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**Statement By China Christian Council President Dr. Wenzao Han On China's So-Called "Religious Persecution", 20th June 1997**

Recently, some people overseas have been publishing articles repeatedly in the press, attacking China's religious policy and making up incidents of so-called "religious persecution". They have especially seized upon the recent detention by the Chinese government of a so-called "famous religious personality", Xu Yongze, employing gross exaggeration and turning this into some sort of "proof" of the Chinese government's "religious persecution". They also assert that Xu Yongze has already been sentenced to death and call on the international community to apply pressure on the Chinese government and thereby carry out a kind of "rescue". According to what we understand, Xu Yongze has been detained under investigation, but saying he has been condemned to death is pure rumour-mongering.

Why has Xu Yongze been detained? What kind of person is he? In the early eighties, Xu Yongze split from the "Shouters" sect and illegally built up the so-called "Full-SCOPE" heretical church. He claims that crying is the only true mark of the Spirit,
that people should cry when they pray, cry when they meet, cry when they worship. He once said something to the effect that "You need to cry and sob out loud, for only then can you be reborn to salvation." He also wantonly made speeches about the end of the world being nigh and disaster imminent, thereby confusing and poisoning people's minds. He would bring people together illegally so as to stir up his gullible listeners and encourage them not to continue with their daily work and lives but instead gather them together every day in one place to cry hysterically. This resulted in many people losing their minds and losing control of their lives, causing great harm to their mental and physical health and seriously affecting the life and work of the people around them. The Bible teaches us that "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33) and "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). As for his declaration concerning the "end of the world", this is exactly in line with other false heretical teachings around the world at this present time. These actions by Xu Yongze completely depart from Biblical teaching and the Christian path of truth, and are simply not Christian at all. In recent years, his activities have grown increasingly more unscrupulous and have intensified, posing an even greater threat to society. Thus, in March, Public Security authorities in Zhengzhou City, Henan Province took Xu Yongze in to detention in full accordance with the law as laid down in the "Regulations For The Management Of The Registration Of Social Organizations" and the "Regulations On Punishments For Infringements Of Public Order" of the People's Republic of China. Could this kind of person ever be called a "famous religious personality"? As to his detention, it is by no means some form of persecution on the part of the Chinese government but only a routine criminal case. This past year, the US and the Japanese governments have both taken severe legal measures against the heretical Branch Davidian and Aum Shinrikyo sects respectively, employing helicopters and armoured cars in order to intervene. Why then can China not carry out the detention and investigation of Xu Yongze? Why is a double standard being applied to pass judgment on certain incidents? It is really as an American friend commented recently, "If a Christian breaks the law in the US, is detained and sentenced, then this is said to be the 'system of the law at work', yet if this kind of thing takes place in China then people say it is 'Christians being persecuted'." Where is the justice in this kind of logic?

Every group and individual, including religious groups and believers, are part of a larger community and must operate within the limits of the constitution and laws of that community. There is no doubt that in order to enjoy the rights of a citizen, groups and individuals must assume legal responsibility for the country. Every country in the world operates like this, and China is no exception. According to experience, we can only enjoy the security of the law and the rights bestowed by the law if we conform to the law. Otherwise, we must receive the penalty of the law. A Christian's behaviour must be in accordance with Bible teaching and also in keeping with the law. Therefore, we advocate that a good Christian should also be a good citizen."
(ANS) According to a statement recently issued by the CCC, some foreigners have been attacking Chinese Christianity, and have called the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement an "organisation set up by the government for the control of the development of Christianity." The China Christian Council statement points out that such attacks are completely contrary to facts and maliciously misrepresent the situation of Chinese Christians today.

The statement points out that before 1949 "colonialists, imperialists and foreign missionaries" made use of each others' services in order to carry out acts of aggression and oppression against China and the Chinese people. The Chinese people hated these acts and were also forced to sign unfair treaties. As a result they came to see the Christianity which promoted and received the protection of such aggression as very much a "foreign religion". Hence, although China was the place where Western mission boards channelled most of their resources and missionary personnel in the 100 years or so before 1949, there were only 700,000 Christians in China on the eve of Liberation.

The desire for self-government, self-support and self-propagation grew up as a patriotic response on the part of Chinese Christians to the actions of their Western missionary counterparts. They advocated that the Chinese church should stand on its own feet and be run by Chinese Christians themselves. The founding of the People's Republic of China was a symbol of the Chinese people throwing off foreign dominance and standing up on their own. This proved an inspiration to Chinese Christians, who gathered together to proclaim their support for the new China and to appeal for the church to be administered by Chinese Christians themselves. The costs for running the church should be borne by Chinese Christians themselves, as should the task of evangelism within China. Within a couple of years of this "Christian Manifesto", 400,000, or more than half of all Chinese Christians at the time, had put their names to it. Therefore, the Chinese Christian "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" can be seen historically as an initiative on the part of Chinese Christians themselves.

The statement goes on to say that, in the 40 years of the Three-Self movement, Christianity in China has been something which Chinese believers have managed for themselves. This has brought numerous benefits for the building up of the faith in China: Firstly, it has changed the face of Christianity in China, no longer being a "foreign religion" controlled by outsiders. As a result, there are now 10,000,000 Christians in China today, more than fourteen-times the number in 1949. Secondly, the movement has greatly raised the sense of responsibility that Chinese believers have toward their own church. There are now over 12,000 churches and over 25,000 meeting points within China. Figures so far for this decade show that over 600 new churches are being built each year. Nearly 10,000,000 Bibles were printed during the period 1992-96, and 800,000 copies of the Hymnal edited by the CCC in 1983 have already been published. Thirdly, by throwing off the yoke of different and divided foreign mission boards and following Three-Self, the Chinese church has managed to achieve mutual understanding, mutual respect and a unity of worship within the church which is rarely
seen outside of China. This is in accordance with Biblical teaching that the church should be "one". Finally, Christians in China have good relations with other sectors of society. Between 1992 and 1994, Chinese Christians made up 20,000 of those selected overall as "model citizens". This has proven to be a good witness to the Gospel within China's socialist society.

