No Ordinary Day

(ANS) March 16, 1999. The sun was shining brightly. A gentle breeze was blowing. It was no ordinary day in Nanjing, China! The entrance to the Amity Printing Company was decorated. New awnings had been placed above the windows. The floors had been painted. A platform was erected on the entry steps. Potted plants were arranged on the platform. Chairs were lined on the walkway in front of the platform. Staff and workers carried out their responsibilities with an air of anticipation. Buses arrived carrying excited delegates from more than 20 countries. They signed the guest "scroll". Each one received a baby orchid. Chinese Christians arrived in buses, private cars and taxis. They represented three levels of Christian Councils, Amity Foundation, seminaries and Bible schools, the YMCA and the Three Self Patriotic Movement. Delegates from the Religious Affairs Bureau joined the group. Board members took their places. Overseas delegates, Chinese guests and Amity staff took their seats. A large red banner served as the backdrop. It explained why March 16, 1999, was no ordinary day. In both Chinese and English it said, "Celebration For The Completion Of The 20 Millionth Copy Of The Bible."

The words of the hymn Great Is Thy Faithfulness express the gratitude felt by Chinese Christians and United Bible Societies' delegates:

Great is thy faithfulness,
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have need of Thy Hand hath provided;
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Bishop K. H. Ting, honorary President of the China Christian Council shared with the delegates: "During the Cultural Revolution the Red Guards destroyed all our Bibles and we needed Bibles to read. The United Bible Societies knew the need and wanted to help. Both sides did not know or trust each other at that time. However, despite the risks involved, both sides wanted and desired to try to establish the printing work. In Jesus Christ we became good friends."
According to Dr. Wenzao Han, President of the China Christian Council, 13 years ago, in 1986, some individuals and overseas Christian organizations questioned whether the Chinese government would allow Bibles to be printed in China. In 1988, the Amity Foundation and the United Bible Societies, under the Lord's leadership, entered into a joint venture, establishing the Amity Printing Company for the express purpose of printing Bibles for China. Now, 13 years later those that questioned the feasibility of the venture have their answer. The Amity Printing Company has celebrated the printing and distribution, with government approval, of 20 million copies of the Bible.

"Do we need to print more Bibles in China?" asked Dr. Chen Zemin, professor at the Jin Ling Theological Seminary in Nanjing, during the celebration ceremonies. He continued, "All I know is that when Bibles arrive at the distribution points they are taken. The number of Christians in China is growing very fast and the educational standard is rising. We need more Bibles. Yes, we will print more Bibles! There are many outside the church who need the Bible. Teachers, students, and other intelligentsia want to read the Bible. In the Bible there is a kind of truth they want to know about. The Bible is an important factor of Chinese culture." He went on to say, "In 1981, when the Jin Ling Theological Seminary opened there was not one copy of the Bible. We borrowed Bibles from some of those who had hidden their Bibles during earlier years. It is hard to believe that we now have more than 20,000,000 Bibles in China."

The Bibles that roll off the presses at Amity Printing Company are penetrating this vast nation. Anyone, believer or non-believer, church attender or non-attender, is free to purchase a Bible without being questioned or having to register. The cost of a standard size Bible is US$1.50. Trucks loaded with Bibles leave the grounds of Amity Printing Company. They are taken to the train or bus station from which they are sent to the 65 Bible distribution centers throughout the nation, from the plains of Inner Mongolia, to the snow fields of Heilongjiang in the north, to the southern mountains in Yunnan Province, to the interior tourist city of Xi'an in Shaanxi Province, from the port cities of Shandong Province in the east to the desert of Xinjiang Province in the west. Many churches have their bookstores open every day.

As of March 15, 1999 at 2:30 p.m., the Amity Printing Company had printed 20,398,145 copies of the Bible, and 18,065 Braille Bibles. Bibles have been printed in more than seven minority languages—Lisu, Miao, Yi, Bai, Dai, Ligu, and Jingpo. In addition to Bibles, Amity prints scripture calendars, devotional books, seminary textbooks, reference books and hymnals for the China church.

