New Ideas On How To Finance The Chinese Church

(ANS) As the number of Chinese believers has grown rapidly in recent years, so too has the need for church workers, buildings and all manner of church services. However, financial constraints greatly limit the expansion of church activities, particularly in poorer areas (see ANS 98.7.8, ANS 98.3.3, ANS 98.1.2). Given the Chinese church’s ultimate goal of self-support, the church must rely solely on its own members for funding. After the Sixth National Chinese Christian Conference, held December 1996-January 1997, a national church committee was established to deal specifically with the question of self-support. In October’s edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, Associate General Secretary of the Chinese Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), Xu Minghan, addresses this problem and summarizes the committee’s recent findings and work.

The most common source of church income right now is offerings from individual believers. Xu underlines the importance of encouraging believers to make financial contributions. In his opinion, both believers and church workers lack awareness of how donations are used, and this discourages believers from giving more. New church members in particular believe that offerings merely serve to benefit church workers. Moreover, some believers are afraid their offerings end up financing huge banquets instead of essentials. Xu stresses how donations not only provide a livelihood for church workers but are also of vital importance in promoting church work in all its aspects. Xu is aware, however, that it is little use urging believers in very poor areas to give more money, since they are already giving their utmost to support the life of the church.

Another possible source of funding Xu mentions is church real estate. In many places, churches used to possess plots of land right in the heart of city centers. This is especially true of older churches dating back to missionary days. While all church property was confiscated during the Cultural Revolution, today churches have the right to either reclaim their piece of land or be suitably compensated where this is no longer possible. Often these plots of land have enormously appreciated in value in recent years. Xu hopes that local churches will reclaim these plots in places where a
comprehensive compensation policy has not yet been implemented. Moreover, Xu wants to promote church real estate investments in cooperation with outside partners. Xu recognizes, however, that this kind of joint investment poses some problems for very traditional or cautious Christians. While conservative believers might not want to cooperate with non-Christians, others may fear the financial risks involved.

Since property investments are only feasible for a certain number of urban congregations, Xu goes on to encourage all local churches to go into business, be it small-scale like breeding cattle in rural areas, or larger enterprises owned by churches in more urban areas. Xu is aware that believers who consider business an inappropriate way of making money for Christians may oppose such activities. Pointing out the importance of honesty, Xu reminds believers that it is the "how", not the "what" which determines the legitimacy of making money. Furthermore, he considers well-trained believers an important human resource who could help in the setting up of such businesses. Xu comments that church life is enriched not only by preaching the Gospel but also, to some extent, through a flourishing Christian economy.

Apart from a general lack of funds in the church as a whole, another serious problem for the church is the gap between churches situated in rich coastal cities and congregations in underdeveloped inland regions. With this gap in mind, Xu addresses the issue of richer congregations helping care for poorer churches. The national CC/TSPM committee recently established a national foundation aiming at this kind of inter-church redistribution of wealth. By setting up a mutual assistance fund, the church not only hopes to reduce the gap between rich and poor congregations but also expects churches to teach each other about how to solve financial problems. However, Xu recognizes that the general lack of overall funding cannot be solved by redistribution alone.

**Christian Entrepreneur Makes The Sky "More Blue"**

(ANS) Environmental conditions in China for sustaining her 1.3 billion people are already far from ideal. Human interference and exploitation of the environment accompany China's rapid economic development, compounding natural environmental difficulties. In many areas, for example, polluted water constitutes a major health risk. Effective management of water resources thus poses one of the greatest challenges to China today. Fortunately, awareness of environmental issues is increasing. October's issue of *Tianfeng*, the magazine of the China Christian Council, interviews a young Christian female for whom environmental protection is both a vocation and a profession.

