Dear Reader,

With its efforts at theological reconstruction, the Chinese church is trying to develop a theology that is suited to its modern Chinese environment. These efforts manifest themselves in many ways. In this edition of ANS, we report about the second batch of graduates from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary’s post-graduate class on pastoral theology. Aimed at pastors and church workers who are already serving within the church, the newly created course aims at equipping the students with the pastoral tools required in a society where personal lives become more complex by the day (p6).

As the movement for theological reconstruction is entering a new stage, emphasis is now being put on how to view the Bible. On p8, we summarize an article by Rev. Gao Ying in which she introduces basic hermeneutical techniques from a contemporary point of view.

As usual, this edition of ANS also carries news about the church leadership and its involvement in issues of national importance. On p3, we report about an inter-faith initiative in support of world peace, and on p4, several church leaders share their impressions about March’s constitutional amendments and what they mean for the church. Discover more for yourself!

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

[Signature]

2004.5/6.1

National CCC/TSPM Committee Unveils New Headquarters

(ANS) Holy Trinity Church, located on Shanghai’s Jiujiang Road, is a construction of significant historic importance. Built in 1869, the church was designed by well-known English architect G.G. Scott. Because of its brick colour, the church is also called "Red Church". The new headquarters of the National CCC/TSPM with a gross area of 7,000 square metres includes Holy Trinity Church, a bell tower and annexes. The Gothic-style Holy Trinity Church has been listed as a historical and cultural site under municipal government protection by the Shanghai city government.

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On June 6, 2004, the National CCC/TSPM Committee held a grand unveiling ceremony of its new headquarters at 210 Jiujiang Road in Shanghai. The new office space is an annex of the Holy Trinity Church. Bishop K.H. Ting, Vice Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Honorary Chairman of the National TSPM and Honorary President of the CCC, was invited to deliver a speech on the occasion. "The relocation of the two organizations will substantially improve the working conditions for the organizations' staff members," the bishop said, adding that the move also illustrated the thorough implementation of the policy of religious freedom.

Bishop K.H. Ting also said that the Three Self principles were still being promoted by Chinese churches. Christians in China felt proud of their nation and continuously prayed for its prosperity, the bishop said. He also expressed his gratitude to the Central Government, the Shanghai Municipal Government and other departments concerned for their highly effective work in handing over the building.

Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the China Christian Council, extended her sincere compliments to the Central Government of China and the State Council on behalf of the National CCC/TSPM Committee and all Chinese Christians. She also thanked the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, the Shanghai Municipal Government, the Shanghai Committee for Development and Reform, the Shanghai Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs, and the Shanghai Bureau of Real Estate Property and Land and Resources Management for their support and help for churches in China. She also especially mentioned the Huangpu District Government, which enabled the successful relocation of the premises through its cooperative attitude with its focus on the overall interests of all those concerned.

Rev. Cao said: "The CCC/TSPM headquarters used to be located at 169 Yuanmingyuan Road. However, the office environment became inadequate for our continuously developing Christian ministry. Today, this dream has been realized with the help of governments of all levels. The relocation of the National CCC/TSPM Committee will certainly evoke many positive reactions both at home and abroad. We hope that the new headquarters of CCC/TSPM will be a window for spreading love to society and all Chinese people. We also hope that it will be a friendly window to enable more people to witness the development of the country and the development of churches in China in accordance with the Three Self principles."

"Since the reform and opening up of China, the number of Christians in China has increased twenty to thirty-fold, the number of congregational places has reached 50,000, the number of Bibles printed has reached over 30 million, and the number of training centres of provincial and municipal level has increased to more than 50. Christians in China enjoy full freedom of religion. The relocation of CCC/TSPM can effectively refute the wanton attack of the U.S. on China's religious policy and the freedom of religion. 'Inside your temple, O God, we think of your constant love.' (Psalm 48:9) 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:9)

The unveiling ceremony was hosted by Rev. Deng Fucun, residential Vice Chairperson of the National TSPM.
Huang Yuejin, Vice Minister of the United Front Work Department and delegate to the CPPCC, Ye Xiaowen, Director of the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, Luo Shiqian, Assistant General Secretary of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, and many other government officials were present to express their congratulations to the National CCC/TSPM Committee. More than 100 people attended the unveiling ceremony. The new office building, located in the annexes of the Holy Trinity Church complex, will start functioning once the moving has been completed, while the church and the bell tower will be opened to the public after renovation.

