Millennial Movements Gain Momentum In China

(ANS) As the year 2000 approaches, certain doomsday sects and cults within the church throughout the world believe that the change in millennium will herald the end of the world and the return of Jesus Christ. The church in China also has to contend with such sects rapidly spreading their message in certain parts of the country, bringing chaos and confusion to church congregations wherever these millennial groups operate. In China, the best known example of this at the moment is the Eastern Lightning sect (for background on this sect, see ANS 97.12.3 and ANS 99.5/6.4). In September's issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, several writers address the issue of millennial prophecies, the return of Jesus Christ and the methods of the Eastern Lightning sect. They warn believers not to fall under the influence of such teachings.

The Eastern Lightning sect believes that Jesus Christ has already come down to earth for a second time, in the bodily form of a Chinese woman called "Lightning". Although rejecting the authority of the Bible, writes Shao Guang, the sect makes use of scripture in order to "legitimate" its teachings in the eyes of those it tries to convert. For example, the group teaches from Jeremiah 31:22 ("For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth: a woman will play a man's part") and Genesis 1:27 ("in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them") in order to "prove" that Christ's second coming on earth will be in the form of a woman. The group uses Isaiah 41:2 ("who was raised up from the east") to show that Christ will return in China, and twists Matthew 24:27 ("Like a lightning-flash, that lights the sky from east to west, will be the coming of the Son of Man") in order to attribute the name "Lightning" to their "female Christ".

The Eastern Lightning sect concentrates its activities in rural areas and city suburbs. The reason for this is because many believers in churches in these areas either don't own a Bible, have never read a Bible or do not fully understand what they read in the Bible. Alongside this, many rural believers have a low educational level and a poor understanding of the faith. In this way, it is easy for sect members to dupe believers. Shao Guang and Wan Songji believe that many fall under the
influence of the sect in China simply because they are ignorant and afraid of somehow being left behind or being cast out. They believe "just in case it turns out to be true."

Ignorance of the Bible and of the basic teachings of the Christian faith are only one factor which aids the Eastern Lightning cause. Jiang Shan writes how he recently got hold of two "instructional manuals" from a former sect member which detail the highly-developed methods employed by sect members when infiltrating a church congregation. Sect members are instructed to enter churches pretending to be eager new believers or seekers. They are encouraged to lie, giving large amounts of fake personal information in order to foster a sense of intimacy and trust with congregation members. At the same time, sect members must observe the situation in the church and target members who are weak in the faith and ripe for conversion to the sect's teachings. Once converts are made, sect members are ordered to keep quiet about them as they seek to build up their presence within the congregation.

Jiang goes on to mention how sect members use any kind of underhand deception in order to win people over. Female sect members are actively encouraged to offer their bodies to young male evangelists in order to tempt them and lure them into the sect. When sect members don't make any headway into a congregation, they turn nasty, mounting vicious attacks on church members. They accuse church leaders of various financial and relational improprieties and generally attempt to split the church through suspicion and accusation. Their aim is to destroy the church.

The writers all conclude that the best way the church can protect itself against the damage wrought by such millennial groups as Eastern Lightning, is for every believer to arm themselves with Biblical truths. Jiang Shan gives details of Eastern Lightning teachings and how they contradict certain basic Biblical truths, and Ming Guang lists all relevant Biblical passages relating to Christ's second coming and the end of the world. All the writers stress that Christians should indeed eagerly await Christ's return, but that Christ will come again in glory, not in bodily form, and we will all be transformed in that instant. For now, we must simply pay attention to doing the Lord's will whilst guarding against the false prophets and false Christ's which God has warned us about.

Church Leaders Support Suppression of Falungong Sect

(ANS) During the past six months, the Chinese government has been taking measures against a widespread religious sect, Falungong (also known as Falun Dafa). The sect's doctrine contains elements of Buddhist, Christian and other traditions. At the very heart of the movement lies the propagation of a new kind of qigong (a traditional Chinese technique combining meditation and physical exercise), which accounts for its particular attraction among many Chinese. Founded in 1997, the Chinese media have reported that the sect had millions of followers at the time of the crackdown in spring of this year. The Chinese police have issued an international warrant against the sect's leader, Li Hongzhi, who is currently living abroad. After the seizure of Falungong materials and supporters, government efforts to eliminate the sect now concentrate on educating the public on threats posed by the sect. In September's edition of Tian Fei, the magazine of the China Christian
Council, prominent Chinese church leaders voice their opinions on the issue of Falungong. These include Bishop KH Ting, Dr. Wenzao Han (President of the China Christian Council) and Rev. Cao Shengjie (a Vice President of the China Christian Council).