Zhou Hongyun is a rising young star in Gaocheng, Jiangsu province, an area already well known for its emphasis on environmental protection. Her "Sisheng" (literally, "Reflecting on the Bible") company plays a leading role in this field. The company is mainly involved in the production of water protection equipment and was among the first companies in China to develop internationally recognized technical devices for water treatment. This year the company has already installed sewage
treatment equipment in 100 enterprises all over China. Close cooperation with renowned institutions, such as Shanghai's Tongji University and Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, explains some of the company's success. Apart from research, however, the key to success lies in high-quality products: "We cannot sell an expensive high-tech device to a customer only to have it turn into a piece of junk soon afterwards," Zhou explains. In China, personnel working in the area of environmental protection are usually highly qualified, comments Zhou, and will not accept inferior quality products. One tenth of the 250 staff in Zhou's company are highly qualified technical engineers.

Having completed only junior middle school education herself, the young manager has worked her way up to run her own company. Zhou Hongyun's work is obviously her passion: Afraid of the strong competition in the market at the time, Zhou returned to work only six weeks after the delivery of her now two-year-old child. And during her interview with Tian Feng writer Xin He, she talked only business.

Underneath Zhou's modest demeanor lies a successful businesswoman. For Zhou, doing business in the field of environmental protection is clearly a way of expressing her personal beliefs as a Christian. A cross is clearly engraved as part of her company's logo hanging on the wall of Zhou's office. Why did Zhou choose the words "Reflecting on the Bible" as the name for her company? "I often consult the Bible for advice on personal and business matters", she admits.

Zhou combines the pursuit of economic profit with providing an important service to society and also protection of the environment. "I see environmental work as a kind of social service," Zhou explains, "because it requires high input and yields little output." Moreover, apart from purely technical achievements, such as introducing and developing high-tech equipment, the company seeks to be effective on a more personal level, trying to enhance qualities in its personnel such as competence and love and respect for their work. Here, once again Zhou's humanitarian approach shines through. "I want everyone to enjoy clearer water and a bluer sky ", Zhou sums up her company's philosophy.

Jealous Husbands - An Occupational Hazard For Male Evangelists

(ANS) Approximately two-thirds of Chinese believers are female, and women play an increasingly important role in the life of the Chinese church. However, in Chinese society at large, men and women still do not mix together much, particularly when not in a group. Given this situation, male evangelists can often arouse suspicion when meeting with female believers, and this sometimes leads to compromising situations. In November's issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, a male evangelist going under the name of De Qi addresses this problem.

De became aware of this issue when a fellow evangelist told him of an incident involving a female believer and her husband. One evening, at the end of a prayer meeting, the woman had asked this evangelist to stay behind, since she felt ill and wanted to pray for better health. While the two of them were praying alone in the
church, the woman’s husband suddenly turned up. Seeing them sitting alone together, the husband flew into a rage and jealously accused the evangelist of improper behavior. Later, the husband would not let his wife go to church any more, leaving the evangelist feeling hurt and deeply wronged.

De points out that this conflict might have been avoided had the evangelist paid attention to some basic rules of conduct for dealing with believers of the opposite sex and of roughly the same age. De then goes on to offer some guidelines for evangelists, the starting point being their own thoughts. De reminds male church workers that they must be sure to regard all sisters in God as their beloved sisters, without being on intimate terms with any one person. Pure thought must be accompanied by appropriate speech, De continues. In order not to discredit themselves or their message, evangelists should abstain from flirtatious language.

Above all, De mentions, evangelists should be prudent in their actions. For example, when dealing with female believers, male church workers could invite family members to be present instead of driving them out and closing the door, as happened in one case. This not only helps to prevent unpleasant rumors but also presents an opportunity to share the Gospel with other family members. When alone with a believer, church workers should not close doors or go into bedrooms. They should also maintain a certain distance between the believer and themselves. Furthermore, when there is nothing urgent to discuss, the length of an evangelist’s visit should be limited. Concerning preaching in teams, evangelists should avoid setting out with somebody of the opposite sex and the same age. Moreover, church workers should exercise caution when preaching at night, and should not stay overnight in a believer’s home if her husband is absent. Here, De is addressing evangelists in rural areas where they often need to travel long distances between believers’ homes and spend the night in different locations.

It is not only evangelists who provoke misunderstandings through imprudent behavior, De explains. Well-meaning female believers often offer food and local delicacies to visiting evangelists, thus arousing the suspicion of husbands who may not always receive such special attention from their wives. Generous hospitality is sometimes hard to decline, De admits. In such cases, he suggests, the evangelist might in his turn offer the food to elderly family members or other persons in the household. In this way, the time-honored Chinese tradition of hospitality need not interfere with the spreading of the Gospel.

