Tapping The Potential Of Women Within The Church

(ANS) "Developing women's issues involves carrying a heavy load along a long road. In the building up of the Chinese church, women are a powerful source of strength. If we bring the potential of women into full play, we can soon bring about the situation described in Psalm 68:11: 'The Lord speaks the word; great is the company of the women who bring the tidings'." So concludes Shen Enzhen of the National Christian Women's Affairs Committee, after joining the first training course held for women in the church in Southwest China's Yunnan province. In last year's December issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, Shen and two other participants describe some of the reflections on women's work within the province which emerged from the course, which took place in September last year.

Yunnan is a border province with 26 minority nationalities. Minority churches are dotted all over the province's landscape of red-earth plateaus and high-ridged mountains. Communication and transportation within the province are poor and many areas are backward and impoverished. Each minority group has its own language and many believers cannot speak Mandarin, the national standard Chinese dialect. Thus, carrying out church work under such conditions is very difficult, compounded by a lack of finances and a lack of personnel. As Shen points out, different places may have different problems, but one fact unites them all: the proportion of women is always much greater than men in every church. As elsewhere, women make up around 70%
of the minority churches and thus, stresses Shen, need to play a key role in developing the church within the province and solving its problems.

The Yunnan Christian Women's Affairs Committee was established in March 1996. In the same year, the committee suggested that each area in the province should appoint a contact person to liaise with them about women's affairs. In this way, a network has been slowly forming for the encouragement of women-centered church activities within the whole province. This year, for the first time, the provincial Women's Affairs Committee brought together 31 of these contact people, drawn from all over the province, to take part in a training course in the provincial capital, Kunming. Shen notes that many of the participants had to travel for several days over difficult terrain in order to attend the course, and for most it was their first time in the provincial capital and so far away from home.

The course focused on Bible study, fellowship and worship, training in basic theology, and developing a more in-depth knowledge of "Three-Self" principles and religious policy. It was also a time of sharing personal testimonies and a chance to plan for the future. Shen remarks on how the participants' enthusiasm was constantly evident - they refused all offers of sightseeing around Kunming and continued studying when class was over, in the dining hall and in the dormitory, even begging for extra classes to be held at night so that they might not waste any opportunities for further training.

Learning to combat heresy and the question of poverty were items of particular focus within the course, since these are the issues which currently plague the Yunnan church the most. It was noted by the participants that women's educational level is often low and that their characters are generally more open and accepting than men's, thus making them more susceptible to heretical teaching. If women make up 70% of the church then it is necessary to educate them fast in sound Bible teaching in order to combat this threat. As to the poverty question, the women were encouraged to make use of their skills in vegetable cultivation and in handicrafts in order to raise more funds for their local churches.

After the course was over, participants returned to their home churches to apply what they had learned. An open letter was also distributed to all the churches throughout the province, containing a three-point summary of the participants' ideas for the future: firstly, they should strive to have one women's affairs contact person in every single church in the province within the next three years. Secondly, training classes should be organized each year for women in the church in each area, according to their different levels and different needs. Thirdly, a fund should be set up to cover the expenses of doing women's affairs work within the church, and it should be up to the women in each area to think of ways to raise money for this fund.

Shen gives an example of what women in the church in Yunnan can achieve if given the chance. Yingjiang county is made up of 180 small villages belonging to the Lisu and Jingpo minorities, with a total of just over 12,000 women believers. In November 1993 they established their own local Women's Affairs Committee and then set up local women's groups within the county. Over the past four years, these groups
have organized regular special meetings to discuss women's issues, and they always
donate the offerings from these meetings to the work of the local Christian Council. In
1994, they provided the Council with 10 sets of bedding for use when visitors come to
the Council on business and have to stay overnight due to the county's remote location.
In the following year, the women collected together 30,000 yuan (=US$3,700 approx.)
to buy two typewriters capable of printing in minority script, so that more believers might
have devotional material to read in their own language. The county Women's Affairs
Committee also organized a Lisu and Jingpo minority Bible memorization and recitation
competition in November last year.

Shen reports that this year, the Christian women of Yingjiang are planning to buy
a computerized photocopier for the local Christian Council offices. Since funds for this
are currently insufficient, the women's groups have asked all their members aged 16
and over to produce minority handicrafts made of cloth - bags, clothes, headgear and
footwear - and to give proceeds from the sale of these for the photocopier. In November
of this year, the women also want to hold a county-wide theological training class for
women in the church. Shen comments how all this shows how much potential women
have and how much of a contribution women can make within the church. As she points
out, the key is how to tap this potential and give it room to grow. [1080 words]

Who Spares A Thought For The Churches In Poor Areas?

(ANS) Some churches in China, particularly in prosperous coastal areas, find
themselves in a very comfortable position today: they are financially secure and their
congregations are made up of relatively well-educated and well-off believers who
contribute generously to the work of the church. Faced with such blessings, many such
churches take things easy and rest on their laurels. However, as Wang Jianqun asks
in last year's December issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, does
Three-Self mean merely looking after one's own self and neglecting the interests of less
fortunate members of Christ's body?

Wang describes how pastoral workers and evangelists in many remote border
and minority areas get basically no pay for their work and have to provide for
themselves when on church business. The lives of such church workers are very
difficult: with no roads or vehicles at their disposal, they have to travel on foot for
hundreds of miles over rugged, muddy mountain paths. When they arrive at a meeting
point they often find straw huts with no electricity. In such places, many peasant
believers struggle just to keep themselves clothed, fed and warm, and the average
income is only 200 yuan a year (=US$25 approx.). Since pastoral workers in poor
areas receive no salary, they are often forced to leave their congregations and travel
far away to the coastal cities to find the means there to provide for their own family's
needs. This thus leaves congregations back home open and vulnerable to attacks from
such threats as heretical teachings or superstition.
The church in China has already printed 20 million Bibles for its 10 million or so Christians, but the distribution of these Bibles is uneven. In richer areas of the country, believers are able to purchase several Bibles per person, but in poorer areas believers simply cannot afford to buy even one Bible, and often one Bible is shared by many believers, even whole congregations. Wang comments that the church in China has now achieved Three-Self and is looking to run itself and look after itself independent of outside help. Yet, as Wang points out, if Chinese brothers and sisters do not look after each other and help each other to practice self-support then this will only encourage activities such as Bible smuggling by people outside of China, thus undermining all that the Chinese church stands for and has achieved so far.

Wang mentions how the government and society in general are attaching more and more importance to developing and assisting poorer areas of the country, and are achieving in these areas the very things which churches should also be doing. Wang gives the example of the Shanghai Charitable Foundation, which has already collected hundreds of millions of yuan, setting up donation boxes in many public places and work units. The money from this foundation goes towards looking after the elderly, orphans, handicapped people and giving educational opportunities to school-less children. On a smaller scale, the Putuo District Social Welfare Institute in Shanghai collected over 230,000 yuan (=US$ 28,400 approx.) and huge amounts of clothing within only 10 months in order to donate all this to elderly people living alone. Even in the Hongkou district of Shanghai where Wang himself lives, the local Residents’ Association collected contributions in June last year to send to poor minority areas in Yunnan province. Whether on a large scale or small, Wang comments that the church is lagging far behind other groups within society when it comes to doing something concrete to express their support, care and love for the needy among them.

Wang concludes by expressing the hope that the church would be inspired by efforts within society as a whole to help the poorer members of its own country. As a concrete suggestion, Wang proposes that richer churches in coastal areas be linked to specific churches in poorer areas and then establish a system for regular, long-term assistance for those churches. Wang suggests that richer churches set up collection boxes especially for this purpose and use the donations to help the old, orphans, school-less, ill and handicapped among the believers in remote backward areas. Richer churches should also seek to provide regular monthly remuneration for church workers in poor areas so that they do not have to leave their congregations to find work elsewhere. Financially-secure congregations could also consider putting up the funds necessary for supporting young people in poorer areas who feel called to study theology and devote themselves to evangelism. Prosperous churches might also send their poorer counterparts Bibles, hymnals and devotional literature on a regular basis. Finally, Wang hopes that churches in richer areas of China will actually send some of their members each year to the churches in poorer remote areas to find out about their situations and bring them support and assistance. In this way, the church in China can truly be seen to be supporting itself. [837 words]
Different Chinese Translations Of The Bible

(ANS) The Bible is the basis for every Christian believer’s faith, and it has already been translated in whole or in part into more than 1,800 different languages, dialects and versions around the world. As Liu Zhongming reports in last year's December issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, the China Christian Council itself publishes 20 different Chinese versions of the Bible. These editions of the Bible differ in style and presentation in order to reflect the various educational and spiritual levels and needs of believers and seekers within the church today. As well as Chinese Bibles, the CCC also publishes translations in the various minority nationality languages within China, such as Korean, Yi, Miao, Lisu, Jingpo, Lahu and Dai, among others.