All the church leaders quoted in Tian Feng express their support for the government's actions concerning Falungong. They believe the purge of Falungong is in accordance with the law and the constitution and does not endanger the policy of religious freedom. The clamp down on the sect underlines the government’s determination to protect and promote normal religious activities while putting a stop to harmful and dangerous behaviors.

Dr. Han gives a detailed analysis of how Falungong resembles many heretical Christian sects. First of all, the sect frightens its followers by preaching that various calamities and the end of the world are imminent, and that only by belonging to the sect can anyone be saved. For example, Li Hongzhi claims the earth is going to explode very soon, and that this event can only be delayed by him and his followers practicing his particular style of qigong. Li claims that ultimately, only he and his followers can avoid this catastrophe and ascend to heaven. Dr. Han points out how many Christian heresies also require their followers to stop working and await the end of the world in prayer in order to ascend to heaven.

Similarly, neither Falungong nor many so-called Christian sects allow their believers to consult a doctor or take medicine when they are ill. As Dr. Han remarks, these sects bully and accuse their followers of having weak faith if they do not recover on their own accord. Without medical attention, small illnesses then turn into life-threatening ones, taking the lives of many and destroying countless families as a result. Li exploits both the physical and emotional weaknesses of his followers in order to manipulate their thinking. It is reported that, in some cases, Li’s followers have even been confused up to the point of taking the lives of their own relatives.

Dr. Han explains how Christian sects and Falungong are not heist in nature. Instead, the heads of these sects are only concerned with themselves, making themselves into Gods and the objects of worship. He goes on to observe that both Falungong and heretical Christian sects appear to have very tightly-knit structures. Li Hongzhi claims that Falungong merely possesses an "administration", not an organized structure as such. However, Dr. Han points out that a recent gathering of 10,000 of Li’s disciples at Zhongnanhai (the Beijing residence of the Chinese government leadership) and other such gatherings around the country all run counter to Li’s claims and point to a highly organized group.

Finally, all the church leaders agree that sects such as Falungong do damage to the very fabric of society itself. While the rest of China is engaged in improving society and building up the country, Falungong preaches that the end of the world is coming. This generates a passive attitude among followers of the sect, preventing them from working for the good of society around them. Furthermore, illegal gatherings on a wide scale endanger order and stability within society.
Church leaders contrast the behaviour of sects such as Falungong with that of normal religious belief. Rev. Cao Shengjie comments how most genuine religion, although concerned with the supernatural, is also actively involved in the here and now, promoting the well-being of others and the society in which believers live. True religion is congruent with its own moral and ethical norms and is also based on rational reflection. Those whose religious beliefs are genuine do not seek to destroy society or people’s lives but seek to build up society, the country they live in, and the lives of those around them. The actions of Falungong and its leader, Li Hongzhi, fail in all these respects and thereby show the sect to be destructive and dangerous in nature. For this reason, Chinese church leaders unanimously support the suppression of such activities for the good of all genuine religious believers and for society at large.

99.9/10.3

A Blessing And A Curse - Church Workers

(ANS) Every church has to contend with the fact that, though its object of worship may be divine, its members are all too human. The Chinese church is no exception. Often, the frailties of human nature reveal themselves most clearly in the church through relations between church workers and with the congregations they serve. In September’s issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, Chen Chao and Nan Feng explore how church workers form both the backbone of the church in China and also provide it with one of its biggest headaches.

As Chen points out, the term “lay worker” above carries a different meaning in the Chinese church from that in churches abroad. The church in China has experienced phenomenal growth in recent years, but has been unable to train and ordain enough qualified pastors to meet its needs. This is especially true in more remote rural areas. This being the case, lay workers often fulfil the duties and role of ordained pastors within the Chinese church.

Chen notes how this situation brings with it many advantages: For the most part, lay workers are enthusiastic, willing and hard working volunteers. Coming from the same “level” and background as their congregations, lay workers have a naturally close relationship with other church members and are well known by all. Also, a church run by lay leaders certainly fits the New Testament model of the “priesthood of all believers”.