2004.5/6.2

Religions Unite In Promoting World Peace

(ANS) Ecumenical relations between Catholic and Protestant believers in China vary greatly from location to location, but more often than not contacts between the two groups are sporadic and superficial. The same applies to the other officially recognized religions, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam. Accordingly, political meetings are among the few occasions on which representatives of China's religious communities meet and interact. One such forum is the Chinese Religions Commission for World Peace, where religious representatives join efforts in promoting world peace. Below, Tian Feng writer Tian Xiao reports on the Commission's latest meeting.

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The present Chinese Religions Commission for World Peace held its first meeting from March 13-15 of this year. Bishop K.H. Ting acted as Chairperson, and Vice Chairperson Sheng Hui delivered the work report for the past Chinese Religions Commission for World Peace.

Wang Zhongyu, a Vice Chairman of the Tenth National Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), presented congratulations and opened the meeting in the name of Jia Qinglin, Chairman of the National CPPCC. In his speech, Wang underlined the importance of the commission's work under the present conditions. The commission helped to guide and unite believers in their struggle against foreign infiltration under the disguise of religion; it helped to oppose ethnic separatism, religious extremism, violent terrorism and sectarian activities. Finally, the commission's work contributed to national unity and stability in China.

Amongst other dignitaries, Liu Yandong, head of the National United Front, and Zheng Wantong, General Secretary of the National CPPCC, attended the meeting.

During the three-day meeting, the regulations of the commission were amended and leaders for different positions elected. Bishop K.H. Ting was appointed chairman of the Chinese Religions Commission for World Peace, while Presbyter Ji Jianhong and Rev. Cao Shengjie are among the 11 Vice Chairpersons elected. A total of 16 Christian representatives are in the commission, with Rev. Gao Ying being one of the Vice General Secretaries.

In an interview after the closing session, Presbyter Ji Jianhong underlined the Christian nature of peace work, saying that re-establishing harmony between humans and God, harmony between people and harmony between man and nature
was at the centre of Christianity. As harbingers of the Gospel, Christians should work to bring about harmonious, friendly and peaceful relations between different nations. Historically, Chinese Christians had strived for these goals, Ji said, and continued to do so under the concept of the Three Self. While efforts for theological reconstruction were under way, Chinese Christians continued to work for peace, public benefit and friendly relations between people. Chinese Christians were resolutely opposed to separatism, terrorism and religious extremism, Ji noted.

Looking back at past peace-related activities, Rev. Cao remarked that Chinese Christians had worked for peace in a number of ways. Following a decision by the church leadership in response to a Chinese Religions Commission suggestion in 1995, a national peace prayer was organized in August of that year. Moreover, World Peace Prayer Day, which originally had been celebrated on the second weekend of January, was moved to mid-August.

During the Fifth General Assembly of the Asian Religions Peace Commission, the Chinese delegation headed by Bishop K.H. Ting, succeeded in squashing the meeting's initiative for a "two China" policy, a success that deeply impressed the delegates assembled.

In 2000, Dr. Han Wenzao, then President of the China Christian Council, and Rev. Cao Shengjie accompanied a delegation headed by Catholic Bishop Fu Tieshan to the Millennium World Peace Summit, another occasion for the Chinese church leadership to win friends and support.

Two years later, during the Sixth General Assembly of the Asian Religions Peace Commission, Rev. Cao Shengjie and her accompanying colleagues Rev. Deng Fucun and Rev. Kan Baoping brought a new focus into their peace work, underlining the rights of women and children, human rights, environmental protection and peace education.

The Chinese Religions Commission for World Peace has members coming from varying faith backgrounds, yet they all share the common goal of safeguarding world peace. The commission strives to enhance understanding between Chinese religious circles and the world religions through friendship, peace, cooperation, and development, while at the same time promoting unity between China's different religious communities.

