Christian Council, will from this year
appear in four instead of two annual issues. The Collections,
meant as a preaching aid for lay workers in charge of meeting
points and family gatherings, now have a circulation of 45,000
copies. Sermons are collected from all over China.

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Yancheng Prefecture, in northern Jiangsu Province, now may
have as many 120,000 Christians, of whom about 50,000 are
baptized. They worship in 54 churches and more than 300 meeting
points. Of the 17 pastors in the area, 11 are young seminary
graduates, while six are former lay workers with limited
theological training.

Amity Hospital in Yancheng City has been set up by the
prefectural Christian Council. It mainly caters to poor people:
There is no registration fee, medicine is less expensive than in
state-run hospitals and may even be given free to those who are
unable to pay. Despite this, the hospital makes a profit which
finances about 5% of the church's operating budget.

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Three funds set up by the Zhejiang Christian Council have
proved very helpful in improving church work in poor areas of the
province. According to a report by Rev. Sun Xipei, President of
the Council, the three funds are the Theological Education Fund,
the Young Pastoral Workers Assistance Fund, and the Poor Areas
Church Building Assistance Fund. Money for the Theological
Education Fund is generated by donations in churches all over the
province on Theological Education Sunday. The Young Pastoral
Workers Assistance Fund was set up to help poor churches to pay
pastoral workers a minimum salary of 200 RMB per month. While
Zhejiang is considered one of the richest provinces in China,
there are still extremely poor areas, especially in the
southwestern mountains of the province.

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The old revolutionary city of Yan'an, Shaanxi Province,
which served as a base for the Communist Party after the Long
March, had no Christians until about five years ago. But now
there are about 300 believers meeting in a private home.
Baptism services in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, are held twice yearly at Christmas and Easter. As there are 400 to 500 new believers to be baptized each time, the service usually spreads out over two days.

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Fujian Province currently has 280 ordained ministers, of which 140 have been ordained recently. The province has the largest number of ordained ministers in China, as well as the highest percentage of new seminary graduates and woman ministers.

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About 800 Christian women from all churches in Shanghai observed the Women's World Day of Prayer on March 3 at Mu'en Church. The service was led by a team of woman ministers and theological graduates.

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To serve the many young Christians in Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province, the churches there have organized numerous activities particularly geared towards young Christians. There are youth fellowships every Wednesday and Friday night. During the summer, there is always a youth camp in the countryside. Young Christians are also heavily involved in visiting weak and poor Christians in their homes.

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Among the new and rebuilt churches dedicated in the last few months is a seven-storey church building in Nanping, Fujian Province, and the only church in Cangzhou, Hebei Province, which was returned to believers after more than 40 years.

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A seven-month lay training course with 170 participants was recently concluded in Beijing.

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A three-month church music training class is currently being held in Xiamen, Fujian Province. Among the 40 participants are both ministers and lay workers, the majority of whom come from the Xiamen area. Teaching the class are accomplished church musicians from all over China, as well as several overseas Chinese church musicians. Xiamen, with several excellent church choirs and a big church orchestra, is one of the centers of Chinese church music.

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Provincial Christian Conferences have met in Guangxi and Shanxi, passing church regulations and electing new provincial leaderships. The first Provincial Christian Conference held in Qinghai recently established the Qinghai Christian Council. [ANS]
Statement by Bishop K.H. Ting at the meeting of religious leaders to study Secretary General Jiang Zemin's Speech on the great task of peaceful reunification of the motherland. The meeting was held in Beijing on March 7 of this year. The Chinese text of this statement appeared in the April issue of Tian Feng, the Chinese church monthly.

As all the people of China, including those of Taiwan, were enjoying the Spring Festival, Jiang Zemin, Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party and President of China, contributed to the people's happiness when he issued an important statement on a question of concern to everyone, that of the reunification of the motherland across the Taiwan straits.

