Dear Reader,

As I am writing this, Christmas is approaching fast, and many Chinese churches are already buzzing with preparations. Most congregations celebrate Christmas with magnificent services that, apart from a long and well-prepared sermon, also include musical contributions from the whole congregation. So impressive are those performances that Chinese Christmas services could easily be mistaken for concerts and have become a source of attraction for university students. And as students and others in search of a ‘genuine Christmas experience’ stream into overflowing church buildings, Christmas services have become a major outreach opportunity for many city congregations.

As attendance at Christmas services shows, interest in Christianity is high in China, and the demographics of city congregations are slowly changing to comprise more and more young people. Trends like these are hard to quantify, though, as exact figures for the number of Christians as well as details on their demographic makeup are hard to come by. In this edition of ANS, we nonetheless attempt to give an estimate for the number of Protestant Christians in China (p7).

Moving from the grassroots to the movers and shakers behind many church-related developments, we reprint interviews with Bishop K.H. Ting and Presbyter Ji Jianhong (p2 and p5). And as usual, there’s more to be discovered in this issue of ANS.

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

Katrin Friedler

Subscription Renewal for 2005

We hope that you have enjoyed reading ANS over the past year, and that you have found it a source of news and information about the Church in China. If you would like to continue receiving ANS in 2005, please fill in the enclosed subscription form and mail it to us along with your subscription fees.
A Devout Patriot: Bishop K.H. Ting Celebrates 90th Birthday

(ANS) Considered the great spiritual mentor of the Chinese Protestant Church, Bishop K.H. Ting is easily China's most prominent Christian, both at home and abroad. Born and raised in Shanghai and later a student at the prestigious St. John's University, Ting studied engineering before embarking on a church career that has spanned more than the past six decades. On 16th of September, the man known as "KH" among foreign friends celebrated his 90th birthday in Shanghai, as October's issue of Tian Feng reports.

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On September 16, 2004, Bishop K.H. Ting, a Vice Chairman of the National People's Political Consultative Conference, Honorary Chairman of the National Three Self Patriotic Movement, Honorary President of the China Christian Council, and President of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, celebrated his 90th birthday in Shanghai.

Among the more than one hundred guests were the current church leadership and other co-workers as well as high-ranking representatives from the political sphere. In his congratulatory note, Presbyter Ji Jianhong praised the bishop, whom he had known for over half a century, both as his personal mentor and a great leader of the Chinese church. "I deeply sense that the Chinese church needed Bishop Ting not only in the past, but still needs him today," the head of the National TSPM said, adding that autumn was called the season of harvest, and that it was generally felt that the church had received a lot from Bishop Ting through his patriotism, wisdom and tolerance.

Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the China Christian Council, honoured Bishop Ting's "exceptional contributions" to China and the Chinese church. In her address, she reminded the audience of Bishop Ting's guidance in establishing friendly relations with churches all over the world, while at the same time being a firm supporter of the Three Self principles. In his constant reflecting on the building of the Chinese church, the bishop had always emphasized the ecclesiastical character of the Chinese church, and had initiated the establishment of the China Christian Council as one instrument to implement the building of the church.

Deng Fucun, Vice Chairman of the National Three Self Patriotic Movement and a student of Bishop Ting's 53 years ago, praised the senior church leader's enduring foresight and wisdom. Whether it was the teaching of students from different denominational backgrounds at Nanjing Union Seminary, China's entry into the World Trade Organization, or the recent Bible exhibition, Bishop K.H. Ting had always encouraged progress, Deng said.

Love Transcends National Boundaries And Class

(ANS) Shortly before celebrating his 90th birthday, Bishop K.H. Ting, President of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and Honorary President of the China Christian Council and the Three Self Patriotic Movement, as well as a Vice Chairman of the National People's Political Consultative Conference, was interviewed by the secular magazine Nanfeng Chuang ["Window to the South"].
Below, we present excerpts from the interview (including biographical notes) that first appeared in Volume 2004.6.1. of Nanfeng Chuang. A full English version of the interview can be accessed on the Amity Foundation’s website (www.amityfoundation.org) under ANS, Volume 13.11/12, December 2004.

A short biography of K.H. Ting: Born in September 1915, from Shanghai, a graduate of St. John’s University Shanghai, the Pedagogical Institute of Columbia University in the US, and New York Union Theological Seminary, a Master of Letters and an Honorary Professor of nine universities in seven countries.

In 1997 he took on the Honorary Chairmanship of the Three Self Patriotic Movement and the Honorary Presidency of the China Christian Council as well as the Presidency of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. [Editor’s note: K.H. Ting has been president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary since its inception in 1952.] He has served as a Vice Chair of the National People’s Political Consultative Conference since 1989. In 1985, he initiated the founding of The Amity Foundation, and remains President of its Board of Directors. In March 2004, he was elected Chair of the Chinese Religions Commission for World Peace.

Love entails tolerance and reason

Good day Bishop Ting. We associate western Christianity with the fact that it has many denominations, but within the Three Self Patriotic Movement (meaning self-administration, self-financing, and self-propagation) you have always advocated a religion that goes beyond denominationalism. What considerations does this position emerge from?

In any country where churches are run well, they do follow the principles of self-administration, self-financing, and self-propagation. When Christianity first entered China, it often was accompanied by a superiority complex, because it was being spread by missionaries originating from the West, and therefore the missionaries brought the different denominations from the West with them. If in such a situation each of these denominations has only respect for itself, this is very inadequate. In my family, my mother was a devout Christian, she and my father belonged to different denominations, but had a lot of mutual respect for each other and never quarrelled. This taught me the lesson that we absolutely have to respect people’s differences, including those between different religions. The schools that I attended were not church schools, hence I didn’t have that kind of experience, but I have really seen teachers from church schools bring over students to temples to see people worshipping Buddha, burning incense and praying, to say to the children: “Remember, all of this is superstition.” We have to remind ourselves that to view a problem only from our own point of view without knowing how to respect differences is so biased.

