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Daniel In The Lion's Den. Papercut From The Christian Arts Center Nanjing.

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Young Church Workers Call For Greater Stress On Youth Work

While churches in Shanghai already organize a lot of youth activities, much more could be done to attract young people to the church and keep them there. This was the consensus of a group of eight young church workers at a discussion organized by the church magazine, Tian Feng.

The group reported that all churches in Shanghai now have youth meetings. At Community Church in central Shanghai, about half of the 200 people baptized every year are under 40 years old. To cater to their special needs, the church holds two special worship services for young people every month, and organizes youth Bible studies three evenings per week, in which up to 100 people participate. At Jingling Church, about 70% of those attending the Sunday evening service are young people. According to church worker Zhang Jianming, this situation also constitutes a challenge for the church: "Old Christians are easy. They will listen to anything that is being preached. But young people are different. They want a sermon that has a connection with their lives, with society and the economy." Zhang said that while these young people were very hungry, the church was not able to feed their minds sufficiently.

Other church workers agreed and told of young people who, soon after having been baptized, disappeared from the churches. Obviously, the churches had not been able to nurture them properly. One church worker suggested registering members of youth groups, so that a follow-up visit or phone call would be possible.

Also discussed in the meeting was why in Shanghai, few young people are willing to commit themselves to full-time church work. During the last few years, the intake of Huadong Theological Seminary has been less than 20 students per year, well below planned numbers. Reasons put forward for this were manifold: The church's youth work was generally inadequate. There were not enough revival meetings, and those there were did not go deep enough. With the market reforms in full swing, the church lost more and more people to outside influences. And finally, the hard life of young church workers was said to discourage many who might have been interested in serving the church.

Asked about their hardships, the young church workers all admitted that they were overworked with too many administrative burdens. While they were willing to do whatever work needed to be done, they felt that as the church had so few workers with pastoral skills, administrative work should rather be done by lay members. They also stressed that in order to keep up mentally and spiritually with doing youth work in a fast changing society, they needed more time for personal study and sermon preparation.

Church workers also talked openly about difficulties in their daily lives. For some, who have not yet been provided with housing, establishing a family life is almost impossible. And female church workers talked about the difficulty of [OVER]
keeping up with church work while raising a child. They said that quite a few women felt that they could not have children in this situation.

But despite the difficulties and hardships, none of the young church workers regretted the path they had chosen. They felt that they had been enriched spiritually by working for the church full-time, and they had many suggestions for improving their work. All of them stressed that evangelism among young people should be a priority of the churches, especially since many people these days were struggling with emotional problems.

Zhongnan Seminary In Wuhan Marks Tenth Anniversary

Zhongnan Theological Seminary celebrated its tenth anniversary on June 12-14. Located in Wuhan, Zhongnan is a regional seminary that serves churches in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Henan, Hubei and Hunan Provinces.

To celebrate the anniversary, a wide range of activities was planned. There were festive worship services in the mornings and evenings, ceremonies attended by church and Religious Affairs Bureau leaders from six provinces, special lectures and discussion groups, evening performances, and a graduation ceremony.

These activities attracted more than half of the 96 alumni of the seminary, as well as many local church leaders from surrounding areas and many international church visitors.

In the opening service, Rev. Wang Zhenren noted how God planted the seed of the Gospel through the hands of many Christians from many countries over many years, nurtured that seed even in the days of chaos and persecution, and has now brought a harvest that cannot be counted. The seminary plays a crucial role in providing the leadership to continue the tasks of planting, nurturing and harvesting.

Those who recall the days when the seminary began noted how spartan the facilities, how empty the library shelves, and how young the faculty seemed then. "The way God has led the seminary over those ten years," Rev. Liu Nianfen, the seminary president observed, "has been marvelous, and provides confidence as the seminary faces the daunting tasks ahead."