Nevertheless, a church managed by lay workers also experiences its own problems. Since lay church workers in China have no formal theological training and often a low educational background, it is very easy for them to misunderstand the Bible and spread errors. Chen claims that much of the extreme thinking in the Chinese church today is due to misunderstandings. As Chen points out, enthusiasm is only as good as far as it goes. It does not matter so much if a lay worker does not understand something, the problems start when lay workers pretend to know something and preach their erroneous understandings as “the truth”.

Furthermore, Chen observes that it is very easy for lay workers to become proud of their leadership position within the church. Since lay workers seldom receive any financial or material compensation for their services, they are often
tempted to substitute for this through recognition of their status as a church leader. Once a lay worker occupies a leading position within a church, it is very difficult for him or her to relinquish this position. Chen talks of situations where evangelists who have been formally trained in seminary have arrived at new churches and have been driven out by lay workers reluctant to be replaced. Chen says this is a fairly common phenomenon in grassroots congregations.

Nan Feng goes on to discuss the particular problem of evangelists within the church. The main difficulty is that church elders, long standing and respected members of a congregation, often view the evangelist as a mere "hired hand", with themselves as the "employers". In this way, the elders often interfere in the work of the evangelist, with the evangelist often having to tread carefully to avoid upsetting the elders. Nan likens this relationship to an old fashioned mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship, where the daughter-in-law must always keep quiet and simply obey. This results in evangelists losing their enthusiasm and spirit of enterprise, coming to see their service as just a job. Often, evangelists become so convinced that they are mere "servants" of the church that they lose sight of their important leadership role within the congregation. Alternatively, as Nan points out, evangelists choose to clash directly with church elders, insisting that they be looked upon as a pastor and that the elders obey them.

Chen and Nan believe that church workers need to be realistic about their own talents, training and abilities, and serve the church accordingly. Where church workers lack training and knowledge, they should seek ways to acquire what they lack, through self study or attending short and long term lay training courses. Otherwise, they should give way gracefully to those with these abilities. And those who have been trained for church service need to find ways to exercise church leadership in a sensitive but determined way. It is when church workers lose sight of whom they are serving and why that they turn from a blessing into a curse for the church and its members.

WEB-WISE

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Attitudes Towards Non-Christians Need To Be Revised

(ANS) Despite the phenomenal growth of the church in China in recent years, Christians still only make up less than 1% of the total population. This being the case, most Chinese Christians are surrounded by non-believers. And yet, many Chinese Christians are very cautious about their contacts with non-Christians and keep their distance from them, sometimes treating them more as "enemies" than as people. In September's issue of Tianfeng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, Lin Zhihua calls on Chinese Christians to reconsider their relationships with the non-Christian majority.
The existence of prejudices forms the starting point of Lin's article. As the author remarks, prejudices exist throughout the whole of society, and the church is no exception. In the church, prejudice has resulted in misconceptions concerning right relationships between believers and non-believers. Lin comments how believers frequently conceive non-Christians as the complete opposite of themselves and therefore not to be approached: "They rigidly draw a red line between believers and non-believers as if it were not to be crossed." He makes the point that a healthier approach to "non-believers" is to see them rather as "not-yet-believers."

It is prejudice and misunderstanding which lead to the distorted views of some Chinese Christians towards non-Christians. Lin comments how many Chinese Christians echo the sentiment once expressed by Li Changshou, the leader of the extreme fundamentalist "Yellers" sect, who once said "A Christian only needs Christ, he does not need to be benevolent". For Lin, such examples illustrate how many Christians carry the idea of "justification by faith" to an extreme. Faced with non-believers, Christians often lack sympathy, compassion or indeed any common language. Lin criticizes this attitude, "If we cannot communicate with non-believers, how shall we testify to the Gospel with them?"

The author maintains that many of the difficulties believers face in relation to non-believers stem from misunderstandings of Biblical texts such as 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Do not try to work together as equals with unbelievers, for it cannot be done." Many Chinese believers take this literally to mean that they must have nothing to do with their non-believing neighbours. However, Lin stresses that Paul is addressing himself exclusively to believers on matters of faith in this passage. Paul is emphasizing the uniqueness of the Christian faith, which should not be combined with the practices of "unbelievers" such as worshipping idols or having several gods. However, Paul is not telling Christians to avoid contact with such "unbelievers", he merely warns them not to follow the unbelievers' practices. Lin reminds all Christians to be "salt" and "light", respecting others as God's beloved creation, living among them and witnessing to them rather than shunning them. Christians may also pray for unbelievers. Thus, if understood correctly, Paul's saying implies that there are even ways for Christians to make unbelievers part of their religious actions, let alone everyday life. Lin quotes Bishop KH Ting, who once said that believers and non-believers need to adopt a "live and let live" attitude toward each other, applying the formula of "seeking the common ground while preserving differences."