You mentioned the mutual respect between different religions, but we can also see that in the process of spreading different religions and non-religions, all kinds of faiths emphasize the advantages of adhering to their own denominations. For example they claim that you can be blessed and protected, that you will “ascend to heaven”, otherwise you will “go to hell”, and they even attack other denominations.

I think this is a backward view of faith. When Jesus brought forward the commandment for love, he not only brought forward a moral principle for humanity to live together in harmony, but he also told people that love is the original attribute of God, that this is the fortune of our cosmos. Indeed for a long time there have been church personnel who have deliberately misinterpreted church doctrine to present an unbalanced view of God, namely that God’s highest attribute is not His generous benevolence, but His omnipotence, His rule that causes people to have respect. This kind of idea is backward and utilitarian, and it is currently slowly dying out.

Perhaps people will subconsciously see adherents of other religions with their different ideas as strangers and will either try to assimilate them or discriminate against them. Besides, under certain circumstances it seems
that the more devout believers are, the more pronounced this kind of trend becomes. How can this contradiction be solved?

We believe in Jesus Christ so that people will be mutually understanding and caring and not to reject and be hostile to each other, and I think that for people of other faiths this is the same. To believe or not to believe cannot be seen as a contradiction. We can only say that there is a difference between them, and this difference should not only be tolerated but also respected. All people can do useful things even though they come from different faith sources. I remember that one famous person once said: "You worship nature in all its numerous forms, its rich inexhaustible mineral resources that please people's minds. You would never demand that roses and violets produce the same fragrance. So why is it that you demand that the richest thing on earth, the spirit, will only exist in one form?" Indeed, the person who said this was not a theologian but Marx.

During a long time after the liberation, when religion was mentioned it was always linked with opium. As a result, people believed that religion is something that poisons people, something that numbs people's revolutionary awareness. How do you see this kind of idea?

Historically, religion has indeed produced some negative side effects, for example during the Middle Ages. During that time, religion was used by the ruling classes to numb the revolutionary awareness of the people. But if we were to say the same of today, I would ask: In our country, where the people have the say, the rule of what ruling class would religion be protecting, and whose revolutionary awareness would it be numbing?

Some people do not wish to understand religion deeply, and seemingly the word "opium" limits how we perceive the true character of religion - does this not constitute a form of book worship and clinging to doctrines? If we say it numbs people, is this limited to religion? Politics can also dull people's awareness. The fact that people once advocated ultra-leftism and said "You have to implement everything, whether you understand it or not" is an example of this. And in those years one or two random sentences from a leader could cause people to be sent here or there. Hasn't the craziness and irrationality created by this kind of politics brought about more harm than the historical opium of religion?

I think that no matter what kind of belief we adhere to, rationality and tolerance should be our common values for the whole of society. In fact, in our Chinese tradition we have a lot of humanistic sources of inspiration. Therefore, for many questions we can unite with humanists of all kinds to oppose all idolatry that is against human nature, belittles human respect, and limits the liberation of humanity.

You mentioned the great calamity. I can imagine that a personality of the religious world like you suffered a lot of persecution.

Personally I didn't suffer a lot of persecution during the Cultural Revolution. Of course, like the majority of ordinary Chinese people that lived through that time I didn't have peaceful days. I think the biggest lesson that the Cultural Revolution taught the Chinese is that we have seen with our own eyes that the most evil motivations and actions can be wrapped in the most pleasing political language. Under the direction of ultra-leftist thoughts, a few people created terror under the slogan of revolution, bewitching innocent people and hurting many good-natured individuals. These people who had the word of patriotism on their lips brought about what China's enemies had wanted to do and never achieved.

Historically, we Chinese have always been relatively tolerant, emphasizing the Middle Way and disliking extremism, this is a very good tradition. But during the Cultural Revolution there was taken endless joy in fighting not only with heaven and earth, but also with people, and this produced a kind of curse towards our fellow citizens to make them into revolutionaries by force. People felt that love consists of singing a different tune, of destroying struggle and of not differentiating between friend and foe. Those people who saw class struggle as a key element were unable to grasp the gospel of love.

In that environment of terror, when there was hardly any hope in sight, how did you and fellow Christians keep your faith, how were you able to persist?

During the turbulence, our gospel was seen by some people as a poisonous weed, and some of our faithful suffered tribulations. Even under strong pressure, they would rather be isolated than frame other people. They firmly believed that only love would be able to wake up many freezing hearts.
In retrospect, we have to thank God who gave us this opportunity, when we were weak and powerless, to suffer together with the Chinese people, to experience such a tragedy like the Cultural Revolution together. This has already become a symbol and sign that we are part of the Chinese people. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul mentions the experience of persecution and standing firm in faith. That we suffered together with the people meant that we were not dependent on any foreign protection from foreign powers. Only so will Christianity be truly Chinese, and through our powerlessness we gained the right to be listened to with respect.

2004.11/12.3

"Pray For Us": Christianity Today Interviews Ji Jianhong

(ANS) On September 8, 2004, Mark Galli, editor of the American journal Christianity Today, visited the new offices of the national church leadership. "Christianity Today is a household name for many people in the Chinese church. We hope that through you, even more foreign brothers and sisters will come to know the real situation of the Chinese church," Presbyter Ji expressed during the meeting. In an interview that first appeared in October's edition of Tian Feng, the Chairman of the National TSPM shares details about his personal faith journey as well as some of the current concerns for the Chinese church leadership with the American visitor. Christianity Today published an article about the meeting that can be accessed under: http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/11/30.68.html

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Thank you so much for receiving us. Our purpose on this trip is to learn more about you and the situation of the Chinese church, as well as the Bible exhibition planned for the US. Maybe you could say something about yourself and your ministry within the church first.

I was born into a church family. My father was a pastor from a Presbyterian background. He later left the Presbyterian church and set up the Little Flock together with Ni Tuosheng. He was an important organizer in their Jiangsu branch, hence I very naturally became a member of that church. Although I had received a church-related education since I was very young, I was moved by the Holy Spirit to understand what salvation means only when I was fifteen. When I graduated from middle school, I clearly felt called, and I learned in church how to serve; that was in 1951, in our Nanjing fellowship. To understand the way of the Lord even better, I joined Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1953, studying and serving in the church at the same time. From then on, with the exception of the Cultural Revolution which was a big calamity for the Chinese people, I have been serving the church. I used to work in Jiangsu and only came to Shanghai two and a half years ago when I was elected Chairman of the Three Self. During the Cultural Revolution, I was sent to the countryside for ten years to do manual work. Apart from that period, I have been with the church all along; my biography is very simple.