Dr. Ho Yong Kim, Chairman for the Asia Pacific Regional Executive Committee and General Secretary for the Korean Bible Society said in his congratulatory remarks, "It was in 1882 that the first Korean scripture, the Gospel of Luke, translated in Shenyang, China, entered our land. Since then, during the last 117 years, a quarter of the Korean population has become Christian. The positive influence that Christianity has brought to Korean society overall has been remarkable. China has played a role in communicating the gospel in Korea and neighboring countries."
Dr. Eugene Habaeker, Chairman of the United Bible Societies and President of the American Bible Society, expressed thanks for "Those Who Dreamed." He said to those present, "We celebrate what God has done and is doing because of your dreams." Chinese Christians also thank God for the United Bibles Societies willingness to join them in making their dream a reality. "I believe that it is significant that at the end of this millennium, we have come together to celebrate the printing of 20 million Bibles and the fulfillment of a dream," said Rev. Deng Fucun, General Secretary of the Three Self Patriotic Movement. He went on to say that Chinese Christians need a new vision for the 21st century and if they follow God's timetable, He will accomplish His plan for the China church.

As guests departed the grounds, the sound of the printing presses could be heard. Bibles were being printed. Boxes were being packed and addressed. Trucks would soon be loaded. It was no ordinary day. It never is when God's Word is printed and distributed. China will be blessed and the Chinese church will impact the 21st century because of the Living Word. It was no ordinary day! "To God be the glory; Great things He has done!"

**Turn To God, Rejoice In Hope**

(ANS) In December last year, representatives of churches from all over the world descended on the Zimbabwean capital, Harare, for the 8th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Led by the President of the China Christian Council, Dr. Wenzao Han, a delegation of eleven represented the Chinese church at the Assembly. In February's edition of *Tian Feng*, the magazine of the Chinese church, one of the participants, Wu Enyang, comments on the gathering and its importance for the church.

The WCC was formed in Amsterdam, Holland in 1948. 147 church bodies joined the Council at its inception. Today the number has increased to 230 member churches scattered over more than 100 different countries, making it the largest international Christian ecumenical body in the world. Wu mentions how, in 1948, China joined the WCC with four member churches, including one Chinese pastor who was elected one of the co-presidents of the new organization. After withdrawing from the body in 1951, the China Christian Council re-entered the WCC at its 7th General Assembly in Canberra, Australia in February 1991.

The WCC General Assembly is held every seven years. Taking "Turn To God, Rejoice In Hope" as its theme, this year's Assembly was attended by over 4,000 people, comprising some 900 official delegates along with various guests and observers. The Assembly provides an opportunity for member churches to report on work completed since the last gathering, decide on directions to be taken in the coming years and elect new leadership. At this year's Assembly, Rev. Gao Ying from Nanjing, who recently spent a year as an intern at the WCC in Geneva, was elected to the 150 member Central Committee.
During the period of the Assembly, member churches organized different presentations on the campus of Zimbabwe University. These sessions, known in local language as "padare", lasted two hours each and covered a variety of issues facing the church today, including questions of justice, peace, democracy, race relations, refugees, gay rights, AIDS, globalization, human rights, women's rights, environmental protection and drug abuse etc. Wu describes how the Chinese delegation held their own "padare", introducing the current situation of the Chinese church. The session took place in a classroom decorated with material linked to the church in China. Wu noted how participants at the "padare" were mostly church representatives responsible for links with the church in China and East Asia. The presentation included a discussion on theological education in China, women's role in the church, Bible publishing and the work of the Amity Foundation.

At the end of the General Assembly, the Chinese delegation also joined other member churches in setting up a stall to sell handicrafts made by Chinese Christians. Proceeds from the stall were donated to a WCC-supported AIDS prevention project in Zimbabwe.

Wu reports how, during one meeting at the General Assembly, some delegates accused China of being the country with the world's worst record for religious persecution. Due to meeting protocol, the Chinese delegation were not able to respond immediately to such an accusation but had to wait until the last day of the Assembly. On that day, Rev. Bao Jiayuan of the China Christian Council was able to present a few facts about the religious situation in China to counter the accusation. Rev. Bao commented how such views of China are quite common among circles influenced by U.S. right-wing conservative forces, but this was the first time he had heard such an accusation come from within a WCC meeting.

In the church in China, there is much discussion about how diversity and unity can co-exist within the church. In this light, the Chinese delegation felt that the WCC General Assembly presented an excellent opportunity for them to witness diversity and unity in action within the church universal. Wu experienced the meeting as an occasion of learning from each other, respecting and tolerating each others differences and celebrating unity together.