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**We’re Moving!**

*As of January 2000, Amity News Service will have the following address:*

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Our telephone, fax and e-mail numbers remain the same.
Chinese Music Teacher Builds Bridges Between East And West

(ANS) Chinese church music involves a curious mixture of Chinese and Western elements. One of the first undertakings by Western missionaries, knowing the ability of music to reach people's hearts, was the translation of Western hymns into Chinese. Today, despite the existence of truly indigenous Chinese hymns, Chinese church music still has a heavy Western bias. October's issue of Tianfeng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, introduces a middle school teacher who is continuing the centuries old exchange between Chinese and Western church music on a very personal level. By striving for musical perfection, she has not only enhanced her own musical abilities but has also gained valuable insights into the bridge-building nature of this endeavor.

Qiu Weizhen is a woman in her late forties. She was sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution but, unlike so many of her generation, this period of her life led to a beneficial outcome. As compensation for lost years, Qiu was allowed to study at Shanghai Normal University. After completing her training as a middle school music teacher, she continued her studies at the renowned Shanghai Conservatory of Music and also at the German Goethe Institute in Beijing. The reason for her studying German was simple: many years previously, a professor from Berlin had introduced the German middle-school system of musical instruction to her. "His method of communicating harmoniously with the students was an eye-opener to me", Qiu recalls. Ever since that time, Qiu had harbored the wish to go to Germany in order to experience and understand for herself the German way of teaching music.

Years of work as a middle school teacher followed, during which time she became a Christian and was baptized. Her growing occupation with music opened a new dimension of this art to her: "Music is a beautiful language" says Qiu, "God gives us his wonderful melodies to nourish our dried hearts." Slowly, she came to experience music from a spiritual point of view.

A year ago, Qiu's longstanding dream finally came true. Relying on her own financial resources, Qiu managed to take part in an advanced training program in Bavaria, Germany, organized by the German Ministry of Culture and Education. The experience had a profound impact on her life. Apart from deepening her understanding of musical education, Qiu also functioned during the course as a bridge between two worlds. Just as a professor from Berlin introduced German culture to her years ago, Qiu managed to convey some notions about Chinese music and musical education to her German teachers. She particularly remembers one occasion: "The teacher had asked us to compose a dance in order to deepen our understanding of a certain piece of music. I incorporated elements of Chinese folk dances and tajiquan (traditional Chinese shadow boxing) into my dance. This left the teacher very impressed." But, equally important, her German interlude enhanced her new understanding of music as a matter of faith. "Martin Luther knew about the intimate relationship between faith and music. His adaptation of church music brought it closer to the lives and music of common people", she says.
Now, back in China, her work as both a music teacher and a church choir director give her plenty of opportunities to apply her new knowledge. Apart from composing, Qiu has also shared some of her insights in prize-winning articles published in specialized music education journals. Qiu Weizhen obviously enjoys building bridges between China and the West, church and society, music and faith. Among her most cherishing memories of her trip to Germany is a visit to a German congregation: "I chose to sing a Chinese hymn, 'The Resurrected Christ', for them. While I was singing, they gained a sense of how the Chinese church is growing in the spirit of love. And I felt proud not only of being Chinese, but also of being a Chinese Christian."

99.11/12.5

HURRYING THE DECLINE OF THE "BLOND" MADONNA

(ANS) Calendars, books and other Christian artifacts featuring blond madonnas with a blue-eyed baby Jesus remain overwhelmingly popular within the Chinese church even today. Such images are a graphic reminder of the influence of former Western missions. However, despite their popularity, important arguments exist for the creation of indigenous Chinese Christian art. In October's issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, artist He Qi outlines some of these arguments. He Qi is a Doctor of Aesthetics, a consultant to the Amity Christian Art Centre in Nanjing and a member of the Chinese Artists' Association. He has won international acclaim for his artistic interpretations of Christian themes, which are clearly inspired by both Chinese tradition and modern western techniques. (See ANS 98.11.8 and 98.12.6)