You said that when you were fifteen, you suddenly understood the meaning of being saved. What happened at that time?

From a human point of view, nothing really happened, but in terms of an experience of being close to the Holy Spirit, something did happen. From early childhood, my parents had led me in Bible study and prayer. At that time, what motivated me was that my parents required me to do so, and later on it became a habit, but in reality, I did not see anything in the face of God. When I was fifteen, one day when I was praying I suddenly realized that I was a sinner, that I needed God. At that moment, I approached God not because my parents ordered it but because I needed it myself, and only then did I feel that I had really established a life relationship with God. Therefore, when there were to be baptisms in our church I requested to be baptized and become a member of the church. From an external point of view, nothing had happened, but internally there was a change.

In what year did you start to serve in fellowships?
In 1951.
And when did you start to study theology in seminary?
In 1953.
And you continued to serve in the church until the Cultural Revolution?
Yes.
Who was the most important guiding figure in the formation of your theological thinking? Many different people from the older generation.

Were they from the church? I have been influenced by many different people, and more importantly by what I have received in my personal encounters with God.

Have you read any theological works by western theologians? Because of the language difficulties, I haven’t read many in the original version, but I studied some of them during my time at the seminary. I am used to bringing different points of view before God in my quests, and then being moved directly by God. I have one weakness, and that is that I haven’t read many books, because when I was young I was influenced by a theological point of view that is not correct, namely that "more knowledge can alienate us from God". Therefore, when I received full marks in an exam as a student, I would not be happy, but would go home to confess my sins. Through this influence, for some time I scorned knowledge and adhered to some sort of extreme "Biblicism". Later on I found that knowledge was not an obstacle to becoming closer to God, and that it is indeed a starting point for the Gospel. However, by the time I became aware of that, my tasks had become many and I was very busy at work; the opportunities to sit down quietly and study had become scarce, this is a lost opportunity.

How do you look upon the development of the Chinese church in your function as the chairman of the National Three Self? I am grateful for the Chinese church that has been blessed with God’s care and guidance over the past fifty years. Not only do we have many colleagues who devote themselves to God’s church, but the direction in which we have been building the Chinese church is in line with God’s will. Besides, God has provided us with a favourable environment, in particular the Chinese government’s policy of religious freedom which is being accepted by more and more people. This allows for the development of the Chinese church which has been growing in a healthy way.

Where do challenges currently facing the Chinese manifest themselves? The biggest challenge is that the faith base of many believers is not sound. The original foundation of the Gospel has been laid on the foundation of an economic culture that has traditionally been very weak, and there is a lot of utilitarianism within the church. What these believers care about most is: Is your church effective or not? What do they mean by ‘effective’? For example, if you have a tummy ache that disappears right after you have prayed, that is called ‘effective’. Some evangelists use this kind of psychological disposition to preach not the word of Life, but to fervently preach miracles. Their faith becomes superstitious and their knowledge of the truth is not sufficient. If this situation won’t be changed, the church will destroy itself. Therefore, it is necessary to raise the educational standard both of leaders and ordinary believers.

Another challenge is that there is too much interference from overseas that distracts us from our ministry. This outside interference does not only bring many contradictions into the church, but also causes some believers to oppose the state and the masses. Outside interference has several aspects: The first one is that today, while the Chinese church builds churches according to the spirit of unity, there are some people from overseas who want to revive denominations. Besides, they want to infiltrate the Chinese church in terms of general awareness and theology. For example, they propagate that China is led by the Communist Party, that the Communist Party is atheist and that because of this, Christians must not cooperate with the Party; or that Christians are citizens of heaven and are not subject to an earthly administration and that Christians must not listen to the government. The Chinese church goes the way of independence and autonomy, but some overseas church organizations want to establish a relationship of dependency. All of this diverts our attention and affects the normal work of the Chinese church. Of course we wish to maintain exchanges with Christian organizations from all over the world, but it must be on the condition of equality and respect. Independence and autonomy are not at all equal with isolation or xenophobia.

In some places, there are some cadres of religious affairs who, because of their insufficient education, cannot correctly implement the policy of religious freedom, but this should not become a challenge for us. The level of education of government officials on all levels is constantly being raised, and the central government now attaches much importance to the administration of religious
policy. Government bodies are encouraging us to immediately report officials' problems in the implementation of the policy [of religious freedom], so that they can be corrected. The channels for reporting problems are open, and they will open more. Certain problems do exist in this area, but this should not challenge us.

In terms of our work, the biggest challenge is personnel. There are now opportunities for the overall development of the Chinese church. We very much lack personnel, and need to train staff for the following areas of work: 1. Theologians, 2. Highly-trained faculty for seminaries and Bible schools; 3. Administrative personnel. China now has 50,000 churches and meeting points and 16 million Protestants. Whether the Chinese church will be able to develop in a healthy way will depend very much on the quality of management. The quality of our management will decide whether the church will be able to keep pace with our rapid social development.

4. We also need pastoral personnel, as nowadays the current pastoral personnel cannot meet the demand, and have to train pastoral workers on a large scale. 5. We also need to train people who can engage in a dialogue with the academe - we now have a platform to conduct a dialogue with the academic world, but we lack qualified people. Therefore, personnel is our biggest challenge, and we have to make great efforts in this respect. We have to rely on ourselves for the training, but we will also send some coworkers to seminaries and Bible schools overseas that have friendly relations with us for advanced study courses.

I have four questions that I would like to ask you, the first one is: When I return to the US, what message would you like me to bring to American Christians?

I hope that over time, American Christianity will be able to better understand the Chinese church. With this deeper understanding of the Chinese church will come a deeper understanding of God's achievements in China. The Chinese church wishes to develop its relationship with American Christians on a basis of equality and friendship.