A highlight for all the delegates at the General Assembly was an address by South African President Nelson Mandela to mark a 50th Anniversary celebration of the organization. During the Assembly, Dr. Wenzao Han and Rev. Gao Ying were also among 100 representatives invited to meet with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, while Rev. Cao Shengjie and Ms. Li Enlin attended a meeting with Mrs. Mugabe.

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Use Them Or Lose Them: Young People In The Church

(ANS) Young people are the future of the church. In China, most church workers are approaching retirement. As such, it is vitally important for the church to devote time and energy towards fostering those who will take over from the current generation. The good news is that many churches in China have already set up youth fellowships. However, according to Ming Guang in March's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, youth work means more than just allocating one meeting among many to young people and thinking that is enough. Churches need to stop and think what the aims of youth work are, and then set up a variety of approaches to meet those aims.

Guang comments that many of the young people who attend youth fellowships in China are still "seeking", usually showing up because somebody has witnessed to them in the past and they are curious. These seekers may also have received some teaching from attending Sunday services, but they usually cannot make sense of what they have heard. Therefore, youth work involves presenting the full message of the Gospel to these people in a systematic and comprehensive way.

However, the Gospel needs to be shared with young people using language and methods they are familiar with. The concerns and questions of young people need to be addressed. Guang notes that there is a temptation when approaching young people to abandon basic teachings about sin and the need for repentance, out of fear of alienating and scaring seekers away. Guang advises youth workers to resist this temptation and let the power of the Gospel message speak for itself. Otherwise, young people will be given only a partial view of the Christian life, thinking that being a Christian is easy and that sinning is not so bad.

When doing youth work, Guang believes it is important to show young people how to integrate their faith into their daily lives. It is easy for young people to think that good behaviour is only necessary when "in church", and that outside of the church anything goes. Modern Chinese society is rushing toward variety, materialism and secularism and, in Guang's view, young people today face many more choices and challenges within society than the older generation did when they were young. If the church doesn't help young people face their difficulties then it tends to lose them. However, the church should not try to solve all problems, as others will always appear to take their place. Instead, youth work should try to impart certain Christian principles to young people which they can use as tools for solving concrete problems in life. As Guang points out, the Christian faith is not a set of theories and answers, but is the experience of grace in our lives as we walk with Jesus.

Guang notes that many older members of the church do not always see the importance of youth work. Some believe that young people are not experienced enough or ready to contribute anything meaningful to the church. However, the Bible and the history of the church has shown that God has no reservations about calling young people to service. John Wesley was only 18 years old when he was called, and many of the current Chinese church leadership also dedicated their lives at an early age. Jesus spent three years training his young disciples, and Paul spent much
time and energy on Timothy and other followers. As Guang points out, God does not wait until people are perfect, well-rounded and mature in order to use them. Rather, God places importance on the right attitude of heart and a willingness to serve. Guang believes that the church needs to follow God's lead in the way it views its young people.

99.3/4.4

Is The Church A Help Or A Hindrance To China's Development?

(ANS) Not long ago, He Jiemiao from Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, paid a visit to one of the ten most developed counties in China in the southern part of the province. He's aim was to collect information on the role of the church in the general economic and social development of that region. Unfortunately, far from finding that the church had a positive role to play, He discovered a community of believers torn apart by the infiltration of sects and heresies. He describes the damage being done by the church in that area in March's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church.

First of all, He discovered that some believers were preaching messages which were interfering with the life of the community in that county. Many believers were being told that Jesus would be coming back next year, so they were giving up or neglecting their work in order to wait. In southern Jiangsu, the rice harvest was 450 kilos per mu of land last year (1 mu = 0.0667 hectares). This year conditions were excellent and the yield increased to 600 kilos per mu. However, much of this bounty was lost when two large farming households neglected their land due to the prophecy of Jesus' return. Similarly, some fish farmers neglected to renew the contracts on their ponds in anticipation of the Second Coming.

Some believers in the county were preaching that Christians and non-Christians cannot live side-by-side, and that believers married to non-believers must immediately separate. As a result, many couples in the area are now either divorced or preparing for divorce. This has caused great concern within society.

Some preachers are teaching from the prophet Micah that the Lord has already gone out from His temple, and that this means God can no longer be found within any church. Consequently, many believers think that God can only be present with them if they worship in the open air. Others say that registered churches are unclean and God cannot be found within registered church buildings. As a result, reports He, many believers are refusing to enter church buildings and worship together with other believers any more. This is providing a bad witness to the local community.