2004.5/6.3

**Working Together For A Brighter Future**

(ANS) In March if this year, China's National People's Congress held its annual meeting, bringing together close to 2,900 delegates. As the government's highest decision-making body, the National People's Congress (NPC) traditionally sets the political guidelines for the coming year and has the power to amend the constitution. Parallel to the NPC, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) met in Beijing. The latter body acts as a consulting organ to the government and is made up of representatives from various social groups, including the officially recognized religions. Below, three church leaders who attended the CPPCC meeting comment on this year's highest political meetings and the constitutional amendments brought forward by the NPC.

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Rev. Sun Xipei, Vice President of the China Christian Council:
"A new wave of studying, propagating, and implementing the Constitution"

Both meetings were extremely successful. Conducted in a way to encourage a progressive and pragmatic approach, numerous important questions were handled, and many things will remain unforgettable for me. Two events in particular stand out: Firstly, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's work report with its humanist, "seeking the truth in facts" spirit, especially his announcement of abolishing the tax on agricultural products over the next five years. The final applause, lasting for over three minutes, impressively underlined the support for the new leadership under President Hu Jintao.

With its emphasis on the interests of the people and support for the weaker segments of society, Wen's work report as well as the government plans for this year earned the central government and the prime minister the reputation of being genuinely close to China's ordinary people. Such good governance lets us look optimistically into the future, no matter what difficulties we will have to face.

The second unforgettable event was an amendment in the constitution of the CCPCC to include four sentences on religious work. These four sentences had already been included in the government's work report, a fact that underlines the attention the new government pays to religious work. We should take this as an opportunity to build our religious bodies well so as not to disappoint the Party's and the government's trust in us and their support in our work.

Among the important issues dealt with at the NPC, probably the most important ones were the constitutional changes made. Prior to the amendments, numerous social groups had been consulted, including members of the different democratic parties, representatives of business associations, and religious personnel. Now that the alterations to the constitution have been publicised, we must initiate a new phase of studying, propagating and implementing the basic law, so that our religious believers will become citizens abiding by the constitution.

Ms. Jin Wei, Vice President of the National Three Self Patriotic Movement:
The new constitutional passages and the work of the YMCA/YWCA

The constitutional amendments follow the ideal of protecting citizens' interests and are one step further in perfecting the system that is intended to safeguard them. The inclusion of the ideas of the Three Represents as well as human rights and social security in the constitution establishes humanism among both the values and the responsibilities of our nation. This constitutes a link to the work of the YMCA/YWCA, where the idea of humanism lies at the core of our work, as expressed in our national motto: "...like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people." (Matthew 20:28)

The idea of humanism expresses respect, care and acceptance for other people. In terms of citizenship, this entails the right of life, the right to work, the right of knowledge, personal development and autonomous personal decision-making, as well as the protection from being discriminated against. Historically, this respect for
and protection of human rights has been a focal point in the work of the YMCA/YWCA.

Over the past years, the Chinese YMCAs/YWCAs have strived to promote the development of the disadvantaged, to engage in work that would bring about wholesome young personalities and to participate in promoting world peace and development. YMCAs/YWCAs all over China are exploring these issues and trying to implement them while at the same time giving testimony to Jesus Christ's love. Humanism and capacity building have thus become two guiding lines in the implementation of our work. Whether professionals or volunteers, all those involved with China's YMCA/YWCA movement at the moment are very happy about the current developments, which tie in very nicely with our own values. The constitution is not only our country's basic law, but also the guiding principle for any activity undertaken by the "Y's".

Presbyter Fu Xianwei, Vice Secretary of the National Three Self Patriotic Movement: Implications for the work of the Shanghai CC/TSPM Committee

The constitutional amendments make the idea of the Three Represents a part of China's modernization efforts through legal means. At the same time, humanistic ideas and the protection of the interests of the people have been written into the constitution. Shanghai Christians embrace these changes, which also contribute to the building of a political civilization.