The second question is: How can America's Christians pray in a better way for the Chinese church?

Your question is a very good response. The best way is to pray for the Chinese church. In this prayer, I hope that American Christians will first of all give thanks to God for his achievements regarding the Chinese church, and I also ask everybody to include in their prayers the challenges that the Chinese church is facing.

What influence will the 2008 Olympic Games have on the Chinese church?

The Chinese church is also thinking about the 2008 Olympics, and we will set up a place for worship and fellowship meetings at the Olympic village.

The fourth question is: I have been working with Ge Peili for 23 years, and he asked me to pass on his regards to you. What is your response?

I would like to thank him very much for his greetings, and would like to ask you to pass on my greetings in Christ to him. I hope he will be able to support the Bible exhibition that we will organize in the US.

How Many Sheep Are There In the Chinese Flock?

(ANS) Probably the most commonly voiced request from ANS readers is the desire for Chinese church statistics. How many Protestant Christians are there, and how many of them have been baptized? What is the percentage of women among the 2,000 ordained Protestant ministers? And how does the growth of Christian congregations compare between different locations? Unfortunately, figures are hard to come by. Below, Katrin Fiedler explains why.

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Statistics are the poetry of Latin America, one saying goes. In China with its strong literary tradition and partially planned economy, reasonably reliable reports and statistics may be available for a vast variety of topics - but when it comes to the numbers of Protestants, things tend to get more complicated.
To begin with, the definition of who is or is not a Christian is not easy. "Due to the lack of ordained pastors, in many rural areas less than 50% of the regular churchgoers are baptized. Should those who have not been baptized be counted?" notes Claudia Währisch-Oblau (See Special Reports ANS 1997). She continues: "Similarly, there are many groups who use the name Christian but have limited understanding of the Christian faith, such as those who have only heard that prayer in the name of Jesus heals the sick. Should they be counted as Christians, or should one wait until they have a better knowledge of what Christian faith entails?"

Members of China's ethnic minorities may likewise be falsely included or excluded from Christian statistics. According to the Chinese government's understanding, being affiliated with a certain religion is part of the ethnic makeup of some Chinese minorities, e.g. the Muslim faith for the Hui population. Only four years ago it became possible for ethnic Mongolians (who were by definition thought to be Lamaist Buddhists) to legally become Christians. And for some minorities, the whole clan may be counted as Christian after the family leader has converted to Christianity, even though individual family members may only have a very limited understanding of the Christian faith.

Many churches hesitate to reveal the number of Christians that belong to their congregations. "If God knows those who belong to Him, that is enough" is an attitude taken by many local church leaders. The fact that part of any congregation will be made up of seekers is another reason for the reluctance to give figures. And finally, in some areas local church leaders may tend to give conservative estimates on the number of Christians for political reasons.

The existence of independent unregistered congregations also makes estimates on the number of Christians difficult. However, to speak of such churches as "underground" would be misleading, as most Chinese churches function openly, whether they are registered or not, and regardless of whether they are part of the CCC network or not. Usually, Christian groups within an area know of each other. Hence, estimates of dozens of millions of "hidden" Christians seem unfounded.

Incidentally, the difficulty in assessing the exact number of believers does not only affect Christian communities. In fact, adherents of China's traditional religions such as Buddhism and Daoism are even harder to estimate, both because these religions are less congregational in nature and because the boundaries between them are blurred in practice, as many people will observe practices from both religions. Besides these established religions, folk religious practices abound but, because they are not part of the officially recognized creeds (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestant and Catholic Christianity), totally eschew official statistics.

In spite of the difficulties associated with compiling accurate statistics for China's Christians, we offer our updated "guesstimates" in this edition of ANS. Our estimate of around 18 million Protestants in China is close to the official 2003 figure of 17 million believers and is based on the assumption that the number of believers has been rising at the same pace as in previous years.
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**Remarks:**

As it is extremely difficult to access reliable figures for the number of church members in any given place, the above figures are estimates at best. What figures are these estimates based on?

- according to the China Christian Council, there were 17 million Protestant Christians in 2003
- over the past two decades, the number of Protestant Christians has increased by about one million believers per year (again, according to CCC sources)
- it is assumed that, percentage-wise, the overall geographical distribution of Protestant Christians has not changed significantly since the last "official" ANS estimate in 1997
A Bird's Eye View Of Christian Worship Centres In China

(ANS) In a contribution for an international sociology congress held in July 2004 in Beijing, Catholic China watcher Parig Digan attempts to give an overview of both Catholic and Protestant Christian worship centres on the mainland. Below, we summarize some of his findings.

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The study's biggest flaw lies probably in the age of some of its sources, yet detailed information for worship centres in China is certainly hard to come by, and newer information may simply not be available. "Neither any of the above sources nor all of them together can be considered a comprehensive directory of churches in China," Digan himself admits in his introduction. "Even between them they tally just short of 20,000 worship centres," a figure that is below "the national total of churches claimed as being open in the most recent statements emanating from Nanjing and Beijing."

Still, Digan's effort to compile a comprehensive list of Christian worship centres merits attention, above all for his attempts to identify specific worship centres and thus "drag" them out of the realm of speculation. Moreover, his entries cover half of China's 2,074 counties. Given the general trend of growth of Christianity in China, it can probably be assumed that worship centres mentioned in Digan's study have, for the most part, not disappeared, but continue to function.

Digan lists 19,616 worship centres in his database, which translates into 155 worship centres for every ten million Chinese. While the Catholic centres included in Digan's study are much less numerous (3,423 centres as opposed to 16,193 Protestant worship sites), a much higher percentage of the Catholic sites is fully identified, leaving less margin for error. Only three out of the nearly twenty thousand worship centres listed are Orthodox. (While Orthodox Christianity has experienced a slight revival in China over the past years, it has to be noted that Orthodox Christianity is not among the officially recognized religions in China.)