In order to develop relations across the straits, and promote the course of peaceful unification of the motherland, this important statement by Jiang Zemin further expounded the basic guiding principle of "peaceful unification; one country two systems" put forward by Comrade Deng Xiaoping. In reaffirming the prerequisite of one China, he put forward a whole series of new policies on several important issues, making a special point of showing care and consideration for the Taiwan authorities and people of every sector in Taiwan, with a complete lack of condescension and with extreme tolerance and magnanimity. His forbearance in dealing with such profound contradictions is an example to the whole world.

My attention was especially drawn to the fact that Secretary General Jiang proposed first of all to formally conclude the hostilities between the two sides, undertake negotiations and come to an agreement. This is an attitude of seeking truth from facts, a step which Chinese at home and abroad and peace-loving people the world over would warmly support. Let there be no intention of using military means to break the stalemate between the two sides. We want the two sides to negotiate from positions of equality, put down their arms, and improve relations. People of good will cannot fail to perceive the sincerity in this. With such sincerity, no difficulty is insurmountable.

Taking this step creates an atmosphere for negotiations for peaceful reunification. Negotiations for peaceful reunification are by no means a case of the large oppressing the small or the strong the weak. The important thing is to speak frankly and sincerely, so that there can be a common effort to arrive at solutions acceptable to both sides. Of course, this is a situation that has to develop over many years and I dare not imagine that it will be easy for the two sides to come to a common understanding. But speaking with one another is always better than not speaking.

[OVER]
Jiang Zemin also welcomed all political parties and people from all sectors in Taiwan to exchange views with us on this side relations across the straits and peaceful reunification. This means that both the parties to and the scope of discussion have been enlarged. As a member of the religious sector, I feel I can say that those of us in religious circles are in agreement with Secretary General Jiang's statement. We support the proposal and we welcome those in religious circles on both sides of the straits to have more frequent and broader exchanges.

Secretary General Jiang made a special point of expressing his opposition to Taiwan independence. As a Chinese Christian, I particularly want to say something about this.

Every Chinese knows, from kindergarten or Primary One on, that Taiwan is Chinese territory. It was occupied by Japan and it is an unalterable principle that Taiwan return to the motherland. Taiwan independence is an unwarranted proposition. Taiwan Christians, including some very influential church leaders and clergy, frequently express their hope for early peaceful reunification of the motherland. These are the sentiments of our own flesh and blood compatriots, who are also our brothers and sisters in Christ. But there are also today forces among Taiwan Christians promoting Taiwan independence, who are even now working for entry to the United Nations under the name "the nation of Taiwan". A certain American denomination supports them, even saying, "Taiwan was an independent country in the 19th century". We Chinese Christians, whether on the mainland or in Taiwan, must be on guard against the plan to split the nation into "one China, one Taiwan". We oppose Taiwan independence. Informed persons in international Christian circles sympathize with the position of the China Christian Council on the Taiwan issue, and for this we are deeply grateful.

There is a story of how a rich man in ancient Israel divided his land between his sons as he was dying, giving the eastern fields to one and the western fields to the other. At harvest time, the elder son, thinking of the needs of his younger brother's family, and the younger son, thinking of the needs of the elder brother's family, set out separately on the same evening to walk in the direction of the other's place, each carrying a great deal of grain. They collided in the darkness, spilling their grain upon the ground and embracing each other. When people later heard this story, they said, "How beautiful it is when brothers live together in harmony." This remark can still be found in the Bible today. According to legend, the place where the two brothers embraced was where later generations built the Holy City of Jerusalem. The "salem" in the name Jerusalem means peace. It is my fondest hope that all the problems across the straits can be readily solved and that those on either side can, as in the legend, embrace one another. [ANS]
Jiangxi Bible School
by Lois Cole

"We come here according to the will of the Lord, with the aim of spreading God's word. Many of us have made sacrifices, leaving our families and our jobs to study the Bible here," said a student of Jiangxi Bible School. She and 23 classmates have been sent by local churches and meeting points, many in rural areas of Jiangxi Province, where they have served as church workers.