At this joyous moment for the Chinese people, the U.S. government has brought about a motion before the U.N. Human Rights Commission, saying that the Chinese government has made insufficient efforts in protecting human rights. We Shanghai Christians deeply resent this. Looking at modern Chinese history, we know that no other government has done as much for the livelihood and development of the Chinese people, or has made equally huge efforts for the rights of the Chinese people. Only after the establishment of the People's Republic were basic human rights, including religious freedom and autonomy of the Chinese church, granted.

The Shanghai CC/TSPM Committee hopes to strengthen its efforts in studying the constitution, so that clergy and lay people can fully embody the ideal of "A good Christian is also a good citizen."

2004.5/6.4

Second Batch: More Graduate Students Take to Pastoral Care

(ANS) Migration and increased mobility, unemloyment and changing family structures are some of the factors that contribute to high levels of personal stress among more and more Chinese. This trend does not stop in front of church doors: where life becomes increasingly complex, demands on pastoral care are rising, both in terms of quantity and quality. Wang Fan reports on ongoing efforts to equip young pastors and evangelists for their multifaceted task.

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Following the increasing demands for qualified pastoral care, graduate students in pastoral care have recently been formally made a part of the school system at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

The format for this second batch of students doing post-graduate studies in pastoral care follows the concept introduced for the first group, and the curriculum and teachers will be identical. In order to further improve the course on the basis of the experiences made, the programme enjoys special guidance and support from the National CC/TSPM Committee, which is monitoring the development of the class.

One change that has been introduced are exams that candidates applying to the programme need to take. Accordingly, more than ninety church workers from all over China sweated over a series of written and oral exams during two sweltering July days last year, before 31 were finally accepted into the programme.

Part of the exams were discussion groups in which candidates had to explain their motivation for the class. One pastor said: "Ever since graduating from seminary in the 1980s, over all those years that I have been serving in the church, I have hoped to have another chance of deepening my studies and opening my field of vision. I hope my continuing studies will enable me to reflect on my pastoral work and preaching, and I hope to take this as a motivation for further studies that will make me into a spiritually and theologically advanced church worker."

Classes for the second batch of graduate students in pastoral work officially kicked off in November 2003. Presbyter Ji Jianhong, Chairman of the National Three Self Patriotic Movement and Vice President of the Standing Committee of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, heads the current class of students from 22 different provinces and autonomous regions.

Seminary president Bishop K. H. Ting also attended the opening discussion meeting and stated with pleasure that many of the students were frontline church workers responsible for churches and meeting points at the very grassroots. Bishop K.H. Ting particularly noted the presence of two representatives from China's YMCA/YWCA movement. In the past, the "Y" had played an active and progressive role for Chinese Christianity, the bishop said. Today, the YMCA/YWCA were again giving testimony to Christ's love through numerous forms of social service, and constituted a bridge between the church and society.

A number of outstanding church personalities, including Wu Yaozong, Luo Guanzong and Bishop K.H. Ting had worked with the YMCA in their youth. Bishop K.H. Ting encouraged the two "Y" staff present to take the old generation as their models and bring out the Christian component in their work ever more clearly.

So far, the new group of students has attended two intensive training modules, the first one in autumn and a second one this spring. Among the courses taught were sessions on the history of Christian thought, Chinese church history, systematic theology and history of western philosophy. Prof. Chen Zemin, Rev. Shen Cheng'en, and Rev. Wang Aiming served as instructors, complemented by Bishop K.H. Ting and Presbyter Ji Jianhong, who taught classes on the topic of theological
reconstruction. Bishop K.H. Ting's talks in particular sparked debates during discussion sessions.

Zhou Yongjian [Wilson Chow], President of Hong Kong's China's Graduate School of Theology, gave a keynote on the Pentateuch. Drawing on the Hebrew original and latest biblical research, Prof. Zhou shared his insights as well as experiences about sharing the Pentateuch in his everyday pastoral work. The keynote was well received by the students who felt that it was especially helpful for their reflections on how to view the Bible. Classes were rounded off by English language instruction.

Returning onto a university campus after years of serving at the grassroots proved to be fulfilling for the students in other ways as well. They eagerly took to campus life with its opportunities of worship meetings, friendship and exchange with other students and used many informal occasions to share more about their hometown churches with junior students.