Lin cautions readers not to develop a "class" mentality in their dealings with unbelievers. He goes on to explain just how much Christians and non-Christians have in common. For example, non-Christians have also been created in the image of God, and they also have a soul. Lin reminds readers of the words of the Apostle Paul: "The gentiles do not have the Law; but whenever they do by instinct what the Law commands, they are their own law, even though they do not have the Law. (Romans 2,14)." The author concludes from this that all human beings possess the God-given ability to discern between right and wrong, since God created their conscience. This being the case, non-believers are able to show just as much, if not more, benevolence and mercy as believers. Lin illustrates this point with a recent newspaper report of a Taiwanese man who donated bone marrow to a girl suffering from leukemia. Lin concludes that it is love which makes anyone do such things, and that this love has God as its origin. As Lin points out, only God can create love. We are called to reflect God's love to all around us, not alienate ourselves from them.
A Young Intellectual Reflects On "Culture Christians"

(ANS) The religious revival arising from political liberalization within China has been accompanied by an increased interest in religious studies. In a number of institutions of higher learning, scholars and students deeply sympathetic toward Christianity can be found. The church, for a long time extremely cautious towards these so-called "Culture Christians", is slowly changing its attitude. A new column dealing with Culture Christians in the magazine of the China Christian Council, Tianfeng, reflects this new development. In September's Tianfeng, a young student named He He gives his own interpretation of the phenomenon of Culture Christians and calls for the church to adopt a new approach towards them.

He first points out that the term "Culture Christians" was originally coined in Hong Kong, and was used to refer to mainland Chinese intellectuals doing research in Christianity. He talks of a "fever" of research in Christianity after the Cultural Revolution among mainland scholars in the areas of philosophical, cultural and social studies. In the process of studying Christianity some of these scholars have come to emotionally accept Christ as their Saviour. These "Culture Christians" distinguish themselves from traditional church-going Christians in that they do not attach importance to rituals such as baptism, worship or holy communion, and they stress theological reflection above Biblical studies.

As a result of these differences, He notes that many traditional Christians criticize Culture Christians as loving theology but not necessarily loving the Lord. God appears to be merely the object of their scholarly attention, not an object of praise and adoration for them. Nevertheless, He notes that many within the church affirm the research of Culture Christians into Christian classics and theology, noting that they may have helped push forward the development of Chinese Christianity in a significant way.

He goes on to explore why many "Culture Christians" remain outside of the church. One major reason is the church cannot provide what many intellectuals need. The level of pastoral care is still very lacking, and the content of sermons is often not deep enough. Many intellectuals would rather seek their "spiritual food" in theological books than from a church sermon. Moreover, many outside the church live under the illusion that the church should be "pure" and very different to the world outside the church. They become disappointed when they enter the church and find it contains just as many problems and difficulties as anywhere else. Many then choose to leave the church and seek the God of their ideals outside the church.

He quotes the Apostle Paul who wrote, "To them all I have become everything in turn, so that in one way or another I may save some." (1 Corinthians 9:22). He believes that somehow the church also needs to find a way to become everything to Culture Christians. This requires the training of preachers and pastors able to reason and think in their sermons on the same level as intellectuals. He suggests that more use could be made of youth groups, where topics could be explored in greater depth. Topics chosen could range widely over a variety of real-life technical, social and emotional problems, applying the intelligence God gives all of us to make wise judgements in dealing with these issues. For their part, He also encourages Culture
Christians not to be so arrogant when they enter a church, showing off their philosophical "knowledge" in front of church workers who are not as well-educated as they. If both sides are willing to work at it, He believes the lives of both Culture Christians and the Church can be enriched beyond measure.

Grace Through Unemployment

(ANS) It used to be the case in China that workers were guaranteed a job for life. Most people were employed by state-run enterprises heavily subsidized and supported by the government. However, this is no longer the case. As China modernizes and reforms its economy, it can no longer afford to bail out overstuffed state-run concerns. As a result, workers are being laid off in huge numbers across the country. Unemployment, once virtually unheard of in China, is now a major social problem, hitting the middle aged especially. In August's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, Shen Guo tells the story of how one believer faced the challenge of unemployment and found both strength and a new understanding of faith through the experience.