Zhongnan Theological Seminary is one of 13 seminaries in China. It presently enrolls some 80 students in a four-year post-middle school curriculum.
Integration Of Different Faith Traditions Possible: Rural Church

One of the main characteristics of the churches affiliated with the China Christian Council is their post-denominationalism. Churches from different denominational traditions started to unite in the fifties, and today many young Christians do not even know what denominations are, calling themselves simply Christian. But local denominational traditions are still very much alive in many regions, especially in areas where indigenous Chinese churches like the Little Flock or the True Jesus Church or non-mainline denominations like the Seventh Day Adventists have been strong historically.

Christians in Binhai County in northern Jiangsu Province, come from particularly diverse denominational backgrounds: While about 26% of the almost 40,000 believers identify themselves as of Presbyterian tradition, the remaining 74% follow the customs of the True Jesus Church.

[The True Jesus Church, an indigenous Chinese church movement, had its beginnings in Beijing in 1917. Its founder, Paul Wei, had been converted by missionaries of the London Missionary Society and later was rebaptized in the Apostolic Faith Mission. After an overwhelming experience of the Holy Spirit, Wei claimed he had received the power to heal the sick and drive out evil spirits. In the following years, the strongly pentecostal movement spread quickly throughout Eastern and Central China. Though the church was torn by splits and controversies about doctrine and leadership, there were about 115,000 followers of the True Jesus Church in China at the time of the Revolution. In the fifties, several leaders of the True Jesus Church were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms. The church was dissolved, and many of its followers joined the Three-Self-Movement. Today, the traditions of the True Jesus Church are still alive in many parts of China, and in Jiangsu Province alone, there are an estimated 450,000 followers.]

Binhai is a county in the backyard of prosperous Jiangsu Province. It is tucked away up in the north, where the weather is dry and the soil not very fertile, away from the big roads, right on the coast but without a harbor. The land is flat, and farming is the main occupation of the about one million people in the area. Life is hard but bearable, however, for every two or three good years one year will bring either drought or devastating floods. Therefore, Binhai has remained one of the poorer counties in the province, with an annual average income of only around 1,000 Yuan per head.

Presbyterian missionaries came to the county town in 1917. And in 1926, the first True Jesus Church was set up in small, dusty Baqu township, half an hour's drive from the county town.

There is now a large church in the county town, newly rebuilt after the old church was destroyed by floods in 1991, which seats about 1,500 people. Every Saturday morning, it [OVER]
Integration Of Different Faith Traditions...

is filled to overflowing, with many people assembling in the courtyard outside. The service starts at 7:30 in the morning, with an hour of hymn singing. Afterwards, the worship leader delivers a pastoral prayer. Then, before the sermon that lasts for at least another hour, there is time for common prayer, True Jesus Church style: People kneel on the concrete floor, all praying loudly at the same time, many crying, wailing and shaking. As the din grows louder and louder, the pastor rings a handbell, and the prayers end. A similar prayer time follows the sermon.

"This common prayer is one of the important traditions of the True Jesus Church, as well as meeting on the Sabbath", explains Rev. Kuan, senior pastor in the county and himself of True Jesus Church background. On Sunday morning, the hardly less crowded service at the church follows Presbyterian tradition: prayers are given by the pastor, and the only common prayer is the Lord's Prayer. "This way, people from both traditions have a worship service that suits their needs. As long as we regard each other as equal on a spiritual level, we can work together without creating tension", says Brother Yu, a lay worker who chairs the local Three-Self Committee.

In addition to the county town church, there are 83 meeting points spread throughout the villages. Many of them serve Christians from both traditions, so they have worship services both on the Sabbath and on Sunday. Similarly, the annual baptism service held at each meeting point includes baptism both by immersion and by sprinkling, according to each new believer's preference. But each meeting point has only one management committee, and is run jointly by Christians from both traditions. This needs respect for each other's traditions and expressions of faith and a strong commitment to the unity of the church, attitudes that are being stressed in the regularly held county lay training classes for village church leaders.