2004.5/6.5

Faithful To The Original: The Importance Of Hermeneutics

(ANS) One of the tasks posed by the ongoing efforts at theological reconstruction is the question of how to view the Bible. Among many ordinary Chinese believers, literal approaches to reading Scripture abound. Apart from failing to take historical limitations into account, this attitude is often rendered problematic through the fact that Chinese Christians read the Bible in translation. In April's edition of Tian Feng, Rev. Gao Ying introduces basic hermeneutical techniques from a contemporary point of view.

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Our view of the Bible is founded on how we understand and interpret Scripture, and this in turn will shape the way in which our faith expresses itself. The ongoing efforts for theological reconstruction in China also aim at correcting and renewing our way of viewing and interpreting the Bible.

While the words in Scripture do not change, human interpretation of the Bible is continuously evolving for a number of reasons. First of all, the sheer volume, age and time range of the Biblical books constitute a huge challenge for an adequate understanding of Scripture. Secondly, new archaeological findings continuously challenge our traditional reading of the Bible, and force us to come up with new views. And finally, as our environment and the addressees of our evangelizing efforts undergo changes, we need to find new ways of expressing Gospel truths and making the Gospel relevant for today's people.

Starting with the early Christian fathers until today, the Christian quest for an appropriate understanding of the Bible has undergone a long development, culminating in the creation of a genuine discipline, hermeneutics, with methodological approaches of its own.

Over time, the focus of research has shifted many times. For example, during the 19th century hermeneutics was strongly influenced by the need to incorporate the archaeological findings of the time into the way Christians interpreted the Bible.
The art of interpreting the Bible works with different approaches, for example the "literal" approach focusing on the meaning of the words employed, or the "spiritual" method that is based on images and allusions. Interpreting the Bible in the latter way was particularly common among church fathers like Augustine, but became also popular in the Chinese congregations that emerged much later. Although this approach is rooted in Scripture, it has to be employed with much prudence. If we focus on the "spiritual essence" alone without taking the literal meaning and context of a Biblical excerpt into account, the real meaning of a passage can be lost. In extreme cases, such an approach can lead to the emergence of cults and sects.

In order to avoid a very subjective, biased approach to understanding the Bible, we need to observe a number of basic hermeneutical principles, the first of which is to take the contemporary context into account. What was the meaning of the chosen Biblical passage for the writer and his or her listeners under the conditions of the time? And secondly, what meaning does the passage carry for today's readers?

To fully understand a passage's original meaning, we need to know the history of that particular Biblical book as well as the social, political, economic and cultural context. There are four aspects that, combined, allow us to grasp the original meaning of a scriptural passage. They are the theology of the writer, the historical background, the etymology of words and the cultural background.

As the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, we need to have a certain understanding of these ancient languages and their corresponding cultures. Given the very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Chinese Bible translations will necessarily differ in some places from the original, and there may even be places that have been mistranslated or misunderstood. Therefore, it is important to study and research the Bible in its original version.

To reach an appropriate understanding of a certain Biblical passage, it is furthermore important to take the context of the selected excerpt into account. How does it relate to the passages preceding and following it? If we fail to take the context into account, we may easily read our own understanding into a certain passage, a common cause of misunderstanding and misquoting Scripture.

Finally, after having grasped the original meaning of a Biblical passage, we are ready to set the selected excerpts into our contemporary context. Again, we have to take the original meaning into account. Paul's teachings, for example, are influenced by the contemporary Roman and Greek religious traditions as well as his own background as a Jew. When trying to apply his teachings to our modern lives, we first of all need to discern which elements are historically determined and which go beyond cultural boundaries.

As our Christian faith is based on our understanding of the Bible, a proper understanding and handling of hermeneutics is fundamental if we want to preach and evangelize faithfully and successfully.

In recent years, there is a trend among young churches in developing countries to explore and interpret the Bible from the background of their own cultures and
experiences, all within the methodological framework of hermeneutics. In my understanding, this is also one of the aims of our current efforts at theological reconstruction.