Kong Lingling is a 45-year-old believer in Shanghai's Mu'en church. On graduating from junior middle school in 1972 she was assigned along with 300 others to work in a clothing market, taking up the post of accountant. Kong has continually experienced God's grace in her lifetime. She never had to leave home to work hard in the countryside as so many others did in the 1970s, and she has a loving husband and a very clever daughter, who is now in senior middle school.

However, all this was to change. Two years ago, the clothes market started doing badly and only 13 employees were still able to keep their jobs. Kong was among the ones let go. To make matters worse, her husband had also lost his job five years previously due to severe short-sightedness. With an elderly mother to support as well, the family required at least RMB 500 (= US$ 60 approx.) to live on per month, but was now suddenly without income.

With very little education and already middle-aged it was extremely difficult for Kong to find any work. She had to take any job that came along, however hard. She assisted in deliveries, helped out in dim sum restaurants and served as an assistant in a food court, saving up her earnings penny by penny in order to scrape by. Then suddenly, just as she was settling in to one position, the work unit re-assigned her to sweep the streets in the area surrounding the work unit.

Kong did not want to do the work. She was only 1.45m tall, shorter than the sweeping brush, and weighed only 42kg. Furthermore, she had once suffered from chronic hepatitis which had left her physically fragile. Kong was afraid that her body would not be able to take the heavy physical burden demanded of street sweepers. But, above all else, she was afraid that people around her would look down on her. Yet, if she didn't accept the assignment, she would be dismissed by the work unit and would receive no references to assist her in getting another job.

After struggling with her dilemma for a while, Kong tells how she opened her Bible and read Jesus's call for His followers to be salt and light to the world. Suddenly it struck her that, in order to be salt, one has to dissolve oneself within the
mass of those around you, sprinkling a bit of your faith on all those with whom you come into contact. She realized that each Christian's light is like candlelight, maybe small and weak in and of itself but still a source of warmth and love. Kong realized that Christians are called by God to do the work which others will not do. She understood that if no-one swept the streets then the roads would fill with litter and lead to disease. Kong picked up her brush and has been sweeping the streets for ten months.

Kong has discovered that her original fears about doing this work proved unfounded. Although she has to work hard through all kinds of adverse weather, her body has never failed her. When asked what advice she would give other believers who face unemployment, Kong replied that they must take any chance for work they get and treasure it, however tiring or hard the work is. She believes God cares for God's children and will never give them more than they can carry. We must see unemployment as just another test in the "schoolroom" of life.

Eating At The Church's Expense

(ANS) In China, there is a long tradition of hospitality and it is a great loss of face to treat any guest poorly. When entertaining guests, it is customary to offer them the best that is available. Unfortunately, in recent years, with the general increase in corruption, this has often been taken to excess. Many work units frequently spend huge amounts of corporate or public funds, often with the flimsiest of justifications, in order to outdo each other in the area of hospitality. In August's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, Nan Qian reports how this unfortunate trend also appears within certain areas of the church.

Nan tells how he preached in a church in a very small county town a couple of years ago. After the service, the pastor of the church invited him for a "very simple" meal so that they could continue sharing. Since the pastor insisted that everything was already prepared, Nan agreed to go along. The pastor took Nan to a fancy restaurant on the other side of town, where several other church leaders were already drinking tea and waiting. The pastor invited Nan to taste some of local specialties, whereupon dish after dish appeared until finally the table was heaving with food.

During discussions at table, Nan discovered the church had just over 300 believers in the congregation, and that the average weekly offering was around RMB 150 (= US$ 18 approx.). When inquiring as to the cost of the meal, Nan learned that it was also around RMB 150. In other words, Nan and the church leaders were eating away one week's offering from the church. On telling Nan the cost of the meal, the pastor became apologetic: a couple of weeks earlier, they had entertained another pastor and crabs were in season, so the price of the meal had been between RMB 300 - 400 (= US$ 36 - 48 approx.). The pastor wanted to assure Nan that they were not treating him shabbily by offering him a lower priced meal.