Liu reports that since 1700 there have been 29 different translations of the Bible into Chinese. The most common version used within the Chinese church today is the Chinese Union Version. This translation was commissioned by the Shanghai Missionary Society in 1890 and completed by a 16 member committee of foreign missionaries in 1919, with the aid of several Chinese believers to check the accuracy of the language used. The Union translation takes the Revised Version of 1885 in English as its source text, which itself is based on the King James Bible. This translation was named the "Chinese Union Version" as a reflection of the fact that translators from all the major denominations of the time came together and worked in co-operation with each other in order to produce the finished work.

The Chinese Union Version has now been available for nearly 80 years and has the longest history of use and the widest distribution for any Chinese translation of the Bible within the Chinese church. The style of the Chinese used in the Union Version is similar to that of the King James Bible, and Liu points out that every effort is made in this translation to be faithful to the original texts. Occasionally, a word in the original text may have no exact correspondence in Chinese. In such instances, the Chinese translation is expanded slightly in order to capture and explain the meaning of the original word. Small dots are placed under any additional words to indicate that they are not part of the original text but are merely used to provide a context and explanation to make the Chinese translation of the original word clear.

Among more contemporary translations of the Bible into Chinese, "Today's Chinese Version" (TCV) has had the widest distribution and circulation. This translation was published by the United Bible Societies in 1979 and takes the Today's English Version as its blueprint. During translation, reference was made to around 70 of the best translations of the Bible since the 1950's, ensuring that this version of the Bible contains all the advances in Biblical scholarship and translation of recent times. This is a modernized and popular translation of the Bible and suitable for all believers within China who have junior middle school education or above. The translation especially takes into account seekers who do not yet believe and thus avoids using any technical theological jargon which such people may not yet be familiar with. A second edition of the TCV came out in 1984, and was reprinted 20 times to 1994. A revised version appeared in 1995, making reference to original Hebrew and Greek texts during the revision.
The translation principle for the Today's Chinese Version is different from that of the Chinese Union Version, and the former makes more extensive use of free translation in order to reflect the essence of the original meanings more clearly. However, this does mean that the translation does not have an exact word-to-word correspondence with the original texts and does contain much of the translators' own understanding and interpretation. Nevertheless, the basic meaning is the same as the Union Version, but in a much more natural and easier-to-follow style. Liu claims that this translation is suitable for young seekers and also of benefit to pastoral workers when read in conjunction with the Union Version. This year the China Christian Council printed a Today's English Version / Today's Chinese Version Bilingual edition of the New Testament.

Liu describes how Chinese theologians and Bible scholars have also made extensive use of a translation of the Bible by Lü Zhenzhong. Lü began his translation as a scholar at Yanjing University in 1940 and completed the full translation in 1970, working only from original Hebrew and Greek texts. This translation uses the direct-translation method, with exact one-to-one correspondences, reflecting the original meaning and content of each word and even keeping to the original grammar and structures. In this way, some problems that are faced in the Union Version are avoided in the Lü translation.

Finally, Liu points out that the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference commissioned its own translation of the Bible into Chinese by the Sigao Bible Society, established in Beijing in 1945, which was revised between 1961-68 and published in Hong Kong. In 1992 this version was once again published in Mainland China. In this version, names of people and places are transliterated very differently from those in the Union Version. For example, Moses and John become "Moxi" and "Yuehan" in the Union Version but "Meise" and "Nuowang" in the Sigao Bible. The Sigao translation also uses different terms to refer to God and the Holy Spirit. Liu points out that this translation of the Bible may seem heavy-going to the average Protestant Chinese believer who is unaccustomed to it, but is useful as another point of comparison for the serious Bible scholar. [952 words]

98.1.4

CCC President Receives Honorary Doctorate During Recent Visit To U.S.

(ANS) During a visit to the United States in December last year, Dr. Wenzao Han, President of the China Christian Council, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree in recognition of his efforts as a "tireless worker on behalf of churches across China, a courageous educator at formal and informal levels, and a faithful Christ-follower during a half-century of awesome challenge."

The degree Doctor of Humanities Honoris Causa was awarded to Dr. Han by Samford University, a private institution related to the Southern Baptist Convention in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr. Han accepted the award not only on his own behalf but also on behalf of the whole of the church in China.

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At the same awards ceremony, Rev. Chou Lien-hwa, a prominent Baptist clergyman in Taiwan, was also presented with an honorary degree. Both Rev. Chou and Dr. Han had previously worked together in Shanghai in the 1940s for the Christian Student Movement. [162 words]

98.1.5

Book By Former Western Missionary Challenges Foreign Churches' Approach To Mission

(ANS) In 1996 the book "Christian Missions And The Judgment Of God" by David M. Paton was re-published in the U.S. and provides a good opportunity to reassess the impact of the Communist revolution on missionary and church activity in China. The book was written from Paton's own ten-year experience as a missionary in China before, during, and after the period of Liberation in 1949. The new edition contains a preface written by Bishop K.H.Ting.

According to Paton's son, in a review article submitted to the Chinese Theological review, the essential argument of "Christian Missions And The Judgment Of God" is that the abandonment of the missionary effort in China, and its forced withdrawal, was a judgment on its failure to understand and properly engage with ordinary Chinese. Paton argues that this withdrawal was necessary for the Church in China to survive and develop in the long term. The Church suffered persecution in the 50s and 60s together with the people and was not cushioned by Western money or support at that time. According to Paton, it thus emerged all the stronger from this experience.

Although written at the time of the Korean War, the book has many messages for the church today. Among other things, it highlights the need for churches in the non-western world to define their own distinctive theology and organizational structures and not simply to import western values or formulae. It is also a call to western churches to abandon any sense of superiority or expertise. [262 words]

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ANS Focus: Shandong Province:

Shandong Churches Still Struggle To Overcome Their Denominational Past

The province of Shandong in northern China has a long coastline which has enabled many port cities to grow and flourish within the province over the past century. Whilst this has proven beneficial to the economy of the region, it has also led to serious problems and difficult challenges to the church within the province, as Rev. Kim Jonggoo of the Amity Foundation discovered during a recent tour of Shandong.

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(ANS) After the Opium Wars in the early nineteenth century, the port cities of Shandong were opened up to the outside world and foreign mission boards of every Christian conviction came pouring in to the province along with the merchants and traders. These mission boards vied with each other to set up their own churches within the province and to convert "the locals" to their own particular brand of Christianity. As a result, coastal cities could often be found with at least 22 different Christian denominations competing for the souls of the cities' inhabitants. Therefore, the main task of the church in Shandong after the missionaries left in 1950 has been to unite the church and make the believers "one".

Christianity came to the city of Qingdao with the Berlin Lutheran Church in 1897. Soon afterwards many other denominations poured in, including some Chinese indigenous churches such as the Little Flock (Local Assemblies) and the Jesus Family. The missionaries left behind them magnificent church buildings, such as the German-style Jiangsu church perched high on a hill overlooking the city. The Qinghelu church was built by American Lutherans in the 1940s in the style of a traditional Chinese palace. Today, due to its design, people often mistake it for a Taoist temple.

Today there are seven church buildings and two meeting points in Qingdao, and 30,000 believers have been baptized since 1980, with a large unrecorded number of believers baptized before that date. The city has six full-time pastors, all in their 20s and 30s, and four part-time pastors, as well as 20 other lay workers. The church in Qingdao has worked hard to throw off the burden of its former denominational divides, and this can be seen in the make-up of its Christian bodies, which has a Little Flock president of the local Christian Council, a CC president from a Church of Christ in China tradition, an Anglican chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Association and a Baptist vice president of the CC/TSPM committee.

A similar situation of denominational splits existed in the city of Weihai after Christianity arrived there with the English Brethren in 1880. The missionaries built many church buildings in the 1920s but now these have been converted in to schools and hospitals and cannot be reclaimed by the church. As a result, one of the most pressing problems for the church in Weihai is to provide a church building for believers to worship in. Currently, the church rents part of a building at a cost of 60,000 yuan (= US$ 7,500 approx.) a year. The church has managed to secure some land in a prime location but cannot go ahead with building work due to resistance from local residents.

The church in Weihai is also proud of the unity it has achieved although, as another port city, many outsiders come in from other parts of China and frequently try to draw young believers to join unregistered and illegal private meeting points. These outsiders lure the young believers with promises of jobs, or by convincing them that these illegal groups are the only ones who truly represent the Gospel.