As well as gaining the support and approval of believers and non-believers within China, the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" has also received sympathy and understanding from certain notable church leaders abroad. The CCC statement goes on to say that big changes are constantly taking place in today's world. In this context, some Westerners are trying to revive the old historical dream of using Christianity to carry out acts of colonialism, imperialism and aggression against China. They want to use Christianity as a tool to oppose China's socialist political system. There is a small number of people who recklessly attack the Chinese church's support of "three-self", who spread rumours, distort facts to the point of pure fabrication, concoct wild stories and thus seek to deceive overseas believers. As the statement points out, Chinese Christians are resolutely opposed to such behaviour. [755 words]

RAB Chief Says China Respects And Protects Religious Freedom

(ANS) "In recent years, some Westerners have turned a blind eye to the fact that there are hundreds of millions of religious people and thousands of religious organizations in China which are engaging in normal religious activities." So said Ye Xiaowen, director of the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau in a speech to reporters on the issue of religious freedoms on June 9, 1997. This speech was later reported in China Daily on June 11, 1997.

Ye points out that the Chinese constitution provides for the freedom of religion as a basic right of China's citizens. Article 36 states that "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief... no State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion... the State protects normal religious activities... no one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State... religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination."

Ye goes on to elaborate on these rights of religious freedom as enshrined in the constitution. He points out that whilst enjoying freedom of religious belief, individuals and organizations must also fulfill their obligation to abide by the law and not to adversely interfere in the education, judiciary and state administration of the country. They must protect the interests of other people just as they expect their own interests to be protected. Furthermore, religious organizations should be independent: the Chinese government and religious groups pledge not to interfere in the religious affairs of foreign countries and by the same token will not allow outsiders to interfere in the affairs of Chinese religious groups either.
Various regulations and guidelines have been introduced in recent years to strengthen and clarify laws on religious freedom, dealing concretely with the management of religious activities of foreigners within China, the management of places of worship and so on. In drafting such laws and regulations on religion, the Chinese government has repeatedly solicited opinions from various sectors within society, especially from religious groups, and thus gained widespread support for these laws once they are finally drafted and passed. Ye points out how it stands to reason that, as a type of social organization, places of worship can be expected to follow registration procedures in accordance with the law in order to be recognized as legitimate and thus receive the protection of the law. In effect, groups who seek to enjoy the protection of the law should themselves operate within the law.

Ye describes how responsibility for upholding religious freedoms and implementing laws in this area rests with the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council and religious bureaus at various government levels. Their work is backed up by Article 251 of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, which states explicitly that "serious cases in which any government employee illegally deprives citizens of their rights to religious belief and infringes upon ethnic customs and practices, may result in custody or a sentence of two years in prison."

Turning to the political arena, Ye mentions how religious leaders hold seats in the People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference at different levels in various parts of China. Bishop K.H.Ting is now honorary president of the China Christian Council and also holds the position of vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, therefore occupying a position as a state leader.

Achievements have also been made by China's religious communities in the field of foreign relations. Ye quotes several examples, such as friendly visits to China by two successive Archbishops of Canterbury and the China Christian Council's formal acceptance into the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1991. Ye stresses that China's door is always open to foreigners who are friendly to China, who abide by China's laws and respect Chinese religious organizations. However, when the Chinese government does crack down legitimately on the activities of a small number of cults which threaten social and public interests and order, some Westerners with their own ulterior motives routinely call such measures "persecution of religious people" and "intolerance of religion". Ye points out that, in truth, since the 1980's, a group of cults have formed in some places around China - some spreading to China from abroad and others having grown and developed on Chinese soil. He goes on to say how these quasi-religious organizations, though small in number, have greatly harmed Chinese society. They distort religious doctrines, spread heresy and incite people to violate the nation's laws with the intention of overthrowing the government.

Informed observers have commented that Ye's statement comes in response to recent reports about the detention of Xu Yongze and the activities of certain overseas religious groups in attempting to curtail Most Favored Nation (MFN) privileges to China. [840 words]
CCC/TSPM Heads Reaffirm Policy Of Religious Freedom

(ANS) Dr. Wenzao Han, President of the China Christian Council (CCC), and Mr. Luo Guanzong, Chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) held a press conference in Beijing on July 7, and reaffirmed China's policy of religious freedom, thereby countering recent attacks on Chinese religious policy from overseas groups, especially from the United States.

"There is no general persecution in China," Han affirmed. He added that the implementation of religious policy is still problematic in some areas due to misunderstandings or even prejudices on the part of some grassroots officials.

In a prepared statement, Han and Luo also noted that there are currently more than ten million Protestant Christians in China. These believers worship in more than 12,000 churches and 25,000 meeting points across the country. 64% of the churches have been newly built since 1980. The CCC President and TSPM Chairman pointed out that 510,000 new Christians joined the church in the period 1994 and 1995, and the largest membership group within the church is under the age of 40.

As well as information on church growth, Dr. Han and Mr. Luo also drew attention to the fact that there are now 17 theological institutes throughout China, including four Bible schools. This can be contrasted with the fact that there was only one theological seminary in the whole of China in 1981. Over the past ten years, 3,200 students have already graduated from these institutes and there are currently 1,296 students enrolled in theological study programs. Han and Luo admit that these figures for theological training are still not enough to keep up with the demands of a fast-growing church membership.

The two Protestant leaders criticized "Bible smuggling" and proselytizing on the part of certain groups and individuals overseas. They pointed out that these not only contravene Chinese law but are also damaging to the church within China. Han and Luo pointed out that the Chinese church itself is trying hard to provide for believers' spiritual needs, and to this end has already printed 18 million Bibles in the last 18 years, with 3.3 million Bibles being printed in 1996 alone. This therefore makes China the largest Bible printing and distributing country in the world. [375 words]

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Chinese Church Magazine Publishes Special Edition On Return Of Hong Kong To Chinese Sovereignty

(ANS) In order to mark the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, devoted a large proportion of its July issue to celebrating this event. It included articles on the history of the territory and the background to the handover, as well as information about the people, society and church situation in Hong Kong. The magazine also published comments from various church leaders around China, expressing their own sentiments and reflections on the change of sovereignty in Hong Kong.