Parig Digan's approach offers some fascinating statistical analysis. Looking at absolute figures, the localities with the highest number of Christian congregations are Anhui, Jiangxi, Shanghai, and Jiangsu. But Digan bases most of his analysis on relative figures, calculating the number of worship centres per ten million people. With this approach, only some provinces maintain their importance both in terms of raw figures and in terms of percentages, namely Anhui, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, and Fujian. Interestingly, the relative approach based on worship centres per ten million inhabitants highlights provinces not normally associated with a high density of Christian life, notably Inner Mongolia (510 worship centres per ten million population)
as direct runner-up to Anhui (759 worship centres per ten million population). Under this approach, Gansu suddenly finds itself in the comfortable company of Jiangsu and Yunnan and ahead of Shanghai (168 worship centres per ten million population).

Unless patterns of regional distribution have changed markedly over the past few years, these findings help to change common perceptions about the church in China. In the past, much attention has been given to absolute distribution of believers, rendering Henan into the province with the most Protestants, and making Shaanxi and Hubei into Catholic strongholds. As it happens, some of the provinces with very high numbers of either Catholics or Protestants tend to be almost exclusively Catholic or Protestant, obscuring the fact that there are also locations where either Protestants or Catholics make up half of the Christian population. In this sense, with his combined look at Catholic and Protestant worship centres Digan offers a refreshing look at the situation of Chinese Christianity.

One aspect that leaves room for speculation is the question whether more worship centres in a specific area also means more Christians. Under this assumption, Digan's findings would have some interesting implications for cases like Inner Mongolia. On the other hand, it has to be noted that the size of Chinese congregations varies widely (probably more so for Protestant than for Catholic churches), from a few dozen people at a rural meeting point to mega-churches with two or three thousand active members in the cities. Therefore, one should be careful not to read too much in terms of absolute numbers of believers into the relative distribution of worship centres, tempting as it may be.


2004.11/12.6

The Bible and Chinese Culture

(ANS) In its search for a theology that is both founded in the basic Christian faith and genuinely Chinese, the ongoing movement for theological reconstruction has entered a new phase. Now, "How to establish a correct view of the Bible" is one of the central questions being discussed. For Chinese Christians with their often very literal reading of the Bible, this requires a delicate balance between faithfulness to the Biblical original and openness to a modern interpretation of Scripture. In October's edition of Tian Feng, Li Xiangping from Shanghai University looks at the relationship between the Bible and Chinese culture.

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The Bible has historically been part of the exchange and fusion between western civilization and Chinese indigenous culture. The earliest Chinese version of the Bible appeared in excerpts as early as the seventh century in the Tang Dynasty. Later, some Biblical narratives and maxims were translated into literary Chinese among scholar-officials during the period of Matteo Ricci at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century in the Ming Dynasty. In 1823 Robert Morrison succeeded in translating the whole Bible into Chinese. His work greatly promoted the
spread of Christianity in China. Nearly a hundred years later in 1919, the Chinese Union Version appeared and has become the most popular Chinese Bible in vernacular language since.

The most fruitful influence of the Bible on Chinese culture has been in the area of literature and art. The translation and popular circulation of the Bible had a deepening effect on the development of the vernacular language in the May Fourth Movement (the New Culture Movement which began in 1917). Through the literary style and content of the Bible, China's literary elite at that time was nurtured. The interaction of the Bible, western culture and literature on one side and traditional literature, folk arts and other forms of arts on the other side contributed to the development of the spiritual dimension of Chinese modern literature, thus painting a colourful picture within the modern literary and cultural development of China.

The aesthetic appreciation of emotional expression in modern Chinese literature was formulated through the fusion of the Bible's literary, symbolic and non-realistic style with the classic poetic and western symbolic language. The Bible's unique homiletic features, its symbolic and metaphorical structures have formed the atmosphere of homily and symbolic aesthetic in modern Chinese literature. The influential non-realistic language of the Bible caused tension and conflict in its encounter with Chinese traditional realistic power, yet played an important part in Romanticism in Chinese literature.

The May Fourth New Culture Movement was not merely a literary reformation. Its deep reflection on Chinese nationalism and traditional culture have become one of the important historical traditions in modern Chinese history. The Bible and its Christian values were important resources for cultural thinking in the May Fourth Movement. Although scholars at that time held critical attitudes towards the conflicts aroused by Christianity in Chinese society, they still had a fair and an objective view on Christian discourse.

Quite a number of people belonging to the cultural elite turned to the Biblical text to seek valuable intellectual resources. Chinese scholars like Liang Qichao thought that Chinese spiritual life lacked the spirit of universal love as proclaimed in the Bible. From this point he vigorously criticized the selfish national mind. Literary reformer Chen Duxiu held the Biblical picture of the personal belief of Jesus Christ in high esteem, who was able to consciously realize the true genuine life and to experience the deep feeling of life itself. He regarded Jesus as a model of personal nourishment and moral norm. And Cai Yuanpei from Beijing University, who had promoted the substitution of aesthetics for religious studies, also recommended the study of Christian moral integrity so as to establish one's own lofty spiritual character.

The exchange and fusion between western civilization as represented by the Bible and Chinese culture have reached a historical point of concern. The processes of both the formation of the Chinese versions of the Bible and Chinese Christianity have solidified the history of Christian development in China. Given today's enormous changes in the country, Christianity may be able to make further contributions to contemporary Chinese culture. The ongoing movement for theological reconstruction and for establishing a correct view of the Bible have also prepared the ground for such a possible contribution.
The cultural exchange between Christianity and China is a mutual process of communication, adaptation, absorption and assimilation. As it is being spread, Christian spiritual revelation can be enriched by Chinese culture. And in receiving cultural messages from Christianity, Chinese culture faces changes in its traditional culture as well as an opportunity to reconstruct the contents of its civilization. Under the fusion of Christianity and Chinese culture, the "ideal" Chinese Christianity not only can substantiate the spiritual beliefs and the transcendental ideas of Chinese culture, but can also enrich the cultural structures and thinking within the Christian faith system.