Another port city, Yantai, also saw fierce denominational competition once it was opened to foreigners after the 1868 Tianjin Treaty. By 1949, there were 14 denominations represented in the city, all fighting and in conflict with each other. Today, out of the 13 counties around Yantai, 11 have Christians, with 22,000 believers worshipping at 15 registered churches and meeting points. Five pastors and 25 other lay church workers minister to these believers.

Past denominational traditions still cause problems within the Yantai church, although believers are working to overcome these through a spirit of "seeking the common ground" and "mutual respect". The church sees its main task...
as reaching out to serve the local community. It provides a medical consultation service staffed by retired doctors from among the congregation, supports the national Hope Project for schoolless children as well as a local school for the deaf and mute, and also has set up a fund to support seminary graduates where their local churches cannot afford to offer them a decent living allowance.

ANS Focus: Shandong Province:

Linyi Church In Shandong Provides "Daily Bread" For Its Members

The following information comes from a visit the Rev. Judith Sutterlin, a staff member of the Amity Foundation, made to the Jinque Church in Linyi in Shandong Province in October last year. In Linyi, conversations with Elder Cao Zongnan of the Jinque Church provided additional information about that congregation and about other churches in the area.

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(ANS) On any day of the week believers in Linyi can worship God together with other local Christians. According to Elder Cao, about a thousand people gather at the Jinque Church each Sunday to share in the main service of worship. Some two or three hundred believers then come together again each evening during the week, worshipping and praising God.

Each week at the Sunday service a twenty-member choir helps lead the hymn singing and offers an anthem. The congregation practices hymns before the main worship service, and then this is followed by a different kind of harmony, the great swell of hundreds of different voices raised in simultaneous prayer. According to local custom, men and women sit separately within the church, with the men on the right and the women filling the middle and left hand sections of the sanctuary. The origin and reasoning behind this custom is no longer known, yet the custom persists. Elder Cao mentioned that during the year the church also has some special worship activities, including a Spiritual Revival Meeting in August and special services for the Christmas and Easter seasons and for the baptism of new believers.

Elder Cao indicated that the entire Linyi district has a total of more than 200,000 believers who worship at over forty registered meeting points throughout the area. According to Cao, the Jinque Church and the nine meeting points associated with it baptize around a hundred new believers each year, while other meeting points each baptize an average of ten new believers annually. These new members have all attended worship for at least a year and have passed a test on their Biblical knowledge before baptism.

The Linyi district as a whole has three ordained pastors. However, at present the Jinque church and many other meeting points do not have their own ordained pastors. Therefore, they rely on the guidance of volunteer lay preachers and leaders, such as Elder Cao himself, who is a graduate of Jinan Seminary. These trained volunteers shepherd the people and provide an extensive program of worship opportunities for the local believers. Each meeting point has four or five volunteer preachers who not only serve their own congregations but also rotate around the area, sharing the responsibility for worship leadership and preaching at several meeting points. The three ordained pastors of the district also periodically visit the meeting points throughout the area to officiate at services of baptism and Communion.

Elder Cao indicated that the Jinque church organizes an annual Bible study training course led by seminary graduates and church elders. Each year, thirty to sixty energetic young lay workers from churches in different towns and villages throughout the area attend these classes and then return to their local meeting points to share the biblical knowledge that they have gained on these courses. Bible teaching is also available to the younger members of believers' families. During the Sunday morning worship service, some of the meeting points also organize special activities for children of believers, teaching them songs and Bible stories.
ANS Feature:

Excerpts From The Letter Pages Of Tian Feng

The letters to the editors of the Chinese church magazine, Tian Feng, give readers a glimpse of daily church life with all its joys and problems. To give our readers an idea of the breadth and width of the issues discussed, we are documenting here questions and answers from the November and December issues of the church magazine last year.

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Can The Corpses Of Believers Be Cremated?

To the editors:

I would like to ask for some advice on a particular question: our country is currently implementing reform in funeral and interment procedures and advocating cremation. Are there any objections to this as far as the Christian faith is concerned? The resurrection of believers is one of the fundamental aspects of our faith. In the Bible it often mentions how the Lord preserves our bones so that we may be resurrected in the future, such as in Ezekiel 37 where it is recorded that the dry bones came to life. Psalm 34 says: “Though the misfortunes of one who is righteous be many, the Lord delivers him out of them all. He guards every bone of his body, and not one of them will be broken.” However, after cremation, what is left over for God to put our spirits back into in the future? The Bible doesn’t mention whether inerated human bones can be resurrected. The government demonstrates respect for people’s faith and people don’t have to be cremated if they don’t want to so, as believers, do we want to push for this?

-- Cheng Fushan, Fengyang, Anhui.

Response:

Death means the separation of a person’s spirit from their body. The body is the spirit’s temporary and short term dwelling place on this earth and the body can decay. After people die, the body will decay of its own accord, although the skeleton decays a little slower than the other parts but, under normal conditions, it too will decompose in the end and become a part of matter. Therefore, the Bible says that a person’s body comes from dust and after death returns to the dust. Thus the cremation of bodies merely accelerates this process of returning to the dust (ashes). Because the population of the earth is increasing at an alarming rate, using cremation to deal with corpses is already becoming more and more common today. It is beneficial to the environment and the maintenance of public health, and it greatly preserves natural resources. China’s population is multitudinous, and traditional burial methods use up huge amounts of land and wood. Therefore authorities in most places throughout the country are pursuing a policy of cremation.

Yes, resurrection is the hope of each and every believer. Resurrection is one part of our redemption and it comes from the great power of Almighty God. The Bible’s teaching on resurrection is more or less summed up in 1 Corinthians 15, and we can study this in more detail. We can see that the body after resurrection (1) is a body “of God’s choice”, (2) is a “spiritual”, “glorious” body as opposed to a body of decay belonging to this earth, and (3) is a body “of heavenly form”. Therefore, we have no need to be too nostalgic or reluctant about leaving the past behind, nor do we need to show too much concern for today’s “perishable” body, which is gone and finished with after death. Christians may face bodily death with peace of mind, since the body cannot be compared with that which they look forward to. It is precisely because of this confidence and faith that the apostle Paul can boast “Every day I face death” and “with no more than human hopes, what would have been the point of my fighting those wild beasts at Ephesus?” (1 Cor. 15:31-32). Letting prisoners fight with wild beasts was Imperial Rome’s method of carrying out a particularly cruel death sentence for Christian bodies, and this kind of method of execution even allowed the wild beasts to eat the bodies, without even leaving behind any ashes. Yet, in the face of such a situation, Paul still hoped in the resurrection.
The resurrection of believers is not the same as the resurrection described in St. John's Gospel, chapter 12. After the Lord Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb where he had already been buried four days, his body was still his original body. Moreover, even after he was raised from the dead, he was still able to go on to die again of old age. Similarly, the resurrection of believers is not the same as the resurrection of the dry bones as recorded in Ezekiel 37. The vision seen by the prophet Ezekiel was a prediction that the whole of the house of Israel would experience a kind of resurgence or revival in the last days. We should not confuse the bodily resurrection of believers at the time of the Lord's Second Coming with the resurrections recorded in Scripture above. As to the reference to Psalm 34, we can understand it as a symbol for the nature of what will happen at the resurrection, referring to the glorification and beautification of the body at that time. We should not attempt to understand this Scripture in any narrow or literal sense.

Is It Permitted To Have House Meetings?

To the editors:

Our family is a Christian family and for many years now we have continuously held family meetings once a week. At these meetings everybody studies the Bible together and takes turns in leading the prayers. Through these meetings we have been able to care for each other and help each other, and we have had a strong sense of God being with us—they have been a real blessing. Some fellow believers in the neighbourhood also take part in these gatherings, and sometimes the number of people present comes to 10 or even more. Recently, we have heard a church evangelist say that such meetings are equivalent to a meeting point and so we should get approval for registration before we continue, otherwise our meetings may be prohibited. But I think that we haven't developed to such a degree that we are the equivalent of an independent meeting point, since we don't conduct baptisms or collect offerings from the believers present. Also, there are people among us who hold positions as lay church workers in the local church. But, in my heart, I still feel unsure about all of this and hope that "Tian Feng" can give me an answer to this letter.