In its July editorial, Tian Feng commented that there are many differences between mainland and Hong Kong churches in terms of the societies in which they exist, their organizational structure, the forms of their activities and also their function within their respective societies as a whole. According to the Basic Law, the new constitution of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, relationships between mainland and Hong Kong churches will be developed on the basis of the "Three Mutualities", namely neither church being subordinate to the other, neither church interfering in the affairs of the other and mutual respect between the two churches.

The editorial goes on to say that putting this policy into effect means that the mainland church completely respects and supports the Hong Kong churches in preserving their organisational structure, their running of church-affiliated schools, hospitals and welfare organs and their maintenance of contacts with church organizations overseas. Just as the mainland church has no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of the church in Hong Kong, so it hopes that Hong Kong churches will uphold the mainland church's right to uphold the Three-Self principle, be independent and self-directing and maintain its current organizational structure and policy of running the church well. Mainland churches hope that Hong Kong churches will not attempt any form of interference.

The editorial points cut that, in the past decade or so, exchanges between churches on the mainland and in Hong Kong have flourished and grown. There have been visits and exchanges of experience in the areas of pastoral work, theological education and publishing, all of which have increased understanding between the two churches. The editorial concludes that both churches have their own call to serve God and be a witness in their own surroundings and according to their own conditions, yet also must continue to draw closer to each other as believers who share the same race, faith and love for God. [424 words]
Interview with Dr. Wenzao Han, President of the China Christian Council

Recently, Dr. Wenzao Han, President of the China Christian Council, came to Hong Kong to attend the opening of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly convening in Hong Kong between 8 - 16 July. ANS editor Ian Groves spoke with Dr. Han about the assembly and about relations between churches in Hong Kong and mainland China.

ANS: Recently, you were asked to bring greetings to the Lutheran World Federation Assembly from the church in China. What did you tell the assembly at that time?

First of all, I conveyed the greetings of the China Christian Council and the more than ten million Protestant Christians in mainland China to all the participants of the Assembly. I also expressed deep appreciation to the LWF leadership for their wisdom and courage in holding the Assembly in Hong Kong only eight days after Hong Kong’s return to the People’s Republic of China.

As the LWF is celebrating its 50th anniversary, I mentioned to the delegates how influential Martin Luther is in China, and explained how “Here I Stand”, a book about Martin Luther, has been published by a secular publisher in Nanjing. This book enjoys a wide circulation within both the CCC distribution network and within state book stores, and is already entering its sixth edition.

ANS: What significance does the Lutheran World Federation Assembly have for Hong Kong and mainland churches?

As I mentioned in my address, Chinese Christians are happy to welcome the first Lutheran World Federation Assembly to be held in Asia and on Chinese soil.

The Assembly shows the solidarity of the Lutheran churches the world over with Christians in mainland China and Christians in Hong Kong, China. Furthermore, it shows the confidence on the part of the LWF leadership in the socio-political situation in Hong Kong under the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China.

I also reminded the Assembly that although the church in China upholds the Three-Self principle in order to achieve a Chinese selfhood for our church, "self-isolation" is not one of the three selfs. Selfhood can only be meaningful in the context of the Church Universal. I asked for the continued prayers, concern and support of the LWF for our small but growing church. We already have a strong bond with the Lutheran churches and earnestly expect this bond to be further strengthened in years to come.

ANS: What do you think the Chinese church can learn from the world Lutheran community?

In my address, I expressed our appreciation for the solid theological work the LWF has carried out in past decades, to the benefit of Christians in China and elsewhere.

The main theme of this Assembly is "In Christ - Called to Witness". This theme has two parts: "Identity" and "Witness", although these parts are actually inseparable and make a whole. At our Sixth National Chinese Christian Conference held earlier this year we also put forward a slogan: "A good Christian should also be a good citizen". As we understand it, being a good Christian is our identity, being a good citizen is our witness. Only by being a good citizen can we give a good witness.

In our understanding of "Identity" and "Witness", we can see that we are thinking along the same lines as the Lutheran churches. We will watch closely how Lutheran churches worldwide come to understand and develop this theme, especially on the theological side.

ANS: Now that the Handover has taken place, how do you see the relationship between Hong Kong and mainland churches developing in the future? In what ways would you like to see the Hong Kong churches contributing to the development of the church on the mainland?

I mentioned to the delegates at the LWF assembly how it is our conviction that the churches in Hong Kong should continue to be governed by Hong Kong Christians. I also pointed out that membership in the Three-Self
Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council will not be open to churches in Hong Kong. However, I expect the good relationship we already have will be further expanded, and that partnership and cooperation in Christian work will be further strengthened and deepened according to the principles of mutual non-subordination, mutual non-interference and mutual respect.

Notice that amongst these "three mutualities" there is no "mutual non-exchange". We should have exchange. It is understandable that Christians in Hong Kong will feel a heavy burden to carry out ministry and work in mainland China. However, if Hong Kong churches want to do such work in China then first of all, they should consult with us. Secondly, any kind of work, projects or cooperation must be carried out according to our church's agenda. If our two agendas can coincide then that is just wonderful and marvellous, and we praise the Lord for this. Thirdly, when we are cooperating on projects, we should be sure to carry them out legally, openly and honestly. I say honestly especially because there are groups, to be frank, who do not act in an honest, open way. Fourthly, we welcome partnership in ministry from the churches in Hong Kong, but I also want to remind Hong Kong Christians not to forget that Hong Kong itself is a mission field. Only 5% of the population here are Protestant Christians, with the figure standing at 10% if we include Catholic believers. So, there is plenty of work to be done in Hong Kong itself.

**ANS:** Have you been able to meet with any local Hong Kong church leaders during this trip to Hong Kong?

On the very day of my arrival I met with the leaders of the Hong Kong Chinese Churches Union, which have about 200 member churches now. During my conversation with them some people shared with me how they had changed their attitude toward the China Christian Council after communicating with us over the last two or three years. Before then, they had some worries and concerns about the CCC, and also some misunderstandings. They told me that even now, some people ask whether sermons given on the mainland need to be approved beforehand by government officials. After they went to the mainland, they were asked to preach and they could preach freely. Many of them never write out their sermon texts in full, they just have some ideas and speak freely. So, how could such sermons be examined beforehand anyway? In this way, they got to know the real situation.