He Qi's main argument in favor of Chinese Christian art is the fact that Western-style Christian art helps to preserve the image of Christianity as a "foreign religion" in China. The term yangjiào, literally meaning "foreign" or "overseas religion", carries a negative connotation and has been applied to Christianity ever since the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries. Nevertheless, many Chinese Christians think that only Western-style art is "true, orthodox" Christian art. "This kind of thinking kills the creative spirit of any Chinese artist who wishes to sinicize Christian art", He complains. He recalls a Christian calendar cover he saw recently where the artist had obviously tried to give the cover a Chinese touch by using a traditional Chinese painting technique. Nonetheless, the painting still showed a fair-haired Virgin Mary and child. He points out that the original Italian renaissance paintings so admired today in China did not actually display the "true" biblical setting either. In fact, they were modeled after local Italian people and places of the time. Therefore, they too are an expression of local culture and can be considered indigenous art.

Despite difficulties, He Qi has reasons for optimism regarding the development of indigenous Christian art in China. Due to the global nature of the Gospel, every culture can find points of reference in the Christian message. And, like the Gospel, indigenous art usually touches on themes central to human experience. Indigenous artists have at their disposal the means to express Christian beliefs in the symbolic language of their own culture.
Since all kinds of Christian art styles have emerged over time from the West, is there still room for a uniquely Chinese Christian art? Again, He Qi is optimistic. Chinese Christian art has developed a long way and has potential for further development, he believes. Therefore, there is no need to fear that Chinese Christian artists might end up merely emulating or "re-inventing" certain Western models. He is utterly convinced that, despite unavoidable influences from varied outside sources, every piece of art retains its individuality due to the unique personality of the artist. Accordingly, he explains, a work of art retains its convincing nature because of the artist's unique interpretation of the subject. Seen from this angle, specifically Chinese Christian art will always be a product not only of Chinese cultural heritage but also the varying interpretations of each individual artist.

He's own experiences in his struggle for Chinese Christian art are mixed. While overseas Christian communities accept and welcome his own unique style of painting, Chinese Christians still request 19th century western romantic style Christian paintings from him. Despite the problems, he holds on to his desire to express his feelings and beliefs through contemporary Chinese art. He even dreams about the day when the situation may be reversed, with Chinese Christian art providing a model for Western Christian artists instead of the other way around.

ANS Feature:

99.11/12.6

Third Chinese Christian Art Exhibition Held In Nanjing

Following on from two previous exhibitions in Hong Kong in 1993 and Nanjing in 1996, the Third Chinese Christian Art Exhibition was held in November this year in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. Organized by the Amity Arts Center in Nanjing, the opening ceremony was followed by a conference on Chinese Christian Art. ANS Editor, Katrin Fiedler, attended the exhibition and conference and spoke with many of the artists and organizers contributing to these events.

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Among Chinese artists as a whole, Christians still constitute a small minority. Nevertheless, with Christianity gradually gaining in popularity in China, more and more Chinese artists are starting to incorporate Biblical motifs into their work. As a result, Christian art in China is created by a very mixed group, not all of whom are necessarily professing Christians.

Nanjing's Taiping Museum, with its beautiful complex of traditional buildings, formed the backdrop to this year's art exhibition. The museum is of particular interest to Chinese Christians: The Taiping Rebellion of the 1850s, now officially regarded as an "upsurge against feudalism", was heavily influenced by Christian thinking, albeit of a rather heretical nature. Since then, Christianity in China has come a long way, and so has Chinese Christian art. In his opening address, Dr. Wenzao Han, President of the China Christian Council, expressed his optimism that this year's exhibition would see works of even higher artistic achievement than last time. Bishop K.H. Ting's address focused on theological aspects of artistic interpretation, emphasizing how, in his view, Chinese Christian artists should strive above all to present the human side of Jesus' life on earth.