He discovered that, out of a total of seven local meeting points in the county, six were now already heavily under the influence of various sects. A local United Front cadre comments: "We are afraid that if we don't step in concerning these cases then they could do real harm to both the church and society. Yet, we are reluctant to get involved, as we see this as an internal church problem." The cadre appealed to He to investigate the situation in the church in that county and come up with a way of dealing with the situation.
He comments that a church never exists in isolation, it is rooted in the society around it. As such, it is up to the church to show its members how to fit in to that society and make a positive contribution. He believes that this begins in seminaries. When church workers, pastors and evangelists are trained, they need to be equipped to help believers resist all kinds of heresy and make a positive contribution to the life of the local community.

Most of the developments about theological thought and education in China are urban based. However, one characteristic of the Chinese church at this time is that the vast majority of believers, over 85%, live in remote, country areas. He suggests that work done in theological education should take into account this reality within the Chinese church and should reflect more the needs and experiences of country believers. If this is not done, the leaders of the church will go out from urban seminaries totally unequipped to pastor the needs of their rural flocks. This leaves country believers and the communities in which they live open to disturbances such as the ones described above.

Unity And Diversity

(ANS) Over a year ago, Bishop KH Ting called for "liberation of thought" within the Chinese church. This has led to questions being asked about whether there is only one valid understanding of faith, and whether "liberating thought" might pose a threat to maintaining the orthodoxy of what is believed in the church. For Kan Baoping, vice chair of the Chinese Christian Theological Education Committee, this all boils down to the question of "unity" and "diversity" within the church. Kan discusses this question in February's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese Church.

By "unity", Kan understands a common desire to seek after and understand God. It refers to sharing "One God, One Faith, One Baptism", being baptized into the church and relating to each other in a spirit of tolerance and forgiveness. Kan understands "diversity" as referring to different understandings and expressions of this common, shared faith. Kan reminds us that, over the past 2,000 years, believers have been continuously reflecting on the Christian message, leading to the rich body of Christian thought which the church possesses today. He points out that this body of thought does not comprise one solitary understanding and expression of faith but many. Kan stresses no-one can claim to completely and entirely understand God. This being the case, no-one within the church can claim that one person's understanding of God is invalid merely because it doesn't fit another's views.

When Chinese believers talk of the Chinese church as "post-denominational", they are stressing that the church is unified but not uniform. The church is not torn apart any more by denominational differences, but it still by no means has only one understanding of faith and one fixed liturgy by which to express that faith. Kan believes that "liberating thought" within the church means learning to share experiences and understanding with each other in humility, learning to listen to others and find room for the experiences of others. If Chinese believers can learn to do this, the church's understanding of God would be greatly enriched and the church as a whole would be strengthened and revitalized.
Dealing With "Unbelievers"

(ANS) In a country like China, where Christian believers form a small minority within the overall population, the question of how to relate to non-believers and believers of other faiths is a serious issue faced daily by Chinese Christians (see ANS 99.1/2.3). In February's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, Xiao Yang from Anhui Province continues to discuss this theme and gives some useful advice to Chinese believers.

In Xiao's view, the key to relations with non-believers is how they are viewed by believers. A believer's attitude and way of acting toward unbelievers, as well as any willingness to try and understand them, will all be affected by the overriding view the believer has of unbelievers in general.

A vital factor in this is the state of a believer's own spiritual life. Xiao believes that if believers' spiritual lives are weak then they cannot understand God and see themselves or others as God sees them. This can lead to many misunderstandings, prejudices and preconceived ideas. Believers who are spiritually poor tend to have a narrow view of unbelievers, seeing them as outsiders, unclean, or even as devils or demons who harbour only evil intent in their hearts! When such thinking takes root, it leads to believers speaking unkindly about unbelievers, not cooperating with them, even bitterly despising them. Therefore, in Xiao's view, it is the duty of every believer to nurture their prayer and spiritual life and stay close to God so as to develop a healthy understanding.

Xiao stresses that this "correct" view involves seeing all people, believer and unbeliever, as objects of God's love. All people are in God's hands and have a role to play in God's eternal scheme of things. Most importantly, all will ultimately receive a righteous judgment from God. Xiao maintains that the role of the believer is to become a channel of God's love toward unbelievers. We need to spend time with God and allow God to cleanse our hearts of suspicion and hatred of unbelievers, filling us instead with love which overflows to them.