As the True Jesus Church has always been weak in theology, special attention is given to educating grassroots believers in basic faith knowledge. Christmas celebrations have been used since 1985 to stress the teaching that in Jesus, God became human. According to Li Hua, an ordained woman evangelist in charge of 20 meeting points, many True Jesus Church followers in the area originally denied that Jesus Christ was God's son. Says she: "At Christmas we remind people that Jesus, even though he was like God, became human to save us, so that we all can become God's children. We celebrate Christmas together so that all of us can understand this." Li adds that during the day-long celebration, there are many different activities: "We have quizzes to test the believers' Biblical knowledge. We have singing and music, the telling of Bible stories, and little skits. All of this gives people a stronger basis in their faith."

Obviously, the True Jesus Church, originally a fringe group, is becoming "mainlined" in Binhai. According to church workers, True Jesus Church traditions like being "anointed by the Spirit" are losing their importance. But faith healing, another important True Jesus Church characteristic, still plays a strong role, possibly because it is important in most countryside churches, regardless of their original tradition. [ANS]
China Christian Council Rejects Rumors About "Religious Culture Press"

The China Christian Council has rejected speculation that the establishment of a Religious Culture Press by the State Council Bureau of Religious Affairs will lead to increased control over religious publishing in China. This was stated by CCC Acting General Secretary Dr. Wenzao Han in an interview with the Hong Kong-based Amity News Service.

The new press will publicize books about religious policy as well as materials on the theory, history and culture of religions. In addition, the press plans to publish "classical books" of the main religions in China, including the Bible.

Dr. Han told Amity News Service that speculation about the new press taking over or controlling the publishing of religious organizations in China was completely unfounded. Such worries had been voiced by a Catholic source from China, who, according to the Hong Kong-based Catholic news service UCAN, fears that the new press would take over the printing of all Catholic books, allowing local churches the publication of informal internal materials only.

"The CCC has not been approached by the RAB, nor has the government asked to take over publishing work from us, and I don't expect them to do so", said Dr. Han.

Dr. Han added that university and research institutions had in recent years published religious classics, often without communicating with religious communities. For example, two recent publications of Islamic works had caused "an uproar" among Chinese Muslims. In contrast, the CCC hopes that the new press run by the Religious Affairs Bureau would go about publishing such works in close consultation with representatives of the religious bodies concerned. [ANS]

This item was released to news organizations on 25 May 1995.

*Video*Video*Video*Video*Video*Video*Video*Video*Video*Video*

TIME OF REVIVAL

This 15 minute video follows the activities of a young woman evangelist in the Wenzhou area, Zhejiang Province. Originally produced by ZDF German State Television, an English language version is now available from The Amity Foundation, 4 Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Price: US$ 15

Payable by check made out to the Amity Foundation, Hong Kong Ltd.

VHS tape available in both PAL and NTSC. Please indicate which version you want when you order.
News In Brief

Among the churches newly opened in recent months, one serving the Shitanjing area in the Ningxia/Inner Mongolia border region seats over 200. The first church ever has been built in Guido County in Qinghai Province. In Nanjing, Fujian Province, believers bought a granary and converted it to serve as a hall for worship.

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After a number of Christians had left Weidu Church in Henan Province to follow a sectarian group, the congregation organized a course on the basic truths of the Christian faith. Taught by pastors from out of town, more than 1,200 people participated in the five evening sessions. Several of the Christians who had left the church also came along, and later decided to return to the church.

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During a lay training class at Shucheng County, Anhui Province, a "Quit Smoking Campaign" was kicked off for church workers in the area. After being informed of the hazards smoking poses to the health of the smoker and his or her family, as well as its economic implications, more than 40 lay church workers signed a pledge to kick the habit. More than 70% of Chinese men are smokers.

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The first class of 40 students has just graduated from Jingling Bible School in Yongnian County, Hebei Province. Students for the two-year program came from all over Hebei. The Bible school was established by the Yongnian Christian Council to meet a dire need for trained church workers in an area where few people can afford to leave their fields for four years to attend a full theological course. A new class will start in September, and the Council hopes eventually to run two classes at the same time.