One of the most admired objects at the exhibition certainly reflected Bishop Ting's sentiments: a life-sized woodcarving featuring scenes from the life of Jesus. Presenting Jesus from a very human and Chinese perspective, its delicately crafted scenes left every visitor impressed. Artist Zhang Wanlong
from the Amity Arts Center talked about his approach when creating this work: "The most important thing for me was to present the topic in a lively, very human way. Look at the chicken over here... and the vegetables there... this is Jesus' childhood, growing up just like any ordinary Chinese kid grows up. And look at the surroundings - they are very Chinese." Zhang continued: "During the process of carving, many of my friends would ask me about Jesus and Christianity. They would say, 'Oh, so is Christianity about being a good person?' And they were happy to find a point of reference in their own culture through my work. Therefore, presenting Jesus in such a human and Chinese way helps people to associate him with their own personal lives. Creating such a work of art thus constitutes one way to spread the Gospel."

Talking with contributors at the exhibition, there seemed to be a marked difference of approach adopted by younger and older artists toward their work. Older artists tend to be more concerned that their works be visually and aesthetically pleasing, whilst younger artists concentrate more on lending their works of art a greater depth of meaning and possible interpretation. Apart from a generational difference, this may also reflect the increasing influence on younger Chinese artists of modern trends within Western art, with its greater emphasis on liberty of composition. Both Chinese and Western traditions were represented among the art works on display, along with a huge variety of techniques ranging from traditional Chinese water color paintings and calligraphy to oil paintings, wood carvings and paper cuts.

The seminar on Christian art held immediately after the exhibition was only the second conference of its kind held on Chinese soil. As a result, instead of focusing on one particular aspect of art, the papers presented were of a fairly general nature and covered a very broad range of topics. For example, some artists discussed topics such as the general development of Christian art or the problems of composing Christian art using Chinese techniques, while others introduced their personal approach towards art.

The quality of the papers varied, given the fact that the conference was attended by both professional and amateur artists. Due to the absence of an overall general theme, some of the most interesting and urgent issues within Chinese Christian art were only touched upon briefly. Examples of such issues include how Chinese artists can truly indigenize Christian art in a way which goes beyond "exchanging bread for rice." This problem further begs the question of how such an indigenous interpretation of the Gospel can be made acceptable to believers who still cling to old traditional Western styles of Christian art. Interestingly, the existence of similar symbols within Chinese and Western cultures poses a different kind of problem for Chinese artists. For example, how can a "Christian" fish be distinguished from a typical traditional Chinese watercolor fish painting? Such questions cannot be solved all at once, inviting the prospect of further Christian art seminars and conferences in China.

ANS Feature:

A Church Born "By Accident" - Tang Shan, Jiangsu

In October this year, Rev. Ewing W. Carroll Jr. of the Amity Foundation's Overseas Coordination Office visited a rural church on the outskirts of Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province. As Rev. Carroll discovered, what started out as a small prayer group has developed into a thriving and growing congregation, now grappling with the consequences of China's rapid urbanization.

In the early 1990s, three elderly women began meeting for prayer and Bible study in Tang Shan Township, some thirty kilometers east of Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. Ms. Tang Chuiyi was one of the three. Twelve years ago, she suffered serious head injuries in an automobile accident. For weeks her neck was "frozen" and Grandma Tang could hardly move. During that time a nephew encouraged her to read the Bible. Not yet a Christian, she was soon struck by the countless passages which revealed a God who had profound love for all of creation, including Grandma Tang!
As she continued to read and reflect on various Bible passages, Grandma Tang’s body began to heal. When asked, “Why did you become a Christian?” she replied: “I learned through reading the Bible that there is a God who loves and cares for all of us.” She soon began attending a small house gathering and, by the end of the year, was baptized.

Now age 72, Grandma Tang is unapologetic about her enthusiasm for Christ and the church. Nearly every spoken phrase is prefaced with “Praise God!” Her smallish, wrinkled fingers are equally enthusiastic as she firmly clasps the hands of each new friend. It is difficult to imagine this same woman was totally incapacitated only a few years ago.

The original gathering of three women soon began to mushroom. The growing number of participants at weekly prayer and Bible study sessions led to the group’s purchasing an old house for worship and other meetings. However, they soon outgrew this facility and began making plans to build a new church hall and an adjacent multi-purpose building.