Furthermore, Xiao points out that we are united with unbelievers in being unworthy of God's grace. Since we ourselves are only forgiven and pardoned because of the love of Christ, we have no reason to withhold forgiveness, pardon and love from others. Above all, believers within the church should never decide that those outside the church are unworthy of being saved.

In conclusion, Xiao says the way to deal with unbelievers is to start with ourselves. For many in China, observing the daily life and actions of Chinese Christians is the only Bible they will ever "read". Therefore, only when we continually examine ourselves and become a reflection of heaven here on earth will we have the ability to see non-believers as God sees them, attract people outside of the church and improve relations with them. In everything we do, we should reflect God's love.
**ANS Feature:**

**Resilience Rooted in Shared Love: Nanping Church, Fujian Province**

During the disastrous floods which hit China last summer, one of the worst hit areas was Nanping in northern Fujian Province (see ANS 98.7.5 and ANS 98.9.1). The following information comes from a visit last November made by Rev. Judith Sutterlin, staff member of the Amity Foundation Overseas Coordination Office, to the church in Nanping, Fujian Province. Conversations with Pastor Sun Renfu of the church shed light on how believers have helped in the area's recovery from the floods, their overall help for those in need, and the nurture they provide each other in living out their faith.

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Toward the end of last year, it was already hard to imagine the destruction that Nanping had experienced only five months earlier. Nanping sits on the banks high above the confluence of the Xi and Jian Rivers which join to form the Min River. Repairs had already removed the outward signs of the water’s effects on roads and buildings in the city proper. However, the internal memories of the sudden and dramatic rise in the waters, which overflowed those banks, remain. Anyone from the area could tell stories about roads covered with water, familiar buildings affected, the boat deck that had hung from one of the bridges when the waters first receded, and family and friends who suffered personal losses. According to government reports, two villages in the area were totally destroyed. Believers and their families suffe’red alongside others.

Pastor Sun told of one church family in a particularly hard hit area who lost six members when their house came down in a mudslide. Only one family member survived. In another case, a 19-year-old church member who went to sell fruit in the market drowned trying to return home. Families who lost their homes had to stay with friends and relatives until they could rebuild. According to Pastor Sun, six local church buildings were totally destroyed and three others damaged by the flood waters.

Though those in the city suffered less than those in the countryside, the Nanping congregation, whose building was situated just high enough to escape damage, has been doing its part to help those with greater losses. Believers gave 50,000 yuan (=US$ 6,127 approx.) toward relief work in the area. By November last year, four of the churches that had been destroyed were being rebuilt. In addition, local believers have been working to find ways to replace the 20,000 Bibles lost to the flood, and by the end of last year, a small start had been made toward that goal.

Helping the community and reaching out to those in need is not new to the Nanping congregation. During the week they run a kindergarten for 156 children. Though some of the children belong to church families, many come from non-Christian families who live in the neighborhood. Every Sunday, the church holds a medical clinic for those with medical needs not provided for by an employer and who cannot afford to see a doctor elsewhere. The congregation has also set up a "Love Foundation", which began a number of years ago with money from special Christmas offerings. Originally, the church used this money to help poor families who did not have the resources to celebrate Chinese New Year with their families. Recently, it was extended to help buy medicines for those in need.

In addition to the outreach already in place, the church has noticed the need of some of its elderly members who have no family to care for them. They are already helping to provide for one such person and will be able to help more in the near future. They expect soon to complete the arrangements for the construction of a Home for the Elderly that will initially serve 30 people.

A vital Sunday morning worship service nurtures the faith and the spirit of love in believers from near and far. Those who come farthest get up at 3am and walk two hours down from their homes in the mountains to get to the public transport that will bring them the rest of the way to the city. After worship, they eat a meal provided by the church before returning home. A 25-member choir spans the generations as it provides an
anthem and leads the congregation in singing. It’s oldest member, Mr Chen, is a graduate of the Shanghai Music Conservatory and a long time member of the church. He is 82 years old and often leads the hymn practice before the worship service. The youngest choir member is a 17-year-old student. While parents are in worship, their children have the opportunity to attend a Sunday School class according to their age group. There are currently four classes to choose from.

If worshippers have prayer requests, these go to a designated member of the congregation who writes them down and gives them to the pastor. The congregation in Nanping City is currently served by three pastors: in addition to Pastor Sun, the church has a new woman pastor who joined a little over a year ago and also an 84 year old minister. In the surrounding county areas, there are 12 pastors, three of whom are women.