This means that Chinese Christianity, following in the steps of forerunners like Wu Leichuan (1870-1944) and Wu Yaozong (1893-1979), who had prepared the way for contextualizing Christianity, will continue to preserve and promote the Chinese Three Self tradition. At the same time it means that within the present context of globalization, the universality of Christianity and the particularity of western culture should consciously be recognized. Also the attachment of particularly western ideas to Christian doctrines should be abandoned, and the focus should be on the original canon of the Bible. Under the presupposition of proclaiming ecumenical Christian doctrines, Chinese Christianity should once again merge with Chinese culture to formulate a new Christian theology with national characteristics and in accordance with contemporary Chinese values.

2004.11/12.7

A Lamp Set On The Grasslands: Churches In Eastern Inner Mongolia

"The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, vast and sparsely populated, stretches more than 3,000 kilometers east to west. In pace with the consistent progress of reform and opening, the Party's policies of religious freedom have facilitated positive advances here. The seeds of the Gospel are being sown in every corner of this region and melodious praises to God are drifting through the mountains, canyons and streams. And how to guide and shepherd the flock of this huge territory is the important task that has fallen to the ministers of the Inner Mongolia provincial church leadership." In October's edition of Tian Feng, Xie Baohua from Inner Mongolia reports on a trip to churches in the province. As his article shows, although they may be blessed in many ways, churches at the grassroots sometimes struggle with issues like registration, internal administration, and the challenges posed by heretical movements.

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In July of this year I accompanied the president of the Provincial TSPM/CCC Committee, Reverend Fan Chengzu, the general secretary, Reverend Cao Liguang, and Li Zhitian from the Provincial Religious Affairs Bureau, to call on a few churches.

Early on the morning of July 17 we arrived at the city of Chifeng. There were brothers and sisters at the station who had been waiting patiently for us, and they all eagerly joined in to tell us about the situation of the church in Hongshan district. Reverend Fan gave his suggestions about the legal registration of several church meeting points in question. Representing the Provincial TSPM/CCC Committee, he assisted the Hongshan District meeting point to democratically elect and establish a "Church Planning Council", and conducted a democratic evaluation of three local church workers. Through these efforts, Rev. Fan helped the local church to establish a somewhat more regulated place for activities.
Braving the high heat of summer, and after many setbacks, we made our way north and arrived, on July 21, at Manzhouli, by the Russian border. Deep in the grasslands, Manzhouli’s elegant buildings adorn a lush green plain. The city is at the north end of the shallow, expansive Lake Dalai (Hulun Nur), which seemed to stretch to the horizon with its 5,000 square kilometre surface. There was time only to catch glimpses of the city's scenic wonders before we rushed on to Zalainuo'er District. A building there was purchased by two brothers and then donated as a tribute to the church. It has more than two hundred square metres and can seat three hundred people. This place was the focal point of our trip. According to our understanding, activities by heretical groups here are very frequent. Disregarding our fatigue from the journey, we put down our luggage and dove straightway into the work at hand.

While he was addressing the local brothers and sisters, Reverend Fan made use of Colossians 1: 9-10 and 1 Peter 2: 9, 13-17 to point to the dual citizenship of a Christian. We are a chosen race; God’s own people, but we are also human beings. Even further: we are Chinese people. The church should not only lay stress on numbers, but should instead be enhanced qualitatively. We should have an unceasing desire for theological discernment and reconstruction, so that the church will spread a Gospel that promotes harmony between people. We must lead our vast flock to love their motherland, support the socialist system and take on the responsibilities given to us by our time.

During the three days we were in Zalainuo'er, we had about six different meetings, attended by more than 1,400 people in all. There were more than a hundred different individual conversations going on. These discussions helped to strengthen the ability of the believers to deal with the relationship between the church and society, and between believers and non-believers.

On July 25, with grateful hearts, we boarded a bus that took us bounding over the great plains of Hulun Buir. After bumping along for six hours, we entered the boundaries of Xing'an League and came to the city of He'er Shan. This is a magically beautiful mountain city with a population of only 8,000. There is virgin forest, there are springs, a crater, a mountain lake, the world’s second largest hot springs and a widely known convalescent hospital. Early in the morning on the second day we happily gathered together with the brothers and sisters there to attend the dedication ceremony for a church in the Yi’ershi township of A'er Shan city. The A'er Shan Municipal Party Committee head and Reverend Fan cut the ribbon. The director of the city’s Religious Affairs Bureau gave a glowingly warm speech to express his congratulations.

Our last stop was Wulan Haote, where the "Eastern Inner Mongolia Theological Training Centre Multiple-Purpose Building" was under construction. According to the engineers’ schedule, it was to be finished by mid-August. Although nearly two weeks of travelling and interviewing had quickly come and gone, it had been of no minor benefit to me to witness up close the older generation of church leaders in their tireless undertakings for the Gospel, diligently devoted day and night. Reverend Fan and Reverend Cao are both past sixty years of age. All the time that Reverend Fan was talking with people on our journey he was using throat lozenges, and Reverend Cao had his hypertension pills on hand owing to his struggles with temperature and
blood pressure. These men are teaching by example the useful properties of "salt" and "light", and are spurring the church to be a beacon for society.

In the depths of the grasslands, in the midst of the mountains, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ has been raised up high and the church of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is receiving God's blessings.

Chinese Youth Explore "Life In Abundance" In Germany

(ANS) Following an invitation from the Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany, Ma Hongzhi had the opportunity to take part in a youth exchange programme directed at young church workers in the summer of 2004. He was accompanied by Sun Xutu from Fujian's Theological Seminary. In October's issue of Tian Feng, Ma shares some of his impressions.

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Located in Germany's southeast, Bavaria is the biggest Federal State in Germany, and as the home of Siemens, BMW and Audi, it is also the economically most advanced region in the country. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, who hosted the two Chinese visitors, is a member church of EKD, the umbrella organization for Germanys' mainstream Protestant churches.

Exchanges between German and Chinese churches date back to the 1980s. Since then, numerous church organizations, both national and regional in character, have established friendly connections with the Chinese church.

German delegations visit China on a regular basis. Having witnessed China's development and the changes that are taking place, they are able to report objectively on what they have seen when they go back to Europe. Chinese church delegations have also made regular visits to their German counterparts, including visits from Bishop Ting in 1983, Rev. Shen Cheng'en in 1992, and the newly elected church leadership in the spring of 2003.