While talking with the Hong Kong Chinese Church Union, I also expressed thanks for their support for the Jiangsu Bible School in Nanjing, where they have contributed very generously. I invited them to come and see the school building when it is completed. We also discussed some further mutual exchange programs, and I suggested pulpit exchanges. I think it is good to share what we have learned from the Bible and the insights we have each been given. We would also like to give Hong Kong Christians the chance to know just what messages mainland pastors are preaching. Are they preaching politics? No, of course not. Their messages are very Biblical. This is also good to promote mutual relationships.

**ANS:** Which other groups have you met with while you were here?

The Board of the YMCA in Hong Kong, also the General Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council, Dr. Tso Man-keung, and the Friends of Amity, including Bishop Kwong and the two other Anglican bishops here. We will also meet with our United Bible Society friends and some overseas church leaders.

**ANS:** You have visited Hong Kong many times in the past, but this is the first time for you to come here since the Handover of sovereignty. Does this trip therefore have any special personal significance for you?

My coming here at this time enables me to see with my own eyes what Hong Kong is like after the Handover. And what do I find? It is very peaceful, very calm, and still very prosperous. When I met with the Friends of Amity here the other evening they were very positive about the situation here. Of course, I know that some people still worry, but on the whole most people feel positive. And I always invite Christians from overseas to rejoice with us because of the Handover, as it symbolizes the end of colonialism which in turn reveals the justice of God. So, I invite everyone to rejoice with us and give thanks for this.
Interview with Dr. Tso Man-kong, General Secretary, Hong Kong Christian Council

ANS editor, Ian Groves, recently spoke with the general secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council about relations between churches in Hong Kong and mainland China.

**ANS:** How do you see the relationship developing in the years ahead between the Hong Kong Christian Council and the China Christian Council?

I am very optimistic about this relationship. Actually, we have been in relationship with the CCC for a number of years since 1979. The Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC) was one of the first Christian bodies in Hong Kong to re-establish relations with the CCC. Back then, many churches and Christians in Hong Kong questioned this, asking why the HKCC wanted to establish relations with churches in a "Communist" country, using this as a label to scare people. Nevertheless, we had confidence and we realized it was a necessity to rebuild this relationship. During the past 18 years we are gratified to see this relationship deepening in a very positive and constructive way. There has been more mutual understanding, more mutual projects and exchange programs on both sides. So I believe that now after the handover the relationship between the HKCC and the CCC will deepen even more and become more inclusive.

**ANS:** Could you mention a few specific areas where there has already been co-operation between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese churches?

There are a number of areas of co-operation between Hong Kong churches and the mainland, for example in relief work. Whenever there is a flood or an earthquake on the mainland, Hong Kong churches always go to the front line to do whatever they can. We also have other programs such as rural development in different parts of China.

In all our programs, we always seek mutual understanding and consultation with the church in China so that the programs will not just be one-sided. The CCC and provincial Christian councils work with us on an equal basis. However, some church groups in Hong Kong do not adopt the same approach and they take the initiative to start their own programs with or without understanding from China, especially from the CCC or the provincial Christian councils involved. In the HKCC, we emphasize mutual understanding more, so that our programs will be based on mutual consultation before we begin them.

Of course, we also have mutual visits between the mainland and Hong Kong churches. In the past, these were confined to the leadership level but now they take place on every level, including youth, women and laity, also between whole congregations.

So, relationships and programs between churches in Hong Kong and China are flourishing and will be further expanded in the future. I would hope that the churches in Hong Kong would be sensitive, and that we would always seek understanding from China, especially from the church in China.

**ANS:** How could Hong Kong churches contribute toward the growth of the church in China, for example, in the area of theological training?

Church growth is so fast in China, we thank God for that. But the training of theologians and church workers may not be able to keep up with the pace of church growth in China at the moment. Given this situation, certain discrepancies appear: the development of certain cults, even heresies. So, I hope that in the future, the churches in Hong Kong and China will draw closer in order to develop some theological training together. I do not say that Hong Kong will train church leaders for China, I merely hope that the church in China would train church leaders in Hong Kong also, so that a kind of "mutual training" is set up. This is one area which we can develop together. Church people in Hong Kong need to know more about the church in China, the history of the church in China, and the way of pastoral ministry and the theology of the church in China.

**ANS:** In which specific ways do you think the Chinese churches can make a contribution towards the development of the churches in Hong Kong?
Each time I visit the church in China I always consider it a kind of personal pilgrimage for my own spiritual growth. This is because I admire so many of the senior pastors in China who were able to hold on to their faith even to the extent of being sentenced to prison or to labor camps. They have suffered for their faith and for their church - I admire this and I hope that this kind of spirituality would not just exist in China but would also take root in Hong Kong as well. I encourage Hong Kong pastors to humble ourselves and learn from the personal and spiritual experiences of senior pastors who have gone through difficulties in China in the past. This would be a good education for us and also a source of spiritual nourishment for many. In this way, we not only have something to offer to China but I truly believe that the church in China has the treasure of its experience to offer to Hong Kong.

ANS: What would you say to those Christians in Hong Kong who still have some concerns about the future of Hong Kong and the churches here?

I would understand this, as we all live under the shadow of our past history. We all know what the Cultural Revolution was - many people suffered at that time, not only Christians, also high-level communist party members, even Deng Xiaoping himself. We all have to live with the painful history of our past. So, now that Hong Kong is under the sovereignty of China, people wonder whether the church in Hong Kong will suffer. I can understand this kind of concern, but times have changed. Hong Kong has changed, China has also changed in the past five or ten years too, maybe even faster than Hong Kong. The China of today is not the China of 1969 and the Cultural Revolution. The leadership in China, to say nothing of the average citizen in China, will not allow China to go back to the past. So, now is a time for us to look forward to the future rather than to dwell on our past history. Nevertheless, we do need to be very cautious that, as we look forward, we must also not allow the past to repeat itself. Given the broad trend of development in Hong Kong and in China at the moment, we need to free and liberate ourselves from the burden of our past history. I believe that this is a new birth, a new beginning of a new era.