Grandma Tang and other believers began to canvass the greater Nanjing area, asking existing churches to donate or loan funds for the construction of a new church building. Many of the Tang Shan congregation also donated or loaned money for construction work. While hiring an outside company to do the major work, individual believers also volunteered their time and labor.

The Tang Shan Protestant Church is one of some 300 churches in Jiangsu Province. There are 800,000 Christians in the Province, nearly 98% living in rural areas. About 70-80 Tang Shan believers gather every Friday afternoon for Bible study. Some 20-30 meet on Saturday afternoons for prayer. When asked how many people attend the regular Sunday morning worship service, Grandma Tang was somewhat embarrassed to reply, “Oh, only 800-1,000!”

Grandma Tang’s enthusiasm has spread not only across her own village but within her own family. For several years her husband, a retired farmer, has regularly traveled to Nanjing by bus to purchase Bibles and hymnals for those without a copy. He spends his own time and money doing this and sells them for the same price he paid. On occasion, when he finds someone unable to afford the price, about US$1.40 per Bible, he simply notes, “Oh, you can pay me next time.”

The Tang Shan church sits on a site overlooking rice paddies and vegetable gardens. However, in recent years the city of Nanjing has begun to stretch in all directions. Now, less than two hundred meters from the Tang Shan church, there is a massive apartment complex providing private housing for several hundred families. Tang Shan may still be a rural church in history and mindset, but it now faces the dual opportunity and challenge of how to share God’s love with the steady stream of “city folk” now moving into the area.

ANS Feature:

**Suzhou: Paradise On Earth?**

For Chinese, the ancient city of Suzhou, with its outstanding classical gardens and romantic waterways, is considered a “paradise on earth.” In November this year, ANS editor Katrin Fiedler had an opportunity to visit both Protestant and Catholic churches in Suzhou and observe just how “heavenly” the church situation is in this “paradise”.

Located in the coastal province of Jiangsu, Suzhou is one of China’s most developed areas. As with many other Chinese cities, however, development is not just confined to the economic. Recent years have also seen a huge upsurge in the number of Christian believers in the city too. Out of a population of six million inhabitants, 50,000 are now registered Protestant Christians. In the past, only a handful of believers might gather for worship, often traveling long distances in order to meet. Today, 44 churches and meeting points serve believers’ needs in Suzhou.

In 1979, Apostle’s church in Suzhou was the first church to reopen in the whole province. Since then, numerous churches and
meeting points have sprung up, each new gathering point an occasion of special joy and praise for the congregation involved. 85-year-old Rev. Bao Guping, pastor of Gongxiang Church in the city center, still remembers every detail of the reopening of his church: "It was on April 6th, Easter. And everybody was crying during the service..."

As with numerous other coastal cities, Christianity in Suzhou goes back to the arrival of Western missionaries in the late 19th century. Aside from Catholic Jesuits, Methodists and other Protestant denominations counted among the first missionaries in town. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, 14 Protestant churches and a number of Catholic churches had been established within the city. While some of these churches were destroyed during the "Ten Years Of Chaos", the majority remained intact. Not all of these buildings are being used for worship purposes today, so recovery of former church property constitutes one of the most urgent tasks for the church in Suzhou. This task is facilitated by documentary evidence compiled by one of the Protestant parishes, St. John's. Here, church workers keep an archive based on documents dating back to missionary times. Young pastor He Jiemiao proudly presents a pile of books, "Several volumes of documentary data have already been published", He explains. The existence of such well documented archives is rare within the Chinese church.