The Nanping City church also relates to and helps other congregations in their area. There are a total of 75 churches in the area, 17 of which are in the immediate Nanping district and five of which are in the city itself. A True Jesus Church congregation also meets in the city church building on Friday nights. Three new churches are currently being built, with the support of the central Nanping City church.

The church publishes its own monthly periodical, "The Ark," to inform and nurture its members in faith and service. It contains church news, sermons, Bible studies, a question-and-answer section, testimonies, new hymns and an introduction to new books in the church bookshop. It was begun in 1994 to serve the needs of the one municipal congregation, but has now expanded to a circulation of 6,000 copies distributed throughout the whole area.

ANS Feature:

Excerpts From The Letter Page 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 March 1999 issue of the church magazine.

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Is It Permitted To Live Together Without Being Married?

To the editors:

As the Gospel continues to spread, more and more young people are entering the church. As a result, holding wedding services in church is now becoming increasingly fashionable. This in itself is a good thing and it is also an important matter for the church.

But, there is a related problem: some believers have come under negative influences within society and only held their wedding service after living together for a period outside of marriage. We all know that God is pure and holy, and that living together before marriage is not allowed under the laws of our country; to say nothing of within the church. Consequently, many of us believers feel that, as Christians, we shouldn’t live together before marriage like some do. However, some believers feel this is no big deal and their attitude toward this issue is not the same as ours.

We are sending this letter off to you in the hope that you will say something about this issue, giving us clear Biblical teaching and direction.

--- Huang Guofu and Zhang Linzhi, Wenling, Zhejiang Province
Response:

Living together before marriage is a new social phenomenon which has appeared as a result of the current wave of modern, western-style, liberated thinking. Living together before marriage is not the same as pre-marital sexual relations, where people talk of love but are in fact merely indulging in acts of lust and promiscuity. Rather, it refers to young people who have both already decided to get married but who then share a bed and secretly taste "forbidden fruits" before the actual date of their wedding. Some people don't think that there is anything wrong with this, but actually it is contrary to Biblical teaching and should not become a popular way of doing things among Christians. The following points should also be considered:

1) Some people may think that, since the couple will become husband and wife sooner or later, the question of living together is not a big one. But, the Bible warns us that, "Marriage must be observed by all and the marriage bed be kept pure; for God's judgement will fall on fornicators and adulterers" (Hebrews 13:4). Only a husband and wife living together within the bounds of matrimony is considered beautiful and receives God's blessing. People living together before marriage do not have the same bond as a husband and wife, and their relationship is more like one of friendship. Moreover, sexual behaviour outside of marriage is, quite simply, promiscuous. This is not a nice thing to hear. Yet, in practice, people living together before marriage themselves often feel a sense of embarrassment about their own behaviour. They often have a guilty conscience and usually want to avoid others finding out about their relationship status. Doesn't this clearly show that this is a big issue? As the starting point for their actions, Christians need to consider whatever it is that will bring glory to God. In our behaviour, we should make strict demands upon ourselves.

2) A wedding is an honourable occasion where everybody is joyful. Why can't a couple wait for that day, receive the blessing of those around them and only then, as new people within a new partnership, step into the bridal chamber and go on to lead a normal, blessed married life together? Some young people go so far as conceiving a child while they are living together, resulting in them getting married in haste in an effort to conceal things. However, just as the proverb says, "The truth will out!" Thus, something which should be a happy and joyous occasion is reduced to an unbearably embarrassing affair. Why put oneself through all this heartache? People and animals both have an inborn physical ability to multiply and produce offspring, but what differentiates us from animals in this respect is the ability to control ourselves and master our feelings. Even more so, Christians should rely on the Holy Spirit to guide their actions, behaving in a holy and dignified manner, not in an "unseemly" way (1 Corinthians 13:5).

3) Legal married life receives the protection of the law. Living together outside of marriage can thus be seen as socially irresponsible behaviour. An even more distorted view of marital love is presented by so-called "trial marriages". In today's society, the divorce rate is rising steadily. If quite a few people are seeking to cast even legal marriage aside then what hope have men and women got who are living together without the support of the marriage bond? We have all heard of far too many "love tragedies" where men and women have got married quickly and then, for a variety of reasons, split up. The worst affected in these cases is usually the woman. Women often cannot bear the "assault" made on them when they are wooed with sweet nothings and loving words, vowing to give their lives and bodies to someone, only to then be cast away without any feeling after they have been used by their partner. After an experience such as this, many people may not even care if they live or die. These "lessons" are far too many.