As far as Hong Kong people are concerned, our future is one of "One country, two systems". We want to ensure that Hong Kong people will govern Hong Kong. The church and Christians in particular need to be actively involved in the ever-changing situation in Hong Kong to ensure that the principles and promises in the Basic Law do not just remain theories on paper but are also implemented in reality. This will not only bring benefit to the people of Hong Kong but also to the people in mainland China as well. So I have full confidence in the people of Hong Kong - their integrity, their experience, their intellectual capacity, not to mention their financial and material resources. I believe that Hong Kong people are ready to govern themselves after 150 years under the British. I thank God for this.

From Chaos To Order : Churches Around Wuhan Revisited

(ANS) Few believers, a lack of church buildings, anarchy and chaos in running church affairs and superstitions practices common. This describes the situation encountered by Pastor Mei Chuan ten years ago on a tour of churches in the rural suburbs and counties surrounding Wuhan, capital city of Hubei province. From April to August of last year, Pastor Mei, together with three co-workers from the municipal Christian Council, repeated this tour of the rural churches around Wuhan. In a recent article in Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, Mei describes the most impressive changes which have taken place in the church in these areas over the past decade.

The biggest difference Mei noticed immediately is a large increase in the number of believers in the area. 10 years previously, there were only around 2,500 people taking part in church activities, whereas this figure has now climbed to 18,778. 14,423

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of these believers are baptized. Unfortunately, Mei notes that the number of church workers in the area is far from adequate to cope with the needs of this large number of believers.

Mei comments how the organization of the church in the Wuhan district has moved from virtual chaos to order. Ten years ago, the church was in a state of near anarchy, with no co-ordination of work, efforts or responsibility. Today, the area has a total of 83 church venues, 46 of which have already registered with local authorities and with many of the remainder in the process of applying for registration. Once registered, churches are able to link up with the local religious affairs authorities and with each other, providing a network which thus facilitates communication and the co-ordination of church administrative work. Registered churches have also been formulating church orders for the running of their affairs and are thus now developing a habit of doing things by rules.

Mei recalls that ten years ago there were only six special buildings in the whole area which the church could use for its activities. Today this total has increased to 60. 15 of these buildings are either not yet registered or are in the process of registering. Having specific places where church affairs can be handled has proven beneficial to the running of the church as a whole. Most of the money for church buildings in the area came from donations by believers themselves, along with a certain amount of support from the Wuhan Christian Council. As living standards and income levels improve for rural believers in the suburbs of the city, believers today are even able to plan to improve and enlarge their church buildings.

Mei comments that, over the past few years, the municipal Christian Council has been holding many different kinds of church worker training classes. As a result of these, the vast majority of believers now have an understanding of religious policy and can differentiate clearly between normal religious activities and illegal ones, between true Christian faith and feudal superstition. For example, in the year 1995-96, various illegal sects and groups sent people to areas around Wuhan under the guise of religion in order to carry out their illegal activities. However, believers were quickly able to spot the heresies these groups were spreading and were also able to report illegal activities swiftly to the local Public Security Bureau, thanks to their improved awareness of religious policy.

In general, Mei has noticed that the standard of religious belief and activities in the area has improved greatly. Ten years ago, rural churches were plagued by a lot of irregular and superstitious behaviour among believers. Churches would appoint special people to heal the sick and cast out spirits, while some people would shout and call out during meetings as if possessed, kicking their feet, rolling about the floor and trembling violently. Others would spread strange visions and dreams. This is not in accordance with the Christian faith or Biblical teaching. Now Mei can see that, through many years of teaching, attention to spiritual growth and a general improvement in believers' educational level, these abnormal phenomenon have largely been eradicated.
Mei concludes by commenting that the church around Wuhan has recognized the importance of loving and supporting its country and its own people. Believers now see this as a powerful witness to the faith and a guarantee that the church will continue to flourish. Citing letters from local cadres and people, Mei shows that Christians contribute a positive witness to the local community and set an example by paying their grain taxes on time, by carrying out family planning policies, by keeping up harmonious and peaceful relations with neighbours and within their families, by never being seen to fight or shout or swear at others, by supporting the cause of education, and by changing old feudal habits and customs among society in general. [815 words]

Two Young Graduates Transform Mountain Region Church

(ANS) Chong Yang county, with a population of around 5,000 people, lies in a remote mountainous region of southern Hubei province. In 1992 the county had 12 church meeting points but, because of a lack of pastoral workers and organizational structure, internal disputes within these meeting points frequently arose. Many believers didn't fully understand the truths of the Gospel and some saw this as a chance to introduce heresy and feudal superstition into the church, thereby confusing believers. Church leaders would preach on the Bible as they pleased, twisting the truth and calling on the Lord's name casually and without reverence.

Such was the situation which greeted two young graduates from Zhongnan Theological Seminary in Wuhan when they came to work in the county five years ago. June's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, reports on how the two graduates set about facing these difficulties and turning the church situation around in Chong Yang.

The two young graduates realized that the first thing they needed to do was set up some kind of organizational and administrative framework for the church in the area as a whole. They immediately encountered resistance from some highly vocal believers in the area who claimed that the church is "universal" and "invisible" and therefore should not be organized by people. These believers censured the two graduates and put a lot of obstacles in their way. The two graduates knew that they couldn't be dragged in to local power games in order to achieve their aims. Instead, they visited all the meeting points in the area to assess the situation and to explain the need for organization if the church were to be run well. They tried to create enthusiasm for the idea of unity and of putting an end to in-fighting between groups.

Finally, after a year's hard work, a Chong Yang County Christian Three-Self Preparatory Group was formed in October 1993 with 21 members selected from amongst all the meeting points. Through consultation, the group divided the county into six large areas for church administrative purposes and selected six workers from among themselves to be responsible for each area. This was a major step in uniting the believers in the county and allowing the church to be run well according to religious
policy. Believers came to realize that they all had a responsibility in running the church, and gradually the differences and disagreements between groups disappeared as believers pulled together with this common aim. The county’s "Three-Self Preparatory Group" finally changed formally in to a full "Three-Self Patriotic Movement Association" and a local Christian Council was also established.