The ongoing venture of theological reconstruction aims at correcting our view of Scripture and at helping us to read the Bible from a Chinese perspective. Therefore, we need to have a clear understanding of the environment the church exists in, as our view of exegesis will reflect the social conditions we live under. We need to strengthen the ability of personal reflection and overcome traditional ways of interpreting the Bible that may have diverted us from our faith in the past. With God's help, our church will be able to respond to the needs and challenges it is facing today.

2004.5/6.6

Being Of the Spirit and Being Of the World

(ANS) What does "being of the Spirit" mean? And just how worldly is too worldly? Questions like these preoccupy many Chinese believers, who are mostly first generation Christians with a rather conservative and fundamentalist outlook on Christian life. In May's Tian Feng issue, Bao Youhua from Yunnan Province takes a look at genuine spirituality and how it manifests itself.

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What does "being of the Spirit" mean? Used as an adjective, it describes God speaking to a human being through the Holy Spirit. "But you do not live as your human nature tells you to; instead, you live as the spirit tells you to - if, in fact, God's Spirit lives in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him." (Romans 8:9) To follow the Holy Spirit in our activities, to be in complete unison with God's will, this is meant by "being of the Spirit". And the Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit as part of the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in which each enjoys the same veneration.

So, how do we discern whether a person is "of the Spirit" or not? Does it suffice to use spiritual expressions such as "thank God" and "hallelujah"? Somebody "of the Spirit" has to believe in Jesus Christ as the saviour of humankind; the person has to be born again through the confession of sins; the person has to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance.

How does "being of the Spirit" manifest itself in the life of a Christian? A healthy Christian life will necessarily bear fruit. There is no good tree that would produce bad fruit, nor is there a bad tree that would bear good fruit. Hence, a person that is "of the Spirit" will reflect this in his or her life in the following ways:

She or he has a rich Christian life and experiences the divine secret through the Holy Spirit. A believer thus filled with the Spirit will also treat his or her body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, and will engage in a normal spiritual life, such as reading the Bible, praying regularly, and participating in worship gatherings. Constant striving for a rich spiritual life characterizes such a person.
A believer "of the Spirit" will also show unity in faith and actions through a life that will give praise to God, acting with understanding and forgiveness towards his fellow human beings. Being filled with the Spirit will inspire a believer towards being honest, sincere and loving with those around him or her.

Moreover, such a person will live in harmony with his or her neighbours and will find pleasure in helping other people. A Christian filled with the Holy Spirit will be glad to work for the church and will take an interested and active attitude towards matters of social concern, ranging from the family circle to issues of national interest.

Regarding his or her spiritual life, the genuine believer will be able to discern right from wrong, and will enjoy a healthy spiritual development that is not extreme or overly emotional. This also includes the integration of rational and spiritual life.

A person "of the Spirit" will have harmonious relationships with non-believers, and will always stay close to the masses.

As Christians striving for the bright side of the world, we will try to avoid the dark world of worshipping idols, gambling and following the principles of feng shui. Other things to be avoided are sinful behaviour rooted in lust of the body or mind and hollow striving for fame. Our quest for God requires us to forego all sin and injustice so as to become pure and holy.

Nowadays, there are many people in the church who claim to be "of the Spirit" but in fact may not be so. Their appearance can be harmful for the faith journey of individual believers as well as for the overall development of the church.

These believers constantly talk about "being of the Spirit", but may not really be reborn. Some only attach importance to their personal experiences such as dreams or speaking in tongues, while they lack profound knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

In some cases, a person's claim to be "of the Spirit" may cause the believer to be extremely self-centred, focusing only on his or her personal faith as "spiritual" and chastising others for participating in social activities.

Another phenomenon that can be encountered are evangelists who pretend to be "of the Spirit" in order to deceive believers, either to cheat them out of money or to raise their own position among them. In other cases, some new believers may be very enthusiastic, but may not have any understanding of Christian truths. And finally, there are people who see anything worldly as inherently evil and who try to completely retreat from the world.