Nan felt sickened at the thought of all the elderly members of the church who, for example, regularly sold eggs in order to raise a meager RMB 2 (= US$ 0.25 approx.) to put in the collection each week, and now they were eating off such offerings. Nan calculated his share of the meal, handed over the money to the pastor
and departed. That was over two years ago. Nan has not returned to that area since then, not because he doesn't care for the believers there but because he doesn't want to again strain their finances.

Unfortunately, as Nan has heard, this phenomenon of churches entertaining guests lavishly is becoming all too common. Some churches spend over RMB 600 - 700 (= US$ 72 - 84 approx.) on one meal, which is equivalent to the price of a cow for a poor peasant farmer. Nan believes the reason why church leaders behave in this way is precisely because they have come to see themselves as leaders, not as servants of the church. As such, they feel the need to show off to both those around them and to visitors. However, most churches in China are still desperately poor and cannot afford the luxury of lavish hospitality. Many believers still cannot afford their own Bibles and many grassroots congregations don't even own a regular meeting place. Therefore, Nan feels it is wrong for congregations to squander their resources on entertaining in this way. As Nan points out, if Jesus asked for the leftovers to be gathered up after feeding the five thousand, so that there would be no waste (see John 6:12), then shouldn't his followers adopt a similar attitude?

ANS Feature:

99.9/10.8

**Why We Must Build Chinese Theology**

For several months now, a discussion within the Chinese Church leadership on the "renewal of theological thinking" and "adapting theology to socialism" has been taking place (see, for example, *ANS 99.5/6 1*). The discussion has been fuelled by several different factors. One is that Chinese theology is simply perceived as out-dated by many foreign and Chinese observers. Some even consider it to lag behind the developments of foreign theologies by as much as 50 years. Then, last year's floods set off a heated debate on the nature of God: while some theologians held to their view of a beneficent and loving God, others conceived him to be a punishing judge (see *ANS 98.11.2* and *ANS 98.12.2*). Moreover, recent political and social developments force the church to reconsider its role vis-à-vis society and the State. These debates not only form an important part of current church life, but their outcome will be decisive for the church's orientation in years to come. In September this year, *ANS* editor Katrin Fiedler spoke with Professor Chen Zemin and Rev. Gao Ying at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary on this movement for the renewal of Chinese theology.

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According to Professor Chen, there are three indicators which point at the backwardness of Chinese theology: First of all, Professor Chen conceives that Chinese theology lags behind theological developments abroad. The predominant theology in China is based on pre-Liberation teachings of foreign missionaries, he explains. The strength of evangelical and fundamentalist thinking in China is due to this missionary heritage. Similarly, millennial teachings can be traced back to wartime when they enjoyed great popularity. Later, however, Chinese theologians lost contact with foreign theologies and were unable to follow their developments, Chen continues. Encounters with different theologies has only become possible in recent years, and the need to catch up with foreign theological developments is still urgent, Chen believes.

The second indicator Chen names for the insufficiency and backwardness of theology in China is related to recent scholarly developments outside the church, namely, the emergence of the so-called "Culture Christians". This group of intellectuals study Christianity from a non-spiritual but sympathetic point of view. Thus, a highly educated elite has gained a comprehensive understanding of Western theologies and is already searching to apply these teachings to modern Chinese society. Therefore, the church's theology can be said to lag even behind the developments within the intellectual community in China, Chen remarks.
Finally, Chen holds the opinion that theology taught in China has not kept pace with social developments. A theology which does not match the society in which it finds itself will soon be rejected by that society, he warns. A modernization of Chinese theology is therefore overdue, Professor Chen concludes.

As both Professor Chen and Rev. Gao point out, the "renewal of theology" must be understood as a long term process, with theological seminaries at its center. Both of them agree changing the convictions of believers at the grassroots level is a matter of generations and will probably take much longer than the creation of a new generation of church workers.

As Chen explains, the development of a "new" theology will be preceded by an evaluation of the existing teachings in seminaries all around China. This process, which is already underway, judges the current teachings by questions such as the following: Are these teachings in line with current church policy? In particular, do they incorporate the ideals of the Three Self, of love for church and country? What kind of theological orientation do they reflect? And finally, is their level of scholarly sophistication high enough?

Chen continues to enumerate some of the specific theological topics to be discussed in this debate: The idea of the Cosmic Christ, the relationship between creation and redemption, and the concept of man, that is how "sinful" or how "perfect" is man? As mentioned above, a discussion on the nature of God has sprung up from last year's disasters. Furthermore, the role of ethics as well as the questions of truth, goodness and beauty existing outside of Christianity are raised. Finally, the Chinese Protestant church is also currently striving for a new interpretation of "justification by faith".