After moving from chaos to collective self-administration in this way, it was found that the number of people who were joining the church increased daily, but there were few workers to pastor these new converts. In the grassroots churches many believers didn't even understand the basics of faith. This formed the second major problem to be tackled by the two young graduates. New church workers were desperately needed but, with few teachers and no money, the county could hardly run a training course to meet this need.

In the end, the county received help from Zhongnan Theological Seminary which sent teachers to the county to help out. During the Lunar New Year holidays of 1994 a one-month short training course began, supported greatly by believers within the county who contributed daily essentials such as money, food, grain and wood for fuel.

Over sixty people from the local area took part in the course, young and old, and from many different educational backgrounds. They all crammed into a 30m² rented room for classes and their day lasted from 6am to 10pm, with the better-educated students helping to coach those with less education, and none setting foot outside of the classroom except to eat and sleep.

After the course finished the county Three-Self Association wanted to organize a second training course for the following year. It also selected and sent over 30 young workers to take part in a six-month training course organized by the provincial Christian Council. Through such training programs, the county finally developed a team which could take on the pastoral responsibility for the believers within the area.

A third problem faced by these two young graduates was that there was not a single decent church building in the whole county. The county had once had a 500m² church which was converted into a kindergarten by the county education committee in 1982 without any agreement with the church. The church sought out the relevant authorities several times in order to negotiate compensation for this but failed. Believers in the county town had then managed to scrape together enough money to buy a dilapidated old factory building with a view to using it for worship but, in fact, most believers preferred to meet in private homes. However, because the number of believers was constantly increasing, the house meeting points couldn't hold them all any longer and the need for a brand new church building became evident. However, the church had only 1,000 yuan (US$1 = 8.1 yuan) in savings and also no money-making venture of its own - nowhere near enough to even buy a plot of land, let alone build anything on it.
1995 turned out to be a crucial year for the Chongyang church. Through contributions from many different believers, many grassroots meeting points in the area built their own meeting halls. The county Three-Self Association then led believers from all over the county to build a central church building and donate the money and labour for this.

All the believers in the area were encouraged to donate toward this project and, on hearing of the need, money came flooding in. Within half a month, the church had collected 10,000 yuan, enough to buy a plot of land with even some money left over to go toward the building. After the building work started, donations kept coming in from far and wide, even from Christians in the furthest and poorest parts of the county who, in all likelihood, would never visit the new church once it was built. All the wood for the windows and the doors of the new church were donated by the believers themselves and all in all 10,000 people helped with the work, meaning that only half of the jobs involved needed to be contracted out, saving around 10,000 yuan in labour costs. Soon the work will be finished on the church building and it will be the biggest church within the province built entirely from funds donated from believers themselves. [1122 words]

97.8.3

Keeping The Spiritual Fire Alive Among Grassroots Churches

(ANS) Spring Festival is usually a quiet time of year for farmers in China and thus a precious time to rest. Around the time of Spring Festival this year, Jiangxi Provincial Christian Council received many telegrams and letters from rural believers all over the province, eager for the authorities to send people to come and teach them during the holiday period. Despite chronic staff shortages of its own, the Provincial CC sent out several of its best workers to areas of need in order to hold training classes there. Among them was Pastor Xie Zhu'en, who visited four rural counties in the north of the province over a period of 30 days within the holiday period. He talks of his experience in the June edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church.

Zhu comments that the number of believers within grassroots rural churches is rising sharply, but the number of workers to care for them are few. Therefore, many people come to faith but then scatter, and the church has few resources available to help them stay within the fold. Given this situation, many people do not receive adequate teaching and are thus easily pulled towards heretical ideas. Furthermore, Zhu reports, local cadres often do not understand religious policy fully and thus do not always act in accordance with official policy when dealing with religious affairs. This can cause many believers to fall away out of fear.

On arriving in one grassroots village, Zhu saw that many of the believers there had no understanding of the Bible and were not even sure whether or not they were saved. Furthermore, many people did not even know how to pray, and their faith has rather shallow roots, founded mostly on incidences of faith healing. Therefore, Zhu and his team had to concentrate most of their teaching on explaining the basic truths of Christian faith to these people. As they listened, many believers left the meeting in order to fetch others so that they too could learn.
Since church workers are few in Jiangxi province, they rarely have the time to go to rural areas. As a result, Zhu notes, rural believers themselves carry the responsibility of spreading the gospel in country areas and under such circumstances it is very difficult to avoid erroneous teachings being developed and then passed on. Zhu comments that once such false teachings are accepted as the truth it is very hard to correct this. As an example Zhu cites one county he visited, where he discovered that 90% of the believers there belong to the so-called "Wilderness Sect". This sect preaches that those who associate with the Three-Self church are not saved and that the Three-Self church itself is a "big whore". Therefore, these believers have a strict rule that they never associate with anyone having anything to do with the Three-Self movement, and those who attend Three-Self services are punished and forced to undergo self-criticism.

Such attitudes make it very difficult for Zhu and his team to do any work in rural counties in Jiangxi. In Yongxiu county all the believers ran away initially when Zhu arrived. Zhu made an appointment to attend one of the believers' meetings there but when he arrived, all the elders of the church had hidden themselves away and leaving only a group of old people who couldn't read, sing or preach. Therefore, Zhu had to take over the whole service for them.

Zhu responded by setting up a training course in the county and in the last few days, five or six people from the local sect attended, three of them elders within their church. Zhu reports how, in the beginning, they said nothing but later, as they listened, they slowly changed their opinions of the team and initiated contact with them. Zhu explained to them how Three-Self isn't a substitute for faith or a faith in itself, it is simply a principle for running the church well. He also pointed out that the registration of meeting points with the authorities was simply something that should be done as good citizens and members of a larger community. Eventually, these messages got through. The believers explained that they had initially held many prejudices against Zhu's group and were thus on their guard against them. However, after hearing the group's teaching, they realized that it was in complete accordance with the Bible and that they had even learned some truths they had never encountered before. Zhu describes how, after this, the believers in the county became willing to co-operate with his team and work to clear up prejudices and misunderstandings in order to help bring unity within the church.