Being "of the Spirit" is not a mere slogan, but a fact, and it is not decided by human beings. It is the ability to give witness to Jesus Christ through speech and actions in our everyday life. Let us hope that all believers can become "of the Spirit".
A Look At Sacred Music

(ANS) Whether they congregate in makeshift meeting points or splendid city churches, all Chinese Christians enjoy church music as an integral part of their worship services. Most congregations start their gatherings with half an hour of singing practice before continuing with the service proper. The hymns sung include both Chinese melodies and formerly Western hymns that were brought into China and translated in missionary times. In May's edition of Tian Feng, Liu Yongqing from China Eastern Theological Seminary takes a more theoretical look at church music and its function for believers.

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Christianity is a religion that attaches great importance to music, including singing. While many religions have musical elements, Christianity has a particularly close relationship to music. Throughout its 2000-year history, music has always been a means to express the sacred.

Music has always been an essential part of human existence. In European history, for a long period of time church music held a central position, until the enlightenment freed the way for the development of more secular forms of music in the 18th century.

So, what do we mean by sacred music? As the name indicates, it is something different from secular music. But does this mean that sacred music is simply one form of music amongst others? In a sense it is true, but sacred music is much more than that. Music owes its existence to God's creation, it is a gift bestowed on us by God. Hence, music does not originate from human beings, and it expresses the transcendent world of truth, goodness and beauty.

Besides, music first appeared in the context of religion, as a means for human beings to express their adoration of their god(s). In this sense, music is an indispensable element of religious praise. Later on, following the changes of the times, musical forms pluralized into the variety of styles and shapes that we know today. Each musical form has its own function and represents different values.

Sacred music is one musical form among many, and in a certain sense we can say that only sacred music represents the genuine value of music, because God created the universe to his praise: "How clearly the sky reveals God's glory! How plainly it shows what he has done!" (Psalms 19:1)

The first person to define sacred music was Augustine, who declared: "Do you know what hymns are? Hymns are praises that are sung to God. If you praise God without singing, then your praise is not a hymn; if you sing to God without praise, then your singing is not a hymn either; and if you sing praise that is, however, not dedicated to God, your singing is not a hymn either." From this exclusive definition, we gather that sacred music (including hymns) has to fulfil three criteria to match the definition: the object of sacred music is God, the singer has to have a praising heart, and finally, this praise finds its expression in a song, which is an external activity to express this internal praise.
Later, musicians and composers added further definitions to the subject of sacred music. A contemporary English composer sees sacred music as "an opportunity for all believers to declare their feelings, as well as a source of joy for the whole church that is rooted in the Truth." Other scholars suggest that a hymn has always to be faithful to the Bible, be of respectful and devout nature, express experiences common to believers, and be spiritual. And finally, a hymn has to follow a certain pattern and be complete in its form.

Ultimately, the fact whether a piece of music can fulfil its task of giving glory to God depends on the nature of the piece. Just as there is no "sacred cow" as opposed to a "normal cow" when an animal sacrifice is made, there is no "sacred music" per se. Accordingly, music from all cultures and ages can fulfil the role of a hymn.

Sacred music is an applied art form, it is an art form that is meant to be put to use during gatherings and worship services. As such, it can serve various purposes, for example praise the Lord, spread the gospel, or educate believers.

Hymns can be an appropriate means of interaction between believers and God to express thanks, confess sins, seek God's help, and more. However, attention to the music must not override God's central position in the worship service. Furthermore, music can be one way for the church to communicate the gospel message of God's saving power to the world. Sacred music has also a function in transmitting theological truths. While spiritual experiences of believers vary, they all can find their expression through the emotional outlet of music. Music can also bring the listener into a realm of spiritual peace and harmony. And finally, music serves to bring believers together and thus enhances unity both within congregations and the church as a whole.

Raising Children The Right Way

(ANS) Raising children has never been easy. As Chinese adults find themselves struggling with the mind-boggling changes that challenge traditional ethics and social networks, preparing their children for the "New China" becomes even more difficult. Increasing social competitiveness and the one-child policy also add to the pressures faced by parents and their children. In May's edition of Tian Feng, Wang Xuefu gives advice on childrearing from his experience as a theologian and counsellor.