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On April 17, a memorial service was held at Shanghai Community Church for Talitha Gerlach, an American missionary who had served with the YWCA in China during the 1940s, and who passed away in Shanghai in 1995. Ms. Gerlach is held in high regard by the Christian community for which she worked.

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Construction work has begun on what will be the largest church in Jiangsu Province. The church in Huaiyin will seat more than 3,000 people, and is being built at a cost of more than three million Yuan. The church will serve Christians throughout the prefecture, according to Rev. Zhang Keyun, general secretary of the Huaiyin Christian Council. It is estimated that there are more than 400,000 Christians in Huaiyin Prefecture, [OVER]
worshipping in 1,200 churches and meeting points. The groundbreaking ceremony was held April 26, and it is expected that the new church will be formally opened next spring. There is currently no proper church building in Huaiyin city, and worship services are being held at a former missionary residence, in extremely cramped conditions.

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The Amity Center for Cultural, Technological and Economic Exchange (ACCTEE) in Nanjing has been established jointly by the Amity Foundation, the Nanjing Office of the China Christian Council, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and the Amity Printing Press. The center's goals are to further cultural and economic projects, to help develop Christian art, and to foster international cultural exchange. The Amity Christian Art Center which was established two years ago will be managed under ACCTEE in the future. Among the projects planned by the center are a collection of Chinese Christian folk songs and the development of an invention for treating industrial sewage.

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Thirty Christian women from China will participate in the Non-Governmental Organizations' Forum taking place in Beijing in September in connection with the UN Conference on Women. According to Rev. Gao Ying, who coordinates preparations for the China Christian Council, the CCC expects to cooperate with the World Council of Churches in the establishment of a Hospitality Center For Women of Faith. The Christian women participating in the NGO forum were named by the Chinese YWCA and the CCC. The groups will prepare for the forum at a conference in Shanghai to be held in July.

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Sichuan Seminary in Chengdu has graduated more than 120 students since it opened in 1984. Students do not only come from Sichuan, but also from neighboring Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces.

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According to Rev. Du Guangyan, president of the Guizhou Christian Council, the 170,000 Christians in the province are mostly found among the national minorities. They are served by 80 pastors, nine of whom are women.

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In Sichuan, there are now about 60 ordained ministers. The number of Christians in the province is estimated at 85,000 to 100,000, with at least as many unbaptized believers. The largest Christian community can be found in the Chongqing prefecture, with more than 210 churches and meeting points.

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News In Brief.../3

One pastor and two teachers were recently ordained in Zhejiang Province, one pastor and four elders in Shaanxi Province, one pastor and two assistant pastors in Jiangsu Province, and two pastors, two teachers and 15 elders in Jiangxi Province.

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The Gansu Provincial Christian Conference was held in April this year. Eighty-six delegates heard the work report of the Province's Christian Council and elected a new provincial church leadership.

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Donghequ Church in Baotou City, Inner Mongolia, has recently established a kindergarten. [ANS]

Book News

A collection of Chinese Christian art has been published by the Amity Christian Art Center. With introductions in English and Chinese, the book includes 52 color plates of paintings, papercuts and calligraphy with Christian themes done by Chinese artists. The paper-bound version can be ordered from the Amity Christian Art Center, 17 Da Jian Yin Xiang, Nanjing 210029, China. A hardcover version is currently in preparation.