--- Zhou Jiaying

Response:

To determine whether a matter is lawful or not, we need to decide in reference to the relevant state law. In 1994, the State Council issued the "Regulations Governing Venues For Religious Activities", stating that all venues for religious activities must go through registration, and also setting the boundaries and scope for such venues. Article Two of the "Regulations" says "For the purposes of these Regulations, 'venues for religious activities' refers to monasteries, temples, mosques, churches and other fixed venues." Your meeting point obviously isn't a church, but could it not belong to the category "other fixed venues"? I have especially looked up the State Council Religious Affairs Bureau's explanation of this article and, according to this, "... 'other fixed venues' mainly refers to those places which are not temples or churches but which are places where believers still regularly hold religious activities. According to Christian tradition and practice, believers have always lived out their religious life in their own homes, with the main participants in such activities being the members of one's own household, sometimes also with a small number of relatives and neighbours taking part also. These activities themselves and the forms of these activities are also quite simple and usually just involve reading the Bible and praying. This kind of traditional house meeting is not included under "other fixed venues" in the "Regulations" (See "Legal System Daily" 1.6.94, 15.8.94; "Tian Feng" 4.94)

According to the laws and regulations and explanations described above, we can clearly see that there is a clear difference between traditional Christian house meetings and formal meeting points. The former is allowed whereas the latter needs to go through the registration process before it can obtain legal status.

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Bishop K.H. Ting once addressed this question when it was put to him by Tian Feng reporters. He also pointed out that the State Council Religious Affairs Bureau made it clear to the church that when Christian gatherings of family members and small numbers of close friends hold house prayer meetings, these are viewed as small scale private devotional activities on the part of believers from a church meeting point and thus are not included among that which has to be registered. (See “Tian Feng” 6:1994)

Seen from this angle, how can our church be against traditional family meetings when ever our state laws do not forbid them? I personally believe that not only is the church not against such activities but it should positively seek to promote them as a way of providing for believers’ spiritual needs. The church should tap the potential of traditional family gatherings for building up the spiritual life of believers and providing each part of the body of Christ with that which is useful and necessary for its daily life. Family meetings can also be used to support and preserve the purity of the faith and act as a means to prevent heresy from creeping in, whilst at the same time bringing honour to God, benefitting the people, and being a good witness for the Lord.

98.1.9

ANS Feature:

Theology In The Contemporary Chinese Context

In an attempt to introduce readers to some of the theological thinking and debates within the church in China, ANS is featuring a series of articles by theologians in the Chinese church. The following article is written by Rev. Baoping Kan, lecturer in systematic theology and historical theology at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and member of the Chinese Religious Association. The article is reprinted here from volume XVII Number 2 Spring 1997 of Word And World, published by the Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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Protestant theology in China has generally followed the theology brought by western missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a result, it has not always quite fit the Chinese context. However, the light of God has shone into China also, and Chinese Christians have made an effort to express the Christian faith meaningfully to Chinese people in a Chinese way. I will deal with this topic in three chronological sections. During the first period prior to 1949, some Christian scholars attempted to shape a Christian theology appropriate to the Chinese context. In the second period (1950 to 1979) Chinese Christians experienced social upheaval, and their theology was closely related to that situation. The third period, the most exciting and challenging era of Chinese Christianity, started in 1979. The Chinese church has been growing tremendously, but it struggles with vital issues that could defeat all its gain.

I cannot attempt a definition or description of contemporary Chinese theology in this essay. I will make some points about the characteristics of Christian theology in China during the three periods, especially as that theology reflects the contexts of the period. I will also suggest what remains to be done by Chinese theologians.

1. The Emerging of a Chinese Theology (pre-1949)

When the protestant church in China was virtually a western church, some Chinese Christians already realized that the western expression of the faith was not suitable to them. All kinds of theological and spiritual jargon, directly translated from English or other languages, and the broken Chinese spoken by the missionaries became formal church language. The solemn and glorious anthems that echoed in church buildings with steeples pointing to the sky did not sound familiar to the Chinese people. Chinese culture had stressed harmony with people and with the world, but many Christian missionaries told the Chinese to hate the world. Could such a religion make any sense to Chinese people? Would Chinese benefit from such a religion? Would it be possible for Chinese Christians to achieve

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salvation through such a belief? A "Chinese church must have its theology done by Chinese" - T.C. Chao's claim corresponded to the thought of many Chinese Christian intellectuals.

Many Chinese theologians attempted to develop a Chinese theology. The paths they took differed, developing in two directions. The first was characterized by its emphasis on the transcendence of God and the separation of church from society. In the early 20s, democratic movements with socialist emphases were evident in many parts of the world. Many Chinese people were involved in the movement to change the old corrupt and vicious society into a new one. But in that context, this form of Christian theology suggested that people should merely stay home and pray. The rationale was that God takes care of everything in his own way and in his own time.

The other path laid great emphasis on the immanence of God and called the church to take an active part in society. That trend was influenced by the thought of Walter Rauschenbach and his early twentieth-century social gospel movement.

T.C. Chao stressed the importance of the Chinese context for a Chinese Christian theology. For him, theology must be done in light of its concrete context. The particular Chinese context had been overlooked by many earlier Chinese Christians. For them, the Christian gospel transcended Chinese culture and any social status. Therefore, culture and the social situation were to be ignored in order to maintain the "pure gospel." It seemed that the gospel was an abstraction. Christian theology was other-worldly and anti-intellectual and stood against Chinese society. In response, Chao made an effort to develop a theology that was integrated with Chinese culture and recognized the Chinese context. He claimed his Christian Philosophy to be "the first book on religious philosophy by a Chinese Christian." In the book, Chao argues:

The western missionary realized that we are not on opposite sides of an uncrossable gap. The missionary can cross to our side, and we can cross to his. The love of God that he talked about made sense from his standpoint... The western missionary does not believe that human beings are able to save themselves by trying their best to be good. We [Chinese] believe that human beings are both able and unable to save themselves, while we, too, try our best to be good persons. What he believes we do not reject, but have our own clear and certain knowledge that we cannot abandon. What he claims as certain we are willing to claim as certain, also. Our experience and our ideas of morality, however, shine to us and we have to follow that light. The western preacher who is advanced in age finds it hard to change his theological perspective. We do not blame him for that; rather, we love him. What we find strange is that even many young preachers, who have time to learn and think, would rather become like people of the fourteenth century... rather than people of the twentieth century.

For Chao, the old fundamental theology of the missionaries did not take Chinese culture seriously. The old theology attempted to reshape the Chinese body to fit a western suit. For Chao, the time had come for people to have a free spirit, a new personality, and to make their choice of belief freely. It is time for the spiritual freedom of Chinese churches. In this time, old history will not be able to confine new life, and old theology has to examine its way of thinking.

The old theology, criticized by Chao and still lingering in China, carries all five characteristics of the so-called TULIP theology of the Calvinist Synod of Dort: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints. With this kind of faith, Chinese Christians cannot remain an integral part of their own society. Such theology must be revised.

Y.T. Wu, another leading Christian theologian, found the same sort of difficulties in older theologies. He rightly pointed out that Christianity in China was not playing its proper role and that the situation of Chinese Christians is mournful:

While China was undergoing a tremendous change, the like of which had never happened, Christianity in China could not say or do anything other than convey an attitude of self-pity and escapism.

Wu attempted to interpret the American social gospel movement in a Chinese way. For his efforts, he was labelled "without faith" by those who claimed to be "conservative" Christians.

When the political climate changed suddenly, theologians like Wu and Chao found themselves facing a new task.
2. The Shaping of a Chinese Theology (1950-1979)

After the new China was born, western missionaries could no longer play a leading role in the Chinese church. Chinese Christians assumed leadership and made decisions according to local needs. Following the outbreak of the Korean war, missionaries were expelled from China, because their home countries were fighting against the Chinese army that came to the aid of North Korea. The Chinese church became independent. This provided the opportunity for Chinese theologians to develop their own theology.

The task for the Chinese church at that time was to play a prophetic role in society, according to theologians like Wu and Chao. Wu reexamined Christian thought in the social context and concluded:

What can a Christian contribute to the present world? It does not have a concrete program for either social reform or world peace. What it can contribute are some principles, a kind of spirit, an attitude. All of those, however, are too abstract.\(^1\)

For him, Christianity itself cannot save China. It cannot make a concrete contribution to the new China unless it accepts socialist ideas. According to Wu, Christianity and dialectical materialism are not mutually contradictory, but rather mutually enriching.\(^5\) In his view, incarnation reveals the love of God, a love that Christianity must manifest itself in a new society.\(^6\) He called the church to play an active role in the construction of a socialist new China. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement was part of that effort.\(^7\)

Wing-hung Lam discovered that Chao had had doubts about communism before it finally emerged victorious in China. After experiencing the new society, however, Chao came to the point of saying:

Now, a native theology starts to take its shape. It covers creation theory, historical philosophy, the idea of life, and the atonement theory of Christ. If such a theology is going to be developed...it must have something to do with Chinese culture and the dynamic immanence of Marxism.\(^8\)

Both Chao and Wu supported the social programs initiated by the people's government. It was a time of dialogue between Christianity and Marxism. It was also a time when Christianity revealed its ability to fulfill its social commitment.