Dubbed as the "Land of Rice and Fish", Jiangsu has long been one of China's wealthiest provinces and this is still true today. Unlike congregations in many rural areas, the church in Suzhou can easily support itself. However, the church does share a problem afflicting many Chinese congregations: a chronic shortage of church workers. As a result, one of the duties of urban pastors is regular visits to outlying meeting points and churches. However, with a total of six young seminary graduates and five older pastors, conditions in the city of Suzhou may be considered favorable if compared with Christian congregations in more remote rural areas.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the Christian community in Suzhou is the good relationship between Catholic and Protestant churches. On expressing a desire to visit the local Catholic community, my Protestant hosts took it in their stride: "We often visit each other," they explained. "In fact, the relationship between adherents of the five major religions (Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Daoism and Islam) are very good." A subsequent visit to the Catholic church convinced me of this. Hearing the Protestant elder teasing a Catholic pastor many years her senior, I realized that this was not a rare occurrence and that contacts were anything but infrequent. The next day I was informed that this very same elder was busy attending a Buddhist ceremony. Thus, while church representatives in Suzhou still follow the official pattern of distinguishing between Protestant and Catholic Christianity as two different religions, in practice they have obviously moved wide ahead of Christian congregations and individual believers in other places.

Both Christian churches are roughly equal in size, the Catholic church having some 60,000 registered members. However, there are some significant differences in the makeup of the two Christian communities, as the Catholic pastor explained. While Protestant congregations contain a relatively high proportion of intellectuals, the Catholic church in Suzhou is made up predominantly of fishermen and farmers. Caring for such a rural congregation means a lot of travel and performing such varied duties as administering extreme unction and celebrating marriages to blessing new boats. One of the famous Suzhou canals runs just alongside a patch of land belonging to the Catholic church, and fishermen coming to attend Mass there can easily find a place to moor their boats.

Unfortunately, idyllic pictures like the one above are slowly vanishing, as numerous fishermen and farmers give up their traditional livelihoods. This leaves the Catholic clergy in Suzhou with the task of looking after an increasingly diverse congregation. The Protestant church faces similar challenges. For example, economic opportunities have led to a large influx of migrant workers into Suzhou, with a number of believers and Christian sympathizers among them. Coming from the poorest areas all over China, speaking a wide variety of different dialects and feeling socially displaced, these workers enter the church with very different needs from those of more well-established urban Protestant believers.

Fortunately, Protestants and Catholics alike maintain a very good working relationship with the Suzhou city government. Being a member of the local People's Congress, one of
the Protestant elders frequently use this opportunity to voice concerns on behalf of the Christian community. During my visit, I also caught a government representative chatting amicably on a sofa with one of her friends, a young nun. No earthly "paradise" is perfect, and neither is the church in Suzhou. However, as far as dealing with their problems is concerned, the churches in Suzhou are certainly trying to live up to the "paradise" reputation their city enjoys.

**NEWSBRIEFS**

Theological Thought: Jiangxi Bible School in the provincial capital of Jiangxi Province, Nanchang, played host August 27-30 to a conference on theological thought. Some 50 papers covering different aspects of the topic were offered during the conference. Participants also joined in an exploration and discussion of readings from Bishop K.H. Ting's latest book, "Selected writings of K.H. Ting" (See ANS 99.1/2.4). Such discussions can be seen as part of the ongoing debate about the building of theology which includes Bishop Ting as one of the main proponents of a renewal in theological thinking.

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Self-Propagation: In early July this year, conferences were held in Fujian and Shandong provinces dealing with the question of self-propagation. The Fujian conference was attended by Cao Shengjie, chairperson of the church's Self-Propagation Committee, with vice-chairman Shen Cheng'en present at the Shandong conference. At both conferences several dozen church workers reflected on the challenges of self-propagation. The idea of self-propagation, one of the cornerstones of the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement and a central concept to the notion of an autonomous Chinese church, is closely related to a number of problems inherent in the Chinese church today. For example, enthusiastic but poorly educated and ill-trained evangelists often do more harm than good to the healthy propagation of the Gospel. Conference participants outlined the necessity to elevate the educational level of church workers, since only this enables them to meet believers' needs and to struggle successfully against heretical teachings. Given a higher level of competency, pastors and other church workers would also be able to approach non-believers correctly and participate actively in the building of theology. (See ANS 99.9/10.8 and ANS 99.5/6.1)
Places Mentioned In This Issue Of ANS

1) Gaocheng (Jiangsu)
2) Shanghai
3) Beijing
4) Nanjing (Jiangsu)
5) Hong Kong
6) Tang Shan (Jiangsu)
7) Suzhou (Jiangsu)
8) Nanchang (Jiangxi)

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