The one-year Bible school, which was established in 1992 by the Jiangxi Christian Council, is an attempt to meet the needs of the province's rapidly growing Christian population - estimated to be 190,000 baptized and 80,000 unbaptized Christians. "We have a lot of sheep, but few shepherds in this province. Many who have been baptized don't understand the basic teachings of the Bible," said Rev. Li Baole, Vice-Chairman of the Nanchang Christian Council. To fill the gap, the school has so far produced 53 graduates. Most cannot serve as full-time pastors, however, as their churches are too poor to support them, and they continue their jobs at factories, schools or on farms during week days.

Evidence of how pressing the need for church workers in the province is, the Bible school was set up quickly with little funding, its facilities the bare minimum. Located on the grounds of Nanchang Protestant Church, the school has one classroom in the main church building. Students spend seven hours of class and many hours of study time in the damp and dimly lit classroom. Students explained that because of poor ventilation and lighting, it was impossible to study in their living quarters. Housed in the church basement, 15 men share one room, the only windows of which open into the sanctuary - leaving them with no ventilation when Bible studies or meetings are held. Housing for the nine female students was difficult to come by, and one of the pastors donated a room in his apartment, also on church grounds, to accommodate them. The room is only large enough for four bunk beds, requiring two students to share a bed. Although the church has a kitchen, there is no space to sit down for a meal, and the students often have their meals in the church courtyard.

Support for Jiangxi Bible School comes from Chinese Christians and an offering taken up on Easter Sunday in churches in the province. There are no tuition costs, although students must pay daily living expenses themselves. Members of the Jiangxi Christian Council hope someday to be able to provide a two-year seminary training program, although some bemoan the fact that progress is slow, and the school doesn't even have a proper library yet. Dependent on the goodwill of pastors in the province or vicinity, and occasionally from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the school has a flexible curriculum, and classes are held when pastors and theologians are available to lecture. Some of the areas covered are books of the Old Testament and New [OVER]
ANS Feature: Jiangxi Bible School

Testament, Biblical geography, the life of Jesus Christ, the history of Christianity in China and abroad, and basic preaching skills.

For the students, who are between the ages of 30 to 50, most having only a junior middle school education and coming from poor rural areas, student life is not an easy adjustment. "We are very earnest to learn. But some of us have had little education, and we can not study well. We worry that one year is not enough time. Much is dependent on our own efforts, as we do not have full-time teachers here," said one student. Many believe their ability to minister effectively depends on whether or not they acquire a reference Bible. Up until this year, Chinese reference Bibles were only available in Hong Kong at a cost of over US$50. Currently, the Zhu Shi Ben, a scholarly reference Bible, is being printed at the Amity Printing Press in Nanjing, and the China Christian Council is also negotiating the publication of the more easily readable Qidao Ben, published in Hong Kong, which they hope to print by the end of this year.

So eager are the students for resources and materials, that they will cut daily living costs, some foregoing one meal a day, in order to save money to photocopy texts or reference books available at the school, commented one pastor.

While the students are reluctant to talk about other pressures and difficulties they are undergoing as a result of their decision to study at the Bible school, the pastors at the church tell about the situations of present and past students easily enough. One problem for some students has been a lack of support from families or neighbors. This is exacerbated by the difficulties students find in returning home on the weekend, finding it too costly and too far, a particular burden for the women who have left behind young children. Support often comes from the students themselves, who grow as a community, sharing their difficulties in daily prayer meetings together.

There are also numerous stories of sacrifice and hardship. In one situation, a young woman gave up a well paid job as a salesperson to attend the school. Relying completely on her own savings because her family could not assist her, she could only afford one dish of vegetables a day. Concerned, her classmates would share some of their food with her. Another young man from the city juggled his life by attending Bible school, taking care of his pregnant wife, and also working at night to support his family.

But perhaps for the students at Jiangxi Bible School, whose main motivation for coming to the school was to simply gain a better knowledge of the Bible and to be able to share it, there are rewards from the struggles in their year of theological studies. One student commented: "We believe the truth is in the Bible and that there is plenty for us to learn. Although the conditions here are poor, we are discovering much about Christianity that we didn't know before. Before coming here, we found there were many unhappy, complicated things in the world. But this place has brought us some answers and some peace." [ANS]