Before a Chinese theology with a new outlook was well shaped, however, the Cultural Revolution began. Churches, along with schools and universities, were closed, and theologians had to stop their endeavour to contextualize their theology.

3. The Church in Struggle (After 1979)

In 1979, the church in China was reopened. Since then, it has been growing rapidly. Many Christians both within and without China are so excited about the numerical growth that they expect China will soon be Christianized. Is the future of the Chinese church all that bright?

Two theological themes emerged from the experience of the Cultural Revolution. One, based on the New Testament story of the five loaves and two fishes, was sharing among Christians regardless of theological or denominational differences. The other, reunification, laid emphasis on identification by Christians with other Chinese people. It did not take long, however, before the fervour of building new church buildings and making new converts overcame the development of these two themes.

Most Chinese Christians are conservative, understanding themselves as evangelicals. The five elements of TULIP theology are still dominant. Opposition to social involvement, and anti-intellectualism, are held over from the old theology. A theology developed by Chinese within the Chinese context is still a dream. People talk about Wu and Chao, but nothing concrete has been done. Bishop K.H.Ting apparently understands what they were trying to do. He calls Wu a forerunner of a theology done according to the Chinese context, noting that "Yao-tsung Wu is an outstanding Christian figure in China. His characteristic is his attempt to dialogue with his age and go forward with his age."\(^9\)

That observation is correct. Wu's understanding of the role of the Christian church in China is fundamental. The sad thing is that his thought has received so little response in China since the reopening of the church. Without appropriate theological support, the Chinese church will be unable to administer such a rapidly growing movement.
The China Christian Council is not a decision-making body. Its relation to provincial Christian councils is consultative, as is the relation of provincial councils to local councils. Faced with the difficulties and issues arising from rapid growth, local churches must find their own ways to cope. What kind of church polity will be able to direct the development of the Chinese church?

The present Chinese church is in a post-denominational stage. This is challenged, however, by the revival of denominations and sects supported by some Christian individuals and organizations from abroad. What is the theological basis for safeguarding Chinese Christian unity? A well-shaped ecclesiology is an urgent need.

Church members are flocking into churches and church buildings are mushrooming. At the same time, all kinds of heresies with a more-or-less Christian character attract hundreds of thousands of people, including many Christians. One of the reasons people are attracted to heretical groups is that so often the theology taught in their own churches is antiquated. Local pastors are not able to respond to the issues arising from the present context, and their teaching is not always relevant to the daily life of people. A theology to safeguard Christianity and the Christian gospel must be developed from a serious study of the Bible that takes account of both past and present contexts.

China is undergoing social reform. The rate of economic growth in China is miraculous. Chinese people, on the whole, are content with their standard of living. Because of the freedom now enjoyed, however, crime is seriously disrupting the reform process. Secularism - a result of the rapid economic growth - challenges the church and threatens to ruin society. What can the church offer Chinese society at such a time? Is the church's only function to castigate or condemn society? What is our theological position on the many social issues confronting modern China? The Christian church in China seems impotent in its response to these concerns.

Christian faith in China is generally seen as personal conviction. It is, therefore, easy for Christians to equate social service with secularism. As a result, the church cannot adequately perform its social function. What is the meaning of a church in society if it has no social function? How shall we understand the church's prophetic role in theological terms? How can we develop an appropriate Chinese Christian social ethic?

All the issues I have raised above are contextual ones. For a church to play a prophetic role in society it must know its identity. Walter Kasper speaks of two extremes: if a church intends to fulfill its social responsibility, it is in danger of losing its identity; if a church attempts to keep its identity, however, it may fail in performing its social function. The way of survival seems narrow. But Jesus' advice is to "strive to enter through the narrow door" (Luke 13:24). Or again, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt 7:13-14). Jesus suggests that there is no contradiction in a church's attempt to keep its identity if it does not perform its social function. By the same token, a church will not be able to fulfill its social function if it fails to keep its identity. A contextual theology will correlate the two.

China is developing. The Chinese church is growing. Under the surface, however, these two significant movements are not integrated. China has made great achievements in economic development that improve people's standard of living. The church in China preaches to its congregations mainly about how to achieve personal salvation. While the crime rate that comes with reform increases, Christians focus their attention on internal contemplation.

The Chinese church will cool down from its excitement over numerical growth. It is time now to review and reexamine the church's past. Based on that reexamination, the church must also reinterpret the Bible in the light of its own context to see what God is saying to the present context. Tradition tells us where we have come from. We must energize that tradition, however, by applying it to a new future and giving it a new meaning.
Notes
1. I refer to the old or western theology that emphasized doctrine and salvation without consideration of social issues.
2. This is the period from the birth of socialist China to the end of the Cultural Revolution.
3. This is the period since the reopening of China and of religion in China.
4. There is no such thing as a Chinese theology, just as there is no American theology or Canadian theology. A theology must, however, deal with the issues of its day. Theology in South America must deal with liberation; theology in the United States must deal with the racial issue. Theology in China has never quite been able to deal with concrete social issues; it remains "traditional," that is, it concerns itself primarily with doctrine and salvation.
5. Tze-chen Chao, Four Talks on Theology (Shanghai: Association Press of China, 1948) 1 (Chinese original; my translation).
6. T.C. Chao, a leading Chinese theologian, graduated from seminary in the United States in 1917.
7. Chao, Four Talks on Theology, 2
9. Ibid., 274-275.
10. Ibid., 293-294
12. Ibid., 319
15. "Three-self" stands for self-administration, self-reliance, and self-evangelism. All three pointed to the independence of the Chinese church from the control of foreign missions.
16. Wing-hung Lam, The Life and Thought of Chao Tze-chen (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1994) 294 (Chinese original; my translation).
18. These movements are labelled heresies not only because of their teachings that falsely interpret the Bible (sometimes in a purely political way), but also because of their illegal behaviour, including swindling and rape, that disturbs the social order.
19. Many leaders of heresies claim to be Jesus or God. Some Christians have been attracted to these unusual teachings and claims, and have left their churches.
20. The driving force of secularism is the desire for separation from community for the sake of the sensual satisfaction of individuals. That is why secularism always has a close connection with materialism (not the type of materialism meant by Marxism) and individualism. If a church confines its role only to making converts, it is in danger of falling into this kind of secularism.
21. Some people may argue that a church should not have a social function. Its task is to promote individual repentance and conversion. But society cannot be purified (if it can ever be purified) only when every individual repents. What, in fact, is meant by individual repentance when social structures make sin necessary? The prophetic role of the church in society is not only to speak of heaven and hell, but also to assure that society is on the right track. That is what the Old Testament prophets did.
22. Christian ethics in China is usually understood personally. It is really Christian morality for individual behaviour without social implication.
NEWSBRIEFS

State Visit: During their recent state visit to China, King Håkon V and Queen Sonia of Norway attended worship at the International Church in Shanghai on 26th October. Chairman of the Shanghai Three-Self Committee, Shen Derong, presided over the worship. Pastor Yang Anding of the International Church preached at the service on the theme of "Offering yourself to the Lord's service".

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Self-Propagation: In order to promote a greater understanding of the principle of self-propagation, a symposium on this topic took place in Shanghai between 18-20 November last year. Several church leaders along with 50 church workers from around the country took part in the discussions, including Dr. Wenzao Han, Mr Luo Guanzong, Rev. Deng Fucun, Rev. Su Deci and Rev. Cao Shengjie. The meeting discussed the questions of building a theology suited to the particular situation within the Chinese church at this time, as well as methods of Bible exposition and other recent issues related to self-propagation within the church at this time.

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Church Music: CC/TSPM committees in the coastal areas of Zhejiang province organized the province's first Church Music Training Class between 20-29 August last year, in an attempt to remedy the current shortage of musical directors in the churches in the province. 45 young people took part and the courses were conducted by three believers who have training in this area. Classes included music theory, direction of hymn singing and harmonium playing.

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Hong Kong Links: In September last year, Mianyang City Church in Sichuan province received a delegation of 14 believers from the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union. Pastor Li Zhigang of the Mianyang church introduced the church's work to the delegation and expressed the hope that more believers from the Union would exchange contacts with Mainland churches.