Zhu comments that the most important work within the Chinese church today is to keep the "spiritual fire" burning within believers' hearts. He comments how churches in Jiangxi are poor and weak, with proportionately few believers, a lack of teachers and with little progress in the carrying out of government religious policy within the province. Nevertheless, Zhu has still witnessed incredible scenes there, such as in Sidu Township in Xiushui county where a training group was set up. Believers, many of them young, came from all over to attend. They rose at 5am to pray for two hours while kneeling on a mud floor, crying to God on behalf of their country, their church and the cause of the Gospel. When classes were over for the day, they would sing hymns, clap and accompany their singing on bells and drums and with dancing. On the last day of the
class, 59 believers were to be baptized. Still in the depths of winter, the water in the church's baptistry was freezing cold, yet the believers entered it joyfully one by one. Zhu sees evidence in all of this for the moving of God's spirit within the church, and this is something he feels the church must not lose. [1001 words]

**ANS Focus: Qinghai Province**

**Qinghai Churches Isolated And Weak.**

(ANS) Qinghai province lies in a remote area of northwest China and has an area of 721,000 km² with a population of only 4.27 million. One quarter of the people in Qinghai are Tibetans and the rest belonging to some 30 or more different nationality groups.

Outside the provincial capital churches in Qinghai are few and far between, says the President of the Qinghai Christian Council, Rev. Meng Zhaohan. There are about 30,000 Christians in the province, but only four churches outside of Xining. The province's three ordained pastors, only one of whom is relatively young, all reside in the provincial capital, as does the only ordained teacher, a young woman. Four ordained elders, all of them retired professionals, are the only other full-time church workers in the province.

The churches in Guide and Huangyuan County have one elder each, while the churches in Datong County and at the Longyangxia Dam on the Yellow River have no full-time personnel. Altogether, there are Christians in 30 of the 34 counties in Qinghai. Most believers meet at home gatherings, while a few congregations have rented accommodation to serve as a meeting point. Meetings in private homes are not allowed to register, according to Rev. Meng, but are tolerated and allowed to function.

Most believers in Qinghai are Han Chinese, many of whom have moved to Qinghai from other Chinese provinces. There is also a small number of ethnic Hui and Tibetan believers. Christians went through hard times since the late 1950s, said the 89-year old Rev. Meng. He himself was denounced as a rightist in 1958, and spent almost 25 years in a labor camp. The verdict in his case was not overthrown until 1980, when he was allowed to return to Xining and take up his church work again.

The Qinghai Provincial Christian Council and TSPM were only set up in 1994. Due to a lack of trained church workers, contacts between the provincial CC and local congregations are very weak. To alleviate the worst needs, provincial lay training classes are being held every two years for 40 days, with 50 participants for each class. Qinghai has also sent a number of students to different theological seminaries but, as living conditions are very hard in this high and remote region, many of them have moved to other parts of China to work, and few have returned so far.
A central provincial baptism service is held in July every year in Xining, for which new believers from many rural areas travel to the provincial capital. The young general secretary of the Qinghai Christian Council, Rev. Tong Ping'an, also travels to the countryside to conduct baptismal services there.

According to Rev. Tong, the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) in Qinghai provides stronger support to Buddhists and Muslims than it does to Christians. In Xining alone, there are 140 mosques, and Tibetan Buddhist temples are numerous on the grassland. Most RAB officials come from ethnic minorities and have little understanding of or sympathy for Christianity.

Yet, despite all the difficulties, churches are growing in Qinghai Province. According to Rev. Meng, several factors contribute to this growth: The general policy of religious freedom; the fact that people now have a better life and start asking questions about the meaning of life; and the growing corruption within society which leads to a search for a new morality. [567 words]

ANS Focus: Qinghai Province

Church In Xining "Blessed"

(ANS) The Christian Church in Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province, was founded by British workers from the China Inland Mission in 1889. In 1958, it was closed and all its pastors were sent to labor camps as rightists. When the church was finally reopened in 1981, there were about 40 believers left in Xining. Today, the city has 6,780 baptized believers.

"God has blessed our church greatly", says Rev. Tong Ping'an, the 32-year old general secretary of the Qinghai Christian Council. He is one of three pastors in Xining, the other two being over 70 and almost 90 years old. There is also a young woman teacher as well as four evangelists in Xining.

With the help of a Xining-born Christian who now resides in Hong Kong, Christians in Xining were able to build a good-sized church right in the center of Xining City, close to the provincial government compound. A six-storey building next to the church provides accommodation for church workers as well as space that can be rented out to supplement the church's income. In addition to this central church, there are more than 30 meeting points in Xining, the largest with about 800 believers. Even small meeting points in private houses have at least 100 members.

Xining churches are very active. While pastors spend the weekdays from Monday to Thursday ministering to the different meeting points, activities in the main church take place mostly on weekends. There is a women's meeting on Friday afternoons, a youth meeting on Friday nights, and a Bible study on Saturday afternoons. All of these meetings are attended by hundreds of participants. On Sundays, the two main worship services at 9 and 11 o'clock pack the church as well as the surrounding courtyard with about 1,600 worshippers each service.
A specialty of the church in Xining is the daily morning prayer in a small hall adjoining the main church building. About 50-60 predominantly elderly women meet at 6 a.m. Beijing time (which in the western province of Qinghai is more like 4:30 a.m. real time) for an hour of individual and communal prayers, singing and a Bible study. "If it weren't for this group," says Rev. Tong, "I don't know where I would find the strength to do all the work I have to do." [390 words]

**ANS Focus: Qinghai Province**

**Membership Statistics For The Church in Xining**

(ANS) Right from its reopening in 1982, the church in Xining, capital of Qinghai province, has kept careful statistics of its growing membership and the number of baptisms it conducted each year. The figures, which former ANS editor Claudia Oblau copied and has reproduced below, are displayed prominently on the wall in the church office. The figures offer a fascinating glimpse at the growth pattern of one local church.