Which Are The Best Musical Instruments For Accompanying Worship?

To the editors:

I am a young believer and take part in the choir at church. I would like to ask a question: At church meetings, can we also use instruments such as bamboo flutes and erhu (Chinese two-stringed violin) to accompany worship? Is it only proper to use a piano in church?

--- Xin Dao, Henan Province
Response:

Pianos and organs are the usual instruments used to accompany church meetings. Because the organ is easier to learn and lower in price, it is the most widespread among the two. The piano is called the "King of Instruments," but performing on it is a fairly difficult skill, requiring long periods of regular practice. If you play the piano in the same way you play the organ, merely using your fingers to play a few syllables, then it doesn't sound at all pleasing to the ear. On the contrary, it sounds stiff, dull and heavy, and doesn't fit the atmosphere of worship at all. I personally feel that today it is simply not necessary for churches to insist on only using pianos in worship. We are entirely free to use other instruments to praise God, including some folk instruments, such as erhu, bamboo flute, percussion instruments, etc. Of course, one always needs to practice well in advance on any instrument in order to get the best results. Many churches are limited by their situations, for example, whether or not they have musically gifted believers or not. For these churches, organs and electric keyboards are the most useful instruments. Where there are really no believers available who can play instruments, such as at small-scale meeting points in the countryside, they can make use of the new Hymn Master machine. This machine plays the melodies of all the hymns in the church hymnal.

In fact, when we limit the use of musical instruments to merely accompanying worship, this is not using the full potential of the instruments. Instruments contain within themselves the means to express worship to God. Just as we use our voices to produce sounds to express our internal reverence and thanks, so instruments can also be used to express the praise and worship we experience in our souls. Moreover, the music which comes from an instrument can awaken and arouse us, causing any meeting to increase in enthusiastic atmosphere and splendour.

In Old Testament times, the people of Israel, under the leadership of the priests, used all kinds of instruments to praise the Lord. The instruments mentioned in Psalm 150 alone include trumpet, harp, lute, tambourines, flute, strings and cymbals. So, why can we not use many kinds of instruments to praise the Lord today?

99.3/4.9

NEWSBRIEFS

Bible School: On October 15th last year, Shaanxi Bible school held a service of thanksgiving to commemorate its 10th anniversary. It also held a ceremony for the dedication of a new teaching building at the school. CCC vice president and general secretary, Pastor Su Deci attended the celebrations along with 1,000 other guests, including provincial United Front and Religious Affairs Bureau leaders.

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Church Property: Liushi church in Yueqing County, Zhejiang Province, was built in the last days of the Qing Dynasty. In 1958, the building was taken over by the government and converted into the county People's Hall for the new Liushi People's Commune. In 1983, the building was among several churches to be reopened within the county. However, the question of ownership of the property was not settled at that time. This year, Christians in Liushi once again petitioned local government departments and, thanks to a better understanding of national religious policy among all concerned, were successfully granted sole rights to the whole church property, thereby solving a 40-year old property dispute.

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Lay Training: For some time now, the need for more church workers to care for the needs of the growing flock in Sihong County, Jiangsu Province, has been acute (see ANS 97.5.2). Last December, the county Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee organized a one-month lay training class for evangelists. The course lasted for the whole month of December. At the closing ceremony for the course, director of the Sihong County Religious Affairs Bureau, Tang Erfan, urged students to be good workers, leading by good example and delivering blessings to their congregations.

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Art Exhibition: As part of its Millenium Event Series celebrating 2,000 years since the birth of Christ, the Hong Kong Christian Council is presenting an exhibition of work by Dr. He Qi entitled "The Image of Christ in China." Dr. He is Doctor of Aesthetics and consultant to the Amity Christian Art Centre in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. He is also a lecturer at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (see ANS 98.12.6). The exhibition will run at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre from 3 - 9 May and is sponsored by various church bodies in Hong Kong.
Places Mentioned In This Issue Of ANS

1. Hong Kong SAR
2. Sihong County (Jiangsu)
3. Suzhou (Jiangsu)
4. Nanjing (Jiangsu)
5. Nanping (Fujian)
6. Wenling (Zhejiang)
7. Yueqing County (Zhejiang)