A reference book on Christianity in Sichuan Province has been published by the Bashu Publishing Company in Sichuan. Jointly edited by staff from the provincial Religious Affairs Bureau and Sichuan Theological Seminary, the book covers the missionary work of all foreign denominations as well as the indigenous Chinese churches in the province, and describes the development of Christianity in the province since 1949. The very detailed book is an excellent source of information for anyone interested in mission history or the situation of the church today. [ANS]

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Christianity & Modernization - A Chinese Debate

This booklet contains eight contributions by mainland Chinese scholars to a conference jointly organized by the Amity Foundation and the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences in Beijing in October 1994, as well as an introduction by Philip L. Wickeri and Gotthard Oblau. It is available from Amity Hongkong for US$ 5 including postage. Please make checks payable to The Amity Foundation Hong Kong Ltd.
Church Magazine Calls For "Fight" Against Sects And Heresies

In today's China, it is as necessary to fight "fraudulent religions" as it is to eliminate fake goods that have flooded the market in recent years. This is stated in the editorial of the June issue of the church magazine, Tian Peng, which has "Sects And Heresies" as its main theme. According to the magazine, sects and heresies are becoming an ever more burning problem for churches in China, especially in the countryside. The editorial notes that they are not only endangering individual churches and Christian communities, but also society as a whole.

According to the editorial, sects emerge when people have an insufficient knowledge of the Bible, or when someone wants to become sole leader of a religious group. Often, heretic teachings are influenced by feudal superstition as much as by Christianity.

Within the magazine, several articles examine and refute the teachings of different influential heresies, among them Chinese cults like the "Weepers", the "Spirit Spirit Sect" or the "Full Gospel of Blood, Water and Spirit" and foreign sects like the "Unification Church." According to Tian Peng, the "Weepers" claim that only a person who repents while weeping and wailing loudly can be saved. Hua Xuehe, the leader of the "Spirit Spirit Sect" calls himself the First Messiah, with Jesus as the second one. The "Full Gospel of Blood, Water and Spirit" was spread in mainland China by its "apostle", You Kun from Taiwan. Originally a pentecostal sect stressing speaking in tongues, followers in some areas have now taken to undergo three baptisms: by blood, water and the Spirit.

The magazine editors call on church workers to fight against false teachings, but also to work hard to win back believers who have gone astray. The editorial takes great care to make clear that different faith and denominational traditions should be respected and not be confused with sectarian teaching. Similarly, Christian groups that have no relationship with the China Christian Council should not be called sects as long as they adhere to Biblical teaching.[ANS]

Doomsday Cult Outlawed In Shanghai

The "Established King" cult was outlawed in Shanghai on 7 February 1995, after having recruited a large following, especially in the rural areas of the municipality.

Cult founder Wu Yangming, formerly one of the leaders of the Yeller sect, declared himself the "Established King" in 1988. The title is derived from Luke 2:34, where Simeon blesses the baby Jesus and proclaims that "this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel." Wu stated that Jesus was dead, and that now there was only one God, namely himself, the "Established King". Besides him, senior sect leaders were known as "Lord" or "Lord Mother."

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Focus on Sects: Doomsday Cult Outlawed...

The "Established King" is a typical doomsday cult. Wu preached that within the next two years, the earth would be consumed by fire. Only believers in the "Established King" would survive this holocaust. Before this time, the Communist Party was the ultimate enemy, or "Red Dragon", which was trying to devour the true believers. But after the catastrophe, the "Established King" would become the ruler of the world, destroying all other governments.

The cult actively recruited new members in schools, streets, and churches. Rural Christians seem to have been attracted by the group, especially in the Shanghai area, where the local leader was a former evangelist who had been trained at Huadong Seminary. Cult members, some of them only in their teens, were given "spiritual names" and told to leave their families, work or studies, and to go and preach the Gospel of the Established King. Married women joining the cult were forbidden to have sex with their husbands, and unmarried women were barred from marrying.

In a cult practice called "being sought out", more than 100 women were raped or seduced by Wu, supposedly so that they could receive salvation. It was one of Wu's female victims who finally alerted the police to the cult. [ANS]

ANS 95.3.9

Church Magazine Warns Against "Living Christ"

Li Changshou, notorious in Chinese church circles as the former leader of the outlawed "Yeller" sect, has declared himself the "Living Christ." An article in the June issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng, calls for vigilance against his teachings.