Please note that the figures for baptisms and membership for one year do not add up to the total membership figure for the following year. This is because church growth in Xining is not only based on the baptism of new believers - Christians move to Xining from other areas in China, and have joined the congregation there, sometimes in large numbers.

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Total members 1996: 6,172  
Total members 1997: 6,780

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ANS Documentation:

It was with a feeling of deep regret and fear that I read "United States Policies in Support of Religious Freedom: Focus on Christians", including the Foreword by Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright, issued by the US State department and bearing the date July 22, 1997.

Let me just quote a few remarks in the document which says a lot to me about a USA with a self-image as the police or ruling nation of the world: "Our commitment to religious liberty ... is a fundamental source of our strength in the world. We simply could not lead without it. ... And we use all the tools available to work for changes within societies and with authorities around the world. ...The State Department is also committed to making full use of international organizations. ...We have asked our embassies to provide more frequent, more systematic and more sensitive reporting on religious issues. ... And we are rewarding officers who make this a priority. ...To enhance these efforts, US embassies have been instructed to include prominent religious leaders among their contacts."

I am not used to reading US government documents and was certainly unprepared for such a blatant revelation of intention. It makes me think of the present-day operation of the 19th Century American "manifest destiny".

I do not mean that religious freedom is no longer a problem in China. I often remind my colleagues that an important part of the work of the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement is to maintain a relationship of dialogue and consultation with the government bodies on the very question of the implementation of the policy of religious freedom. China being such a vast country, there is an endless stream of problems related to religion which we bring up with the proper authorities of the government, often with good results. The fact that, since the end of the Cultural Revolution, there have been opened at least 12,000 places of Protestant worship in China and 17 centers of theological training, not to mention the nearly 20 million Chinese Bibles that have been printed - all of these facts testify to the usefulness of the on-going dialogue. They have not happened through the intervention of any foreign government. I strongly feel that any US government intervention as "Protector of Religion" in the name of religious liberty would only jeopardize what we have been doing ourselves and intend to continue to do, and would give us the unenviable image of collaborating with the US government, and that violates our principle of self-government.

I do hope that the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad will not be an instrument of intervention under the State Department.
Portrait of a Local Church in Shaoxing, Zhejiang

(ANS) "The church does not receive or even want any money from the government. Nor does the government try to tell the church what it can or cannot preach. We depend on this book...the Bible." So stressed Shen Xiling, Chairman of the Shaoxing Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement in Zhejiang Province, during an interview with Jenny Huang, an English teacher with the Amity Foundation, on the background to the Protestant church in Shaoxing city.

Mr Shen explained how the Shaoxing church was built by Baptists from the USA around a century ago, along with a church-affiliated hospital, middle school and kindergarten which are now run by the local government. The church was closed during the Cultural Revolution and became a site for Red Guard battles. It was returned to the congregation in 1982 and re-opened for worship in the same year.

According to Mr. Shen, the church in Shaoxing has a membership of between two and three thousand believers, with 700 to 800 people attending any one worship service, according to the church building's seating capacity. In order to meet believers' needs there are additional services held on Sunday afternoons as well as on Wednesday and Friday evenings, plus prayer meetings twice a week. Services are all held in the local Shaoxing dialect. Mr. Shen mentioned that, despite the high membership and attendance at services, the church still does not have its own pastor. Preachers and church workers, both lay and ordained, are supplied from nearby cities or are drawn from within the congregation itself.

Other programs offered by the church include literacy classes, a 30-bed home for the elderly and a clinic. The Shaoxing church also runs a Bible Training Centre which offers courses to train people from various parts of Zhejiang province to serve as lay preachers in their home churches. All of the people running these programs are volunteers, with about ten full-time retirees dealing with administration and receiving a small token allowance from the church offering for their services.[345 words]
Church Buildings: The Daqi church in the Beilun district of Ningbo city, Zhejiang province held a dedication service in October last year for its new church building. The building stands on two mu of land (1 mu = 0.0667 hectares) of land and the building itself, with a total area of 830m² and a capacity of over 1,000 people, is the biggest in the area. Also in October in Zhejiang province, the Lecheng church in Leqing city was dedicated after the old church was pulled down to build a bigger one with a capacity to hold over 1,000 people. ** In June 1994, Renbei meeting point in Jindun township, Dafeng city in Jiangsu province bought a building to serve as their church. The building was renovated with through the hard work of the believers and was ready for use from Easter of last year. It can hold over 400 people. ** Huating county church in Gansu province started work on a church building in November 1993. The project was completed with funds from local believers and a service of dedication held last October. ** In 1986 the believers in Qiaoshan village in the Mulao nationality Autonomous Region of Luocheng prefecture, Guangxi province built a mud-brick and tile church building to serve as their church. Through ten years of exposure to the elements and especially after huge damage due to waterlogging in 1994, the building was in very bad shape and not functional any more. In February of 1996 a groundbreaking ceremony was held for a new church building and support for this project was given from several believers from Hong Kong. Seven months later in September work was completed on the new cement and steel two-storey structure. ** Believers in Ba'an Township, Daye City, Hubei province built a church building in 1991 but it very quickly proved to be too small for the needs of the church in that area. Therefore, after acquiring some 2,000m² of land in 1996, the believers built a second church building, which was completed in October of last year.

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Ordinations: On 26th and 27 April of this year the Shanghai Christian Church Affairs Committee ordained one man and one woman co-worker as pastors. ** On 6th May 1997 the Guangdong Christian Council ordained one church co-worker as pastor in Foshan city. This is the first pastor ordained in Foshan since Liberation. On the same day, an elder was ordained in Shunde city in Guangdong province.

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Believers in one of the poorest areas of the country, Yuexi County in Anhui Province, finished constructing a church building in the county in 1995. After that time, co-workers became aware of the inability of some of the believers in the county to read. Therefore, a literacy class was started last year using the literacy textbooks specially published by the China Christian Council. Up until now 40 believers have taken part in the class.