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Literacy Class: Qinghai Provincial Women's Affairs Committee organized its first literacy class in April of last year. The course lasted six months, finishing in October. 120 participants were divided into two groups and each group attended eight classes each week. Instructors on the course were retired teachers drawn from local congregations, and they took as their texts the three volumes of "Christian Easy Reader", published by the China Christian Council.

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Bishop Wang Shenjin, 1915-1997

(ANS) On the morning of Christmas Day last year, Bishop Wang Shenjin, chairman of the Shandong Three-Self Patriotic Movement, president of the Shandong Christian Council and president of the Shandong Theological Seminary, passed away after a prolonged illness. He was 82 years of age.

Bishop Wang was born in 1915 into a Christian family in Gutian County, Fujian Province, and came to faith in Christ at an early age. He graduated in 1937 from Jilin's Jilin University and then in 1939 from the Theological Seminary of St. John's University, Shanghai. Wang was ordained priest within the Anglican communion and served in Kaifeng City in Henan Province before being sent to Canada for further study in 1946.

On his return to China, Wang served as accountant and priest for the Anglican church in Henan province before rising to the rank of Bishop of the Anglican church in Shandong Province in the 1950s. In 1958, Bishop Wang was elected vice chairman of the newly-created Shandong Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee and became its chairman from 1981 onwards. He was also elected president of the Shandong Christian Council.

As well as local responsibilities, Bishop Wang also played a role within both church and government bodies at a national level, serving as a vice chairman and standing committee member of the national Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee and also a standing committee member within the National Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (C.P.P.C.C.). He was also a representative to the National People's Congress and the Shandong People's Congress.

Bishop Wang devoted himself to the twin causes of unity and world peace. He was a director of the Chinese Institute of Religions and also of the Conference of World Religions and Peace. During his lifetime, Bishop Wang visited many countries around the globe, as an ambassador of peace for the Chinese church and in order to promote friendly ties between churches around the world.

A strong sense of patriotism also influenced Bishop Wang's thinking and actions throughout his life. He constantly sought to build friendly ties with overseas Christian circles whilst at the same time keeping a close watch for hostile overseas forces who sought to damage the Chinese church. In the 1940s he joined the Chinese Christian Anti-Imperialist Patriotic Movement and was a staunch supporter of the Three-Self Movement from its early beginnings. Despite difficulties faced during the Cultural Revolution, Bishop Wang never lost his faith in the Socialist system and its promise of religious freedom for all, and he actively fought to preserve this freedom. Through cooperation and close liaison with various government authorities, Bishop Wang was instrumental in pushing for the return of church property and the re-opening of church meeting points after the years of the Cultural Revolution.
Bishop Wang was also a great scholar and writer, and published several important works, such as "Gospel Parables" and "Research into the Miracles of St. John's Gospel". In recent years he published the first Chinese translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as countless essays and articles. Even in his final days, when battling with chronic illness, Bishop Wang still insisted in pushing ahead with a revision of a draft for a series of books on Judaism for Shandong University.

Bishop Wang was a model for the flocks he pastored, leading believers to be both good citizens and good Christians. By example, he taught believers to devote themselves to the Lord's work, to serve society, uphold the law, promote unity and develop a sense of concern for the needs of all. When his flock faced situations of natural disaster or extreme poverty, Bishop Wang always took the lead in drives to collect funds and material goods to alleviate people's distress. Wang was easy to approach and received all who came in contact with him with warmth and concern, tirelessly working to listen to the concerns of believers and doing his best to solve their needs. In this way, he earned the respect and admiration of all he served and will be greatly missed. [578 words]

"Self-Propagation" Symposium

(ANS) Christianity has always stressed "propagation", according to Jesus's great commission to "go to all nations and make them my disciples" (Matt. 28:19). The Chinese church has thus, in accordance with such Biblical teaching, included "Self-Propagation" among its Three Self principles. However, many questions still remain about how "Self-Propagation" is to be carried out in the Chinese setting. In order to address some of these questions, 47 representatives from provincial Christian councils and theological institutes throughout the country met in Shanghai between 18-20 November last year. Xu Ge reports on the outcome of discussions at this symposium in the January issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church. This is the first such symposium held in China on this issue since Liberation in 1949.

The symposium reached the conclusion that self-propagation is really the key to achieving the other Three-Self goals of Self-Administration and Self-Support. For example, church workers would not have to worry about receiving enough money to run the church if they spread the teachings of the Christian faith and meet believers' needs - experience shows that believers donate readily when they perceive the church to be serving them and providing for them spiritually. Similarly, the spread of superstitions and heresies which plague the church in some areas can be counteracted by providing clear teaching on various aspects of the faith. Furthermore, the number of well-educated believers and seekers is increasing, especially in the cities, and consideration needs to be given to the message which is to be given to such people.

However, as Xu points out, serious consideration of the content and style of the messages which church workers preach is lacking in the church today. Various church leaders have called for the development of theological thought within the church in China, but the growth of the church in the past decade or so has tended to push such
reflection down the list of most church workers' priorities. At the moment, it is all these workers can do to cope with rapidly growing congregations. Time for reflection on theological issues is seen as a luxury few can afford.

The symposium discussed the question of who should undertake the task of evangelism within the church in China. Participants recognized key elements which make a good evangelist: someone who clearly has a close relationship to God and who is constantly seeking to improve this relationship; someone who has a strong sense of personal morality and who clearly practices what they preach within their own lives; someone who has a sufficiently high educational level to reach a broad cross-section of society; someone with a high degree of Biblical and theological training and the ability to pass this knowledge on to believers clearly and simply.

As to what evangelists should be preaching at this current time, the symposium participants agreed that the central core of the Gospel message never changes, but that the church's understanding and application of that message varies from age to age, according to tradition and experience. Xu reports that the need still exists to look at certain scriptural truths and find ways to combine these with Chinese culture to produce a theology suited to Chinese needs. In particular, ways have to be found to make certain doctrines, such as Creation theory, the Atonement, the notion of Original Sin etc., understandable and acceptable to a Chinese society steeped in a tradition and culture for whom such concepts may be alien. Methods of Biblical study and exposition suited to Chinese study habits also need to be explored and developed.

The symposium participants recalled how, in the 1950s, the church went through a certain mass theological movement, hotly debating the question of how to understand such Scriptural injunctions as "Do not love the world", and "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers". At that time these issues were hotly debated within the church and many articles and essays were published, stimulating further discussion. The symposium participants would like to see similar enthusiasm for theological debate rekindled within the church today.

After discussing who should evangelize and how the content of the messages to be spread should be developed, the symposium discussed how evangelism should take place in practice. Xu reports how participants agreed that preaching should be firmly rooted in the concerns and current problems facing people in the church and in society today. For example, preachers should address questions such as how to promote Christian ethics and morality in the midst of the government's call to build up Spiritual Civilized. Preachers should also address newly emerging phenomena, such as how believers should deal with new wealth in the midst of a developing market economy, how believers should face the threat of unemployment or early retirement, and how believers might deal with marriage breakdowns and divorce. [808 words]

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Meeting The Needs Of Intellectual Believers

(ANS) In recent years, as the church has been developing steadily, there have emerged certain phenomena never seen before: the average age of believers is gradually going down, the general educational level of believers is rising, and many intellectuals are now choosing to enter the church. As the church approaches the 21st century, Yu Jiang from Shanghai asks the question in January's edition of Tian Feng: "How do we bring the Gospel to young, well-educated intellectuals in China?"

As Yu explains, intellectuals within China have been alienated from the church in the past and have harboured an indifferent attitude toward Christianity. There are several reasons for this: firstly, Christianity was introduced into China through the means of Western culture and Western oppressors and was thus seen to be at odds with traditional Chinese culture, values and sensibilities. Secondly, intellectuals came to see the church as a superstitious, backward and stubborn institution and a hindrance to science, progress and modernization. For these reasons, a wide gap developed in China between the church and intellectual circles.

A third reason lies in the fact that, for a long time, the vast majority of believers within the church have been those from the countryside with a low educational level. Hence, for a long period of time, Christianity in China has been merely a "mass" religion of the "poorly educated" in the minds of intellectuals. Given this situation, church evangelists naturally developed their methods of evangelism and pastoring to cater to the greater "mass" of uneducated believers, leaving intellectuals unsatisfied and unreached.

Today, however, the make-up of the church in China is slowly changing, especially in larger towns and cities. Yu cites the example of his own Mu'en church in Shanghai (see ANS 97.3.5): Of the 440 people taking part in training courses for new believers in 1996, nearly a quarter of them had completed some form of higher education and most of these were young people. Similarly, in the first half of 1997, one third of those baptized in the church were below the age of 35 and with a high educational level.