According to the magazine, a number of churches recently received notice from Li that he was the "Living Christ" set to become the king whom the Communist Party, as well as emperors and governments the world over, had to follow.

Li Changshou, has been active as a sectarian teacher for more than 30 years. Several years ago, he published a book claiming that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit had been replaced by "another Spirit" of which he was the first follower. Li claimed that the Bible contained only "dead words", and that all churches were "spiritually dead." Life was only to be had in the "other Spirit", and all theology, philosophy and culture were declared to be "the enemy of the Christians."

According to Tian Feng, Li's recent proclamation of himself as the "Living Christ" shows that sects and heresies are not easily repressed, but tend to show up in new forms after being outlawed. The only protection against such teachings is to always remain vigilant and to study the truth well. [ANS]
The churches in Shandong have been shaped by a rich heritage of home-grown Christian movements. Among them, the Jesus Family seems to have had the biggest impact. Amity's Gotthard Oblau reports.

[The first Jesus Family was founded in 1927 in Mazhuang (Tai'an Prefecture) by a young man named Jing Dianying. More Families sprang up quickly. They were self-sufficient egalitarian Christian communities with the distinct features of charismatic churches. Community members denounced their traditional family bonds and lived together sharing fields, houses and livestock. Denounced by the government as feudal superstitious groups, all Jesus Families were disbanded in the early 1950s.]

In today's Shandong, Christians shaped by the Jesus Families are still recognizable. Their spirit and identity stick out among the diversity of denominational backgrounds. They strictly adhere to the rule of tithing and practice the principle of mutual sharing and support on an inter-family and inter-community basis. Their spirit has an enriching impact on the church as a whole.

Consider Rev. Zhao Yabo (Abel Zhao), head of the Lingqu County Christian Council, who learned about the Jesus Family from his father. Like all villagers in China, Zhao is officially registered as a peasant, with a piece of land assigned to him by the village committee under the contract system. At the same time, he is the pastor of a Christian meeting point which the believers built at the back of his private courtyard. The county church office occupies a room on the first floor of his house, just above his mother's living room. Besides being peasant and pastor, Zhao is a trained dentist, while his seat in the local Consultative Conference gives him experience as a politician.

Although there is actually no Jesus Family around, the best of its spirit lives on in a Christian hospital across the street from Zhao's meeting point. The Aide ("Love and Virtue") Hospital, founded 10 years ago, today has 36 doctors and nurses. Medical staff include ophthalmologists, gynaecologists, dentists and nose-and-throat specialists, many of them known all over the county for their skills.

All staff members, from the director down to the cleaning lady, receive the same salary of 80 Yuan, hardly more than pocket money. To make ends meet, they still till their family fields, mostly before the clinic opens at 8:00 and after it closes at 17:00. In addition, all have one free day per week for field work on a rotating basis. Although an ophthalmologist can earn ten times as much in the city, the Aide Hospital has a waiting list for new personnel. The county hospital, on the other hand, has recruitment problems, because only one third of all medical students from the county return after graduation.

Due to the staff's modesty, patient fees can be kept low. Patients come from far and wide. The seriously sick are pushed in on wooden wheel-barrows, a common mode of transport in
China's remote areas. Since there is no medical insurance for poor peasants, many patients have a hard time settling their bills. In such cases payment is deferred, reduced or cancelled.

All staff members at the clinic are Christians. They begin each day with a morning devotion at 5:30 a.m. and conclude with evening prayer at 7:30 p.m. Visitors and patients are welcome to attend, though no pressure is exerted. Jesus posters and Bible verses disclose the clinic's identity, and peasants refer to it as the "Jesus Hospital". Doctors and nurses are used to giving personal witness and counselling their patients spiritually. In this way, countless patients have left the place more than just physically healed, and many have started a new life in Christ.