The summer youth exchange programme run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria (ELCB) takes place every two years. It unites representatives from the ELCB's partner churches, who join in discussions, seminars, visits and exposure programmes to strengthen mutual understanding and their sense of mission vis-a-vis the challenges posed by our times.

This time, the programme was very clearly divided into three parts, namely discussion meetings at the beginning, exposure programmes during the second half of the exchange, and weekend visits. Under the overall motto of "Life in Abundance", participants discussed the negative effects of globalization, the challenge posed by AIDS, the surge of Pentecostal movements and more. How should the church respond to the challenges of consumerism and a growing gap between the rich and the poor?

Ma Hongzhi used the opportunity to report about recent developments in China and the problems posed by them. In spite of significant economic successes and growing personal freedom, China's development was not without problems, such as the east-west and rural-urban divides. The church being a minority group in China, Ma
doubted whether it could play a very effective role in tackling these issues. He also shared information about China’s AIDS crisis with his audience. Churches could play a role in educating believers as well as in offering spiritual guidance to those afflicted by the disease, Ma explained.

The German exchange programme included numerous visits to churches, both Catholic and Protestant congregations. One of the most memorable moments for Ma was to drop in at a highway chapel, soak in the peace and quiet of the surrounding greenery next to the busy highway, and say a thank you prayer for his safe journey...

2004.11/12.9

Book Review: Response to Jesus in Beijing by David Aikman

(ANS) The following response was written by Faye Pearson, currently an English teacher at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and a long-time China watcher. Before moving to the Chinese mainland, Faye Pearson (who comes from a Baptist background) spent three decades in Taiwan. In her book review, she responds to David Aikman’s Jesus in Beijing (Regnery Publishing 2003).

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After I read "Jesus in Beijing" by Mr. Aikman I am distressed. I encouraged church leadership to give Mr. Aikman an interview. I knew Mr. Aikman worked for Time magazine and I had read some of his articles. I am disappointed that he did not give a more balanced view of the Christian situation in China.

I lived and worked in Taiwan for 30 years, prior to going to Nanjing in 1998 where I have lived and worked since. I have taught at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary for the last five years. During this time my Mandarin language skills have enabled me to visit with hundreds of registered church pastors, lay-leaders, seminary teachers, staff and students. Therefore, my views come from this perspective.

Christianity has grown at a staggering, thrilling and surprising speed since 1979. There are Christians in every level of society - educated and uneducated, wealthy and poor, young and old, white collar professionals and blue collar workers, male and female. They are found in every profession - law, education, business, medicine, art, manufacturing, food services, and civil service. They are found within the Communist Party and the People’s Liberation Army. There are Christians all over the nation - the villages and mountains, the towns and plains, the cities and farms. It is very clear Christianity is filtering into multiple aspects of Chinese society as Mr. Aikman states.

It seems to me that overall the author implies that believers in the unregistered churches are more committed Christians than those in the registered churches. I know that some believers go to the registered church on Sunday morning and the unregistered church during the week. Believers in both expressions of the church know the meaning of suffering and persecution. It would be difficult to measure which individuals or body of believers have suffered most for their faith.

Is there or should there, be a "contest for who has suffered most" so that the winning group can look down upon the losing group or so that outsiders, none of whom have suffered half as much as either group, can define which is the more spiritual of the two groups?

Mr. Aikman is thorough in introducing various "house church" leaders, i.e., leaders of unregistered house churches as opposed to leaders of registered meeting places and registered churches. God has some influential and strong leaders in the "house church movement", who have suffered greatly for their faith and we can learn from them. However, there are also many strong, faithful, and influential Three Self leaders who have suffered for their faith from whom we also need to learn. Why were some of these leaders not introduced?

Mr. Aikman says, "Compared with 1949-1976, China is a paradise of personal freedom," I couldn’t agree more! The ordinary Chinese has religious freedom to believe or not believe, however, the Christians in both the "registered
and unregistered churches have limitations. Both expressions of the church work within limits. I have had the privilege of visiting 18 of China’s provinces. I have worshipped in urban and rural churches and visited the regional and provincial seminaries and Bible schools. I visited for hours with both senior pastors and younger ones, heard their stories and wiped their tears. Through all of these contacts, I have discovered it is difficult to make a general statement about persecution. It seems to me that in some areas of the country there is much freedom of religion, in others there are limits and in others there is serious persecution, depending largely on the local officials. Often these local officials do not respect Christians or do not understand or agree with religious policies. There are also some cases when persecution comes from other religious groups.

My personal perspective is that the government would not want to admit any persecution, pressure or bias against believers. In fact, more exists than the government will acknowledge. On the other hand, there is far less persecution, pressure and bias than many western churches and mission-sending agencies want people to believe.

The author implies that overall one finds strong, Bible-centered sermons preached in the unregistered churches and not in the registered churches. I have heard more than 200 sermons preached in registered churches. The sermons were delivered by both male and female pastors. Some of these had served prison terms for their faith. There were those who served faithfully without experiencing any difficulties, and others were new seminary graduates. For the most part, the sermons were long, well-prepared, sound in doctrine and emphasized Jesus as Lord.

Again, the author implies the lack of training in the "unregistered church" is a strength. One of the greatest needs in both the registered and the unregistered church today is training. I have no doubt that most of the young men and women in the unregistered seminaries are gifted and called of God, but I also know from personal experience that most of the students at the Nanjing Theological Seminary are men and women who are committed to Jesus Christ as Lord. They know the cost of discipleship. They love God’s Word. They love the church of China and they love their country. They are gifted and committed to serving the church and serving their country, and I find it difficult to believe the students in the unregistered seminaries and training centres are more dedicated and more evangelistic than the students in the registered seminaries, Bible Schools and training centres since both come from the same public educational system, church structure and culture.