The causes of this change in attitude toward the church among young intellectuals are also manifold: according to Yu, the main reason lies in the fact that the Chinese church in recent decades has been following the Three-Self path and has found its own place within society instead of being a mere "foreign" import. The witness of Chinese Christians to other members of Chinese society over the past 40 years has earned the admiration of different groups within society, including intellectuals. Christianity in China has established a social role for itself and intellectuals have begun to re-evaluate and consider the faith from the standpoint of its potential contributions toward education, development and stability within society.

An added reason for this change is that the general educational level of the whole population in China has greatly increased with the start of the Reform and
Opening policy and the accompanying economic development. Most people now receive education to the level of middle school or even higher. Given this fact, the number of intellectuals has naturally increased within society as a whole and thus it is only natural that this is reflected within the make-up of church congregations too, where new believers are more often than not better educated than before.

Yu points out that the church in China must now face the fact that it is not just a church for a "mass" of low-educated peasant believers. He believes that the church must recognize its growing component of "educated" or "cultured" members and think of ways to provide them with the pastoral and spiritual support they need. If the old methods of pastoring remain intact and untouched then the church will never really be able to attract or bring together the increasing number of new believers and seekers with higher educational levels. Yu has found that, once they have entered the church, young intellectuals unanimously feel the simple "mass" pastoral diet they receive is not suitable or enough for them. They are thus left feeling that the church simply lacks concern for them. Some intellectual believers wander from church to church in search of something more meaningful to them and invariably end up disappointed as they discover the same style and content at every place of worship they visit. Intellectuals need spiritual nurture if they are to be kept within the church.

It thus seems obvious to Yu that the church must find new pastoral methods which can meet the needs of intellectual believers. For example, most intellectual believers feel a strong need to participate in the life, work and debates of the church. Therefore, according to local needs, Yu suggests that congregations should organize special fellowships for intellectuals. These fellowships would provide a forum for educated believers to actively explore their ideas and thinking about faith issues under the guidance of a pastoral leader. The fellowships could also serve as channels for intellectuals to witness and serve in the church and in society.

In order to reach out to intellectuals, Yu reminds us that it is also necessary for pastoral workers themselves to pay attention to their own learning. This does not mean that pastoral workers should devote all their time to becoming experts in many fields just to reach out to those intellectuals involved in those fields. But, it does mean that pastoral workers should take care to keep their own knowledge of various fields and issues as broad and deep and as up-to-date as they can manage, so that they have a point of contact with as many people as possible and can maybe then share the Gospel with them in some way. In order to achieve this aim, Yu believes it is up to the church itself to give pastoral workers and evangelists more opportunities to engage in further studies and training. The writer suggests allowing evangelists to return to seminary every few years for "top-up" training for a period of time. Seminaries also need to look in to setting up suitable courses for this purpose.

Yu cautions that learned, scholarly and talented evangelists should by no means be expected to separate themselves from the broad mass of believers in order to reach intellectuals exclusively. In Yu's eyes, the Chinese church will continue to be a "mass" church of the relatively low-educated for the foreseeable future. The point is to make sure that evangelists are equipped to become "all things to all people", as the Apostle Paul was, so that all members of the church and of society can be reached and cared for in some way. [1123 words]
Allowing Church Members To Grow Old With Dignity

(ANS) Throughout China, church leaders are currently talking about "running the church well", and they devote all their energies to this cause. However, in considering how to run the church well, few people stop to consider the fact that most of the church's membership is made up of elderly people. Zheng Xinyuan from Kaifeng city in Henan province argues in January's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, that facing up to the fact of its elderly membership is essential as the church considers how best to run itself and move forward.

In a recent statement, Standing Committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (C.P.P.C.C.) and Chairman of the National Committee on the Elderly, Wang Zhaohua, pointed out that, "the number of people over 60 in China has now broken the 100 million barrier. This number increases by 3% each year. By the end of the century, we will have 132 million old people, representing over 10% of our total population. We are becoming a country of the 'elderly'."

The question of the ageing of China's population is one which the government, society and every individual family takes seriously. It has ramifications for the future of China's development and stability. Given these facts, Zheng suggests that the church in China cannot afford to overlook this phenomenon either. This is especially the case when one considers that 70-80% of all believers within the Chinese church are elderly. Therefore, the church has even more of a responsibility to deal with the questions raised by its elderly membership. Zheng suggests that finding ways to solve problems related to the ageing of the church's membership would not only ease the burden such members may place on society but at the same time would also be an example and a good witness to society.

Zheng has some practical suggestions for church congregations to consider to help its older members. He encourages church's to consider setting up Old People's Centres run by local congregations. These centres could be places where old people can gather, convalesce after illness, receive health care and also provide recreational facilities, all under one roof. These centres could also have a residential element, where elderly believers in need can spend their final years in peace and without being a burden to sons or daughters who cannot afford tc care for them adequately.

Zheng reports how his own church in Kaifeng city has already made a start in the area of tackling the needs of its elderly membership. Shi'en church in the city's eastern suburb has already set up an "Old People's Peace and Comfort Home". The home primarily takes in elderly believers who are in ill health or physically weak and who have no-one to care for them, regardless of whether or not these residents are able to contribute toward the cost of their care. The aim of the home is to make sure that no-one within the church goes uncared for. The home has a clinic, and each resident receives a monthly physical check-up. The home is run entirely by volunteers from within the local congregation. As Zheng reports, the verdict of one resident on the "Peace and Comfort Home" is that "the life we live here is truly a foretaste of our heavenly life." Similarly, when the children of the home's residents see the care and
love that their parents receive, they comment on how the church is really a compassionate body. In this way, Zheng points out, the church not only cares for its members but provides a good witness to society.

A second suggestion made by Zheng is that the church learn to tap the potential of its older members. As he points out, there are many older believers in the church who have accumulated a wealth of talents, skills and experiences and who still enjoy good health sufficient to contribute to the life of the church and outreach to society. In this way, Zheng points out, older members of congregations need not feel themselves in any way a burden to the church or society but instead can make some form of positive contribution. [701 words]

98.2.5

Using Spring Festival Couplets To Announce The Good News

(ANS) Spring Festival is the biggest and most important Chinese festival, occurring at the time of the Lunar New Year in January or February - this year, Spring Festival fell on 28th January. During this festival, especially in country areas, people like to paste Spring Festival couplets around their doorways. Two vertical messages are placed on either side of the door frame and together pronounce a certain blessing or message of hope for the new year. A short, four-character greeting is also placed horizontally above the doorway to complete the message. The custom dates back to the Qin and Han dynasties, when people used to hang messages written on blocks of peach wood from their doorways in an attempt to ward away evil spirits.

Today's Spring Festival couplets rarely deal with warding off evil spirits. Messages concentrate on welcoming the New Year as a sign of hope. The content of such messages include descriptions of beautiful Spring scenery, wishing people a better and healthier life or praising some good aspect of life today. However, some couplets, especially in rural areas, still carry superstitious undertones.

In January's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, one believer from Ganzhou in Jiangxi Province calls on other believers to make use of the tradition Spring Festival couplets in order to counteract superstitious thinking and proclaim the truths of the Gospel. Zhao Qinru believes that in this way, Gospel messages can reach local communities in a style familiar and appealing to them. Believers can simply substitute traditional greetings for new ones based on Scriptural truths but written in a typical couplet style.

Zhao has been writing such couplets since retiring due to ill health in 1992. Every year after Christmas he devotes all his time and energy to writing up such messages and delivering them to believers in the country areas in and around Ganzhou in readiness for the coming Lunar New Year. Some of the messages he has used in the past are given below. In the original Chinese, the two parts of the couplet contain the same number of Chinese characters and also rhyme with each other, creating a pleasing effect for the eye and ear:

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God's grace is vast and mighty like a flowing river;  
The Lord's love warms like a fresh Spring breeze.

Prayer is like fragrant incense floating up to heaven;  
The Good News is like an abundant rain coming down after a long drought.

When people believe in Jesus, blessings come;  
Grace is often present within households that rely on God.

God's mighty grace is as deep as the ocean;  
Jesus's great love is as strong as a mountain.

Spring mountains, Spring water, Spring comes and goes;  
The love of the Lord, the love of God, Love stays with us forever.

A family that possesses the Gospel is often joyful;  
A Christian household enjoys peace in abundance.