Since the mid-1980s, Shandong's churches have been training young pastors. Today, young ordained ministers and evangelists can be found all over the province. While this is a healthy development, it also causes great financial headaches for many congregations. Most of the old pastors, forced into "productive" work in the Cultural Revolution, have an independent income from the pensions they receive from secular institutions. But the young must be fully supported by the believers. Though the Christians in Zhangjia, a village near the provincial capital Jinan, are as cash-strapped as most of their brothers and sisters anywhere else, they have found a striking solution. "Our church has its origin in a Jesus Family," said the local pastor. "With this background, we are used to mutual support on a very personal basis. The believers can't afford to pay me a salary. But like everybody else, I have my share of village farmland under the public contract system. The brothers and sisters do most of my farm work, and even at home they lend us a hand. In this way, my wife and I are free for the work in the church."

It is amazing to see that even forty years after the original Families were dissolved, the movement still has such a great and positive impact on the broader church. How do church leaders view the Jesus Families?

Rev. Chen Guangxu, acting president of the Weifang Christian Council in northern Shandong, did not want to idealize the Jesus Family. "In cultural terms, they were part of the old feudal China," he explained. "The family heads were despots whom nobody dared to contradict. Under the influence of the Jesus Family, many people simply abandoned their parents or spouses. The communities had separate dormitories for women and men. Married couples were not allowed to spend time together without special permission from the leader."

But Pastor Chen had a lot of positive things to say as well. He especially admired the missionary zeal of the Jesus Families. Whenever a Family flourished and grew beyond a certain size, small groups were sent out to establish daughter Families elsewhere. "Whatever one may think about the Jesus Family," Chen said emphatically, "one thing is for sure: their people are fervent believers and have an inspiring faith."
Rev. Xu, vice-president of the Shandong Christian Council, disagreed. He recalled how in the early 1950s he visited Jesus Families on behalf of the Three-Self-Movement, barely containing his anger at what he saw. "Inside the communities of the Jesus Family, marriages were arranged against people's will! A twenty-year-old woman committed suicide because she was forced to marry a man of sixty. The community leaders lived in luxury and secured the best food for themselves, while others secretely hoarded vegetables just to survive. In those days, many Family members sent letters to the central church in Nanjing complaining that they could stand it no longer. They were ever so grateful to the Party and the new government for liberating them. These communities kept bragging about Christian love, but in reality they were ruled by force and in a totalitarian way."

In recent years, the movement made headlines. In 1992, police crushed a Jesus Family in Duoyigou, a village in western Shandong. The leader of the community, Zheng Yunsu, was sentenced to 12 years in prison, while his four sons must serve from five to nine years in a coal mining labor camp. Other community members received sentences of two or three years of reform through labor. After their arrest, they were paraded through the streets on an open truck, with signs around their necks reading, "Member of the Jesus Family".

According to Rev. Chen, government authorities and church leaders had tried to persuade the Family to dissolve peacefully before the crackdown. Chinese law prohibits people to move freely from one place to another or to form unauthorized organizations. In the end, the church had to distance itself from the group. According to Chen, its people fell for all kinds of immoral practices. "They sewed all their quilts into one big piece, under which they spent the night all cuddled together - sixty men, women and children. This was their idea of Christian love."

Rev. Xu in Jinan was more forceful. He went to the place three times, he told us. Among the community members were about 20 handicapped elderly people. "I have seen with my own eyes how hard they had to work," Xu exclaimed. "But they got hardly anything to eat. They were exploited by Zheng Yunsu, the family leader, who was wearing the finest clothes under his blue jacket. He lived in a beautiful house erected by the believers. We talked to him and urged him to change. We never interfered in their faith and life of prayer, but their practical ways we just couldn't tolerate. I tried to make clear to them that Jesus came to serve and not to be served. But it was all in vain, they just wouldn't listen. In the end, the government ran out of patience, and they had no friends left, not even within the churches."

And then, at the end of his tirade, Xu added somewhat abruptly: "But one should say that there were also many good people among them. The Jesus Families have brought forth many fine Christians." [ANS]