Obviously, some of these questions reflect the difficulties of representing a religious minority and touch upon the relationships between Christians and non-Christians in Chinese society. As Rev. Gao remarks, not only the content of these current debates but also the very process of discussion itself is something new to the Chinese church. A first step in the building of a new theology has been made by Bishop KH Ting with his new collection of articles, both Professor Gao and Professor Chen point out (see ANS 99.1.4).

NEWSBRIEFS

Church Property: The construction of the Three Gorges Dam in southwestern China's Sichuan province is estimated to have already affected close to one million people. In five different areas in the eastern part of the province, 20,000 believers in six churches will have to move because of flooding caused by the project. Since 1998, the national CCC/TSPM have been offering financial assistance to affected churches and believers as they are forced to relocate. Local church councils have also been working closely with local religious affairs and government bureaus in choosing and registering new sites for churches, as well as in the design and construction of new church buildings.

Relocation work has reached different stages in different locations. For example, believers from the cities of Yunyang and Fengdu have yet to decide on a new location for their churches. Progress has been most rapid in Fengjie. Local religious affairs authorities there have helped the church cut through many of the formalities needed to relocate, and they have also helped keep relocation fees to a minimum. Local authorities have also worked hard in locating a suitable site for the new church. The new location is a 1000 sq meter plot, compared to the 850 sq meters of the original church building. With formalities concerning the acquisition of a site already completed, the church hopes to begin construction work very soon.
Women's Affairs: The first ever Jiangsu provincial-level conference for women church workers was held between 1-3 June this year. 14 participants from major cities all over Jiangsu gathered in the port city of Lianyungang. The conference presented a rare opportunity for long-established local church women's affairs committees to come together at a provincial level.

Conference participants agreed on the importance of thorough planning in the area of women's affairs. The women pledged to start by strengthening their own local women's committees and groups. A proposal was also put forward to include a women's page in the provincial church magazine, Huixun, in order to report regularly on the situation of church women's work within the province. Apart from expanding current women's activities such as women's literacy classes, women's social service groups and women's choirs, projects were also suggested to help the rising number of laid-off women workers, for example, the creation of retraining courses. Other suggestions included churches organizing lectures on subjects related to family life and marriage, and also approaching medical workers within the church to help increase awareness of health issues.

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Theological Education: Guizhou Theological Class is situated in remote and mountainous Pan county, some 340 kilometers from the provincial capital Guiyang (see ANS 98.8.2). Since its inception the class has already graduated 100 students, and a new batch of graduates are now preparing to go out and serve the church in Guizhou. Guizhou province has a chronic shortage of church workers, with most remote churches lacking regular preachers of any kind. Worship in these churches merely consists of a few semi-literate church members reading aloud passages from the Bible, and the singing of a few hymns. Therefore, the Guizhou Theological Class is essential to the healthy growth of the church in the province.

Now, another class of students has graduated. Facing their new work, they ask the Lord for strength to make their contribution to church and society with wholehearted devotion.
The Amity Foundation 2000 Calendar

In 1999, the Amity-sponsored children's social welfare institutions (orphanages) held a nation-wide drawing competition, and some prize-winning pictures from this competition have been included in this year's calendar.

Although unfairly treated in their early lives, these little artists have embedded in their works their confidence in themselves and hope in their country and in the future of the world. With clumsy strokes, bold composition and rich coloring, they share with us their dreams. In fact, they are reminding us of a dream we all dream of: that there be more love, care and happiness in the 21st century.

These children come from 28 orphanages Amity started to work with in 1987. With the joint efforts of these orphanages, local governments and friends from both at home and abroad, the work at these orphanages has improved significantly. And the children under their care are not only having their material needs met, but are also enjoying a rich cultural life. As a participant in this endeavor, Amity has witnessed all these changes and is thankful.

For those who would like to order copies of the calendar, please feel free to contact us at:

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Places Mentioned In This Issue Of ANS

1) Hong Kong
2) Beijing
3) Yunyang (Sichuan)
4) Fengdu (Sichuan)
5) Fengjie (Sichuan)
6) Lianyungang (Jiangsu)
7) Guiyang (Guizhou)
8) Nanjing (Jiangsu)
9) Shanghai