Zhao suggests that such messages can be completed with four-character horizontal inscriptions such as "Immanuel", "Hallelujah", "Praise the Lord", "Spread the Good News", "Be salt and light", or "Love your country, Love the Church". [525 words]

ANS Focus: Xiamen, Fujian Province:

"Noah's Ark" Sailing Full-Steer Ahead In Xiamen

Last year, ANS reported on the newest church in the city of Xiamen, Fujian Province - the "New District Gospel Church" or "Noah's Ark" church, as it is fondly labelled by local believers due to its distinctive architectural design (see ANS 97.2.5). In January of this year, the church opened its doors to a group of teachers from the Amity Foundation. ANS editor Ian Groves accompanied these teachers on their visit and learned more about how the church is developing since its dedication only two years ago.

"This church is a miracle from God", declares local evangelist Gao Zhiquang. The idea for a new church in Xiamen was raised in 1994, and originally the municipal Christian council wanted to place the church on Gulangyu island along with the already well-established Trinity church there. However, things looked bleak when the local authorities refused permission for such a building, citing the lack of space and the need to control the growth of population on the small island as reasons for the refusal. Nevertheless, believers' prayers were then answered when the municipal government instead offered more than 2,500 sq meters of land to believers within the newly created economic zone on the outskirts of the city.

Donations from overseas Chinese with ties to the city and also from local believers came pouring in, and soon more than 8 Million yuan (US$ 1 million approx.) had been raised for the construction of the new church. Furnishings for the church also came from near and far, including pews provided by Malaysian believers and an organ donated from Singapore.

One of the most striking features of the church is it's appearance, designed to resemble Noah's Ark. The person chosen to design the church was a non-believing local engineer who decided to start reading the Bible in order to collect some ideas about a suitable design structure for the church building. After completing the first few chapters of the book of
Genesis, he hit upon the notion of constructing a building which would evoke an image of Noah's Ark as mentioned in Genesis chapter eight. Whilst completing the design of the church, the engineer was so intrigued and moved by what he had read that he continued his readings in the Bible and eventually came to faith through his involvement in the construction project.

The exterior of the church in the New District is not the only striking aspect of the church. Unlike most churches in China, the congregation of the "Noah's Ark" church has an exceptionally large proportion of young and middle-aged believers, with 33% of the 1,000-strong congregation under the age of 30. The reason for the relatively high number of younger members is the church's location - being on the outskirts of the city and in a newly-created suburb, few old people live locally and even fewer elderly believers are able or willing to travel so far to this suburb every Sunday to attend church services. Furthermore, the New District area of Xiamen naturally tends to attract younger people from all over Fujian province and other areas of China who come there to do business or look for work.

As the church has only been open a couple of years, it is still developing many of its plans and ideas for new programs. In the future it wants to concentrate its efforts on reaching out to local residents through providing services of various kinds. However, due to the large numbers of younger believers, youth work is already a priority within the church now, explains Mr. Chen, director of the youth program. A youth fellowship for church members between the ages of 20-30 provides opportunities for Bible study, a youth choir and the opportunity to visit local areas to bring the Gospel to people there. At present the fellowship has a core membership of around 40-50 young believers. A Sunday school is also available during the regular Sunday morning service, where children of believers can hear Bible stories and take part in hymn singing and dancing.

Although half of the congregation is made up of women believers, the church has still not worked out any special programs for the promotion of women's issues. Nevertheless, the church is attentive to the valuable role women have to play in its life and work - the church's senior pastor is a woman and a recent graduate from Fujian Theological Seminary in Fuzhou. Pastor Li works tirelessly seven days a week for the church and is supported in this by her husband, who takes care of most of the housework and looks after their young daughter. [777 words]

ANS Focus: Xiamen, Fujian Province:

"Oldest Protestant Church In China" Prepares For 150th Anniversary

During a recent visit to Xiamen in Fujian Province, ANS editor Ian Groves joined a group of teachers with the Amity Foundation in visiting China's oldest Protestant church and learning more about the church's former history and its current activities.

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(ANS) A plaque outside Xiamen's Xinjie church in Fujian Province reads "China's First Protestant Christian Church". The church was built in 1848 after the end of the first Opium War when Xiamen was opened to the outside world as a so-called "Treaty Port". The church building was extensively renovated in 1935. After merging congregations with another local church in 1958, activities at the church building were halted between 1966-79 due to the Cultural Revolution. The building was returned to believers and reopened in August 1979, the first church to be re-opened in Fujian Province and the second church within the whole of China. In 1982, the local municipal government declared the church building a protected historical location.

After reopening, the church's main concern was to select and send four young people to seminars in Fuzhou and Nanjing in order to provide for its immediate and future pastoral needs. The church now has one pastor and three evangelists, as well as six elders and 26 deacons. The church has also quickly moved to set up a choir, children's
group and youth fellowship, as well as Bible study and prayer fellowships, an old-people's fellowship and a network for providing home visits to those in need. Since reopening, the church has held 15 baptismal services, admitting a total of 949 new believers to the church. At present, the total membership of the church stands at just over 2,200.

This year, the church will celebrate its 150th anniversary and plans to mark this occasion by publishing a special souvenir album cataloguing the history of the church. In order to achieve this, it is appealing to local church members to collect souvenirs and memorabilia, as well as old photos which tell of the life of the church both past and present. [348 words]

98.2.8

NEWSBRIEFS

Evangelistic Services: On November 14-15 last year in Zhejiang Province’s Wenling City, members of the Chengguang Church brought friends and relatives to evangelistic services held at their church. Approximately 4,000 people attended each day, either seated in the main sanctuary or following the services on closed-circuit television in five other rooms. 80 believers from the church also participated in a prayer vigil throughout the two days in support of the outreach. During the second evening more than 600 first-time attenders made a decision to accept Christ. The church will follow up these commitments by providing the new believers with counselling in basic Christian beliefs. Today the Wenling area has 101 congregations with a total of 72,200 believers.

Self-Propagation: In a recent interview, vice chairman of the national Three-Self Patriotic Movement and chairman of the Jiangsu Provincial Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Ji Jian Hong, called on the church to improve its work in the area of Self-Propagation. He encourages the church to begin establishing a Chinese systematic theology through the publication of theological writings by Chinese theologians over an extended period of time. He suggests that a good start for this work could be provided by debating some of the basic theological issues of relevance to the church in China today. These include the discussion of how to be independent while also belonging to the church universal, what it means to be in the world while also being separate from it, the issue of faith versus logic and reasoning, and the consideration of whether belief and unbelief are complete opposites.

Bible Course: Begun in August 1993 by the Yongnian County CC/TSPM in Hebei Province and now sponsored by the wider Handan City CC/TSPM, the Jingling Bible Course has to date already trained more than 80 students. Named after the Jingling Church where the Bible classes take place, the course provides qualified evangelists for local congregations throughout the area. By providing church workers trained in sound teaching and doctrine, the course helps congregations resist the influence of heretical beliefs. Last November, the official plaque for the course was unveiled in a ceremony attended by CCC President Dr Wenzao Han, who wrote the words for the plaque, along with other local church and religious affairs leaders.

Symposium on "Life Values": Last November, nearly 70 professors and students attended a symposium sponsored by the Graduate Student Association of Nanjing Jinling Union Theological Seminary to discuss Christian views on life and life values. They explored several different aspects of the topic, including what one "gains" and "loses" as a Christian and how this is viewed differently by believers and non-believers. Participants noted that, given the new economic climate in China, wealth has not necessarily brought happiness to those who possess it, nor does poverty necessarily involve only misery. Participants also explored issues involving the meaning of life, death, and new life in Christ.

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Testing for church lay workers: In order to improve training and to raise motivation, the Jiangsu Provincial CC/TSPM will hold an examination in February this year for all lay church workers and evangelists under the age of 55. The examination will test church workers’ knowledge of the Bible, Three-Self principles, current political developments and legal issues concerning the church. Test papers will be set by a special sub-committee of the provincial CC/TSPM.

Places Mentioned In This Issue Of ANS

1. Beijing
2. Fengyang (Anhui)
3. Ganzhou (Jiangxi)
4. Gutian (Fujian)
5. Handan (Hebei)
6. Hong Kong
7. Jinan (Shandong)
8. Kaifeng (Henan)
9. Kunming (Yunnan)
10. Linyi (Shandong)
11. Mianyang (Sichuan)
12. Nanjing (Jiangsu)
13. Qingdao (Shandong)
14. Shanghai
15. Weihai (Shandong)
16. Wenling (Zhejiang)
17. Xiamen (Fujian)
18. Yantai (Shandong)
19. Yingjiang (Yunnan)
20. Yongnian (Hebei)