Mr. Aikman addressed the issue of "Theological Reconstruction" and those who are working in support of it. Western Christians have been concerned about it and have given much discussion to this "theological reconstruction". In talking with many key Christian leaders in China, some of whom serve as pastors and/or in administration at the various seminaries and/or Three Self and China Christian Council offices, they stated that often we in the west have somewhat misinterpreted what is going on in China. While it is true that there is fear and concern among some leaders, others believe theological reconstruction was not launched to alter the Christian faith but to pave the way for more effective ministry. In order for the gospel to be proclaimed and God’s kingdom to expand, Christians need to communicate the grace of God using contemporary words and concepts. In a nutshell, the church does not desire to reconstruct theology but to "re-think" theology in order to be more effective "sharers" of the Good News.

There is often discussion by western Christians about the person and theology of K. H. Ting. I have known Bishop Ting for more than ten years. I have known him up close. I have great respect for him and treasure his friendship. I read his books and articles and I do not assume to interpret his theology to anyone. However, one thing puzzles me. Why do Christians who believe in the sovereignty of God allow one person’s comments and theology to create such a sense of unrest and waste of time worrying about it. The Church of China is God’s Church. It has been His Church from the beginning. It was His Church through the dark days and nights of the Cultural Revolution. It will be His Church in the future. As He guided, protected, and used her in the past He will do the same in the future.

Mr. Aikman gives emphasis to the various religious groups serving in China, and for the most part, does a fine job in assessing the situation. In early years, some missionaries served as interpreters on opium ships and sailed into China with a missiology that, "the means justifies the end." It has taken Chinese
Christians centuries to recover from the damage done by this philosophy. However, it seems we are willingly and joyfully repeating the same mistakes. Individuals, both overseas Chinese and foreigners, and large mission agencies are sending their “missionaries” into China with little cultural understanding and a lack of Chinese language skills. Of course, many of them are quite clandestine. Some start Bible studies and cell group churches in their homes. By China’s law it is illegal for outsiders to do this. It is appropriate and legal for church leaders to invite foreigners to assist them in various ministries. I have heard stories that some of these new converts think that they do not have the freedom to attend local registered churches.

In violation of good missiological principles, others give more financial support than should be given to the local church. Others write glorious reports of the church planting movements they are starting in China and neglect to tell what Chinese churches and believers were and are doing apart from foreign involvement.

There are others foreign Christians who come to walk alongside the Chinese believers and non-believers, to love and live out their faith, and support the Chinese Church. There is a place for the foreigner to love, support, encourage, nurture, train and teach when invited, but China’s Christian leadership is Chinese and MUST remain in their hands as Mr. Aikman points out.

Registered and unregistered churches, like all bodies of believers, are part of the church universal - the Body of Christ. Within BOTH registered and unregistered churches, there are giants in the faith, knowledgeable Bible scholars, committed believers, new converts with a simple faith, believers that do not take their faith seriously or live like Christians, unbelievers genuinely seeking to find the Truth, and government informers.

There are dedicated and spirit-filled pastors, older pastors who want to keep their positions, recent seminary graduates who are committed to God’s Word and are seeking to find their place in ministry, lay leaders who are serious in faith but have little experience or knowledge of church organization, pastors and lay leaders who are more committed to the system than they are to the church.

It is important for the western Christian to take a balanced view of the China situation. Two people look at a half filled glass of water. One says, “It is half full.” The other one says, “It is half empty.” Both are correct. This is true when we look at China’s long and complex history. We must have two perspectives as we look at the two expressions of God’s church in China. Both are His church. Both are Chinese. It is time we allow the Chinese Church to deal with their differences.

We need to celebrate and rejoice in what God is doing in China through His followers. We need to pray that God will give wisdom and strength as they deal with the challenges they face.

NEWSBRIEFS

English language training. Churches all over China are working on their English language proficiency. In August of this year, the Beijing Christian Council organized a three-day language training programme "Olympic English". Taught by members of Nanyuan Church, classes were intended to raise general English standards in preparation of the 2008 Olympics, and attracted mostly young people.

A much longer training programme aimed at the oral communication skills of seminary teachers and pastors was conducted from July 4 to August 14, 2004 in the scenic area of Huangshan. Organized by the China Christian Council in cooperation with the Amity Foundation, the programme hosted a number of foreign teachers who helped 45 participants brush up on their spoken English.
Nanjing Seminary. On July 20, 2004, plans for a new seminary campus for Nanjing Union Theological Seminary were formally approved by the government. The new complex will spread over 23,842 square metres and construction costs are budgeted to be around 70 million RMB [US$ 8.9 million approx.]. This will not include the cost of constructing the seminary chapel.

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Season’s Greetings from the China Christian Council

Dear sisters and brothers,

On behalf of 16,000,000 Protestant Christians in China, I bring you warm greetings for a beautiful Christmas and a bright New Year.

When the only begotten Son of God was incarnated on earth, not many people, not even Jesus’ parents, could comprehend the mystical meaning of this great event. But the truth it has revealed is God’s unchangeable love and goodwill toward human beings.

Chinese Christians have experienced God’s full blessing in the year 2004. We are encouraged to be a positive element in building up a harmonious society in China. The reconstruction of theological thinking is developing further, and Bishop K.H. Ting has had his collection of writings “God is Love” published in the United States. We have moved into our new headquarters beside the Holy Trinity Cathedral. In August, we shared our church life with Christians in Hong Kong through the “Exhibition of the Bible Ministry of Chinese Churches” with nearly 30 thousand attendees. Delegations from Germany, the UK and Japan, and friends from 14 countries and districts came to visit us, and around 140 Chinese Christians were sent out to meet Christians in various parts of the world. All of our developments, and achievements are worked out for the glory of God.

We appreciate all the prayers and support from our colleagues and friends outside of China, and we pray that God will be with you as well in the year to come.

Immanuel. God is with us.

Rev. Cao Shengjie

President, China Christian Council
Places Mentioned In This issue Of ANS

1) Shanghai
3) Beijing
5) Manzhouli (Inner Mongolia)
7) Huangshan (Anhui)

2) Nanjing (Jiangsu)
4) Chifeng (Inner Mongolia)
6) Wulan Haote (Inner Mongolia)