Recently, a Christian mother came to me in distress over her grown son. According to her account, her son's emotional well being had first suffered tremendously from failing to enrol in an elite university. Later, after graduating from an ordinary university, he had encountered difficulties in integrating fully into society when he started to work. Instead, he had resumed a life that was more and more dependent on his parents, withdrawing from responsibilities and emotions until he resembled a child.

Recounting her son's story, this mother was feeling both bewildered and wronged. As she explained, her son had been the focus of her life, and she had sacrificed time, interests, her work, and energy in his interest. Apart from requiring good grades
in his studies, she had never demanded anything from him and had protected and nurtured him in many ways, even bringing him the washbasin with water to wash his face...

This mother did not realize that her son's problems were linked to her way of raising him. Her "love", expressed constantly in numerous ways of protecting her son, only served to hamper the boy's emotional development, failing to instil a sense of responsibility in him and creating a deep sense of dependency on the mother.

All life is created by God with the inherent wish to grow. When a person is born, God entrusts the child to us with his or her cognitive, psychological, physical and spiritual development. Development psychology teaches us that during the early phase of development, a person has a strong dependency on the father and the mother, but that in the process of raising a child, we will have to let the child become more and more independent, just like a bird that has to leave the nest. Similarly, when a child starts to learn to walk, we will let the child stand up and try on his own, encouraging him to walk towards us.

As children grow up, some parents lose this natural ability to let a child grow, and become overly protective of their offspring. They try to keep their children in a completely safe and pure environment, thus depriving them of the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them.

How can a child become more mature without doing things and without committing mistakes? Certain pressures and worries are necessary during the development of a young person. As teenagers, during the process of individuation, children will start to withdraw from their parents in order to take a more active role in society. This period may be accompanied by feelings of insecurity and also fear on the teenager's side. Parents may feel that their own value systems are being rejected and may try to limit the child to their own environment, but such overly protective measures may hamper the young person's ability to adapt to society.

As psychologist Scott Peck underlines, excessive "giving" from the parents' side does not equal love. Real love will always foster growth in oneself and others. Instead of allowing this growth, some parents fulfil all their children's wishes, sometimes also to reach other goals like good grades in school, and mistake this behaviour for "love".

The experience in psychological counselling and healing suggests that such children will have difficulties integrating into society, and will probably "reward" their parents not with love, but with feelings of discontent and anger. Such "adult children" will have an attitude of overly high demands towards society, and when their expectations are not met, the young persons may sulk like children and may even withdraw into a world of illusions to avoid growing up.

Parents who love their children should give them the opportunity to grow in all areas of their personalities, i.e. not only physically, but also intellectually, psychologically, intellectually and spiritually. The Bible tells us about Jesus' development, giving us a model of growth. God did not create human beings like machines that are
programmed to function in a certain way, but respects us and gives us choices and
the opportunity to experience a growth process.

During this process of growth, mistakes are difficult to avoid, but it is through these
mistakes that human beings grow. Besides, we are not left alone in our evolution;
there are parents, relatives and teachers by our side. And, after turning into grown-
ups, we face the task of letting our children go through the same process of growth.

2004.5/6.8

NEWSBRIEFS

Bible Exhibition. There will be a Bible exhibition titled "Lamp at my feet, light on my
path: Bible ministry in the Chinese church" in Hong Kong from August 5 to 10 this
year. Organized by the National CCC/TSPM Committee with the aim of bringing
Christians from Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland closer together, the exhibition
will focus on Chinese believers' love for the Bible, as well as the Bible printing and
distribution work done by the national church leadership. Currently, the organizers
are still calling for contributions for the show. Exhibits should be "topical, reflect the
special characteristics of the Chinese church, and be contemporary."

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World Prayer Day. Women all over China celebrated World Prayer Day with a host
of activities. In Shanghai, women from the city's 163 churches and meeting points
congregated for a joint prayer meeting in downtown Muen Church, and in Shaanxi,
seminarians of Shaanxi Bible School gathered to celebrate the occasion. Wang
Hong, Vice Principal of the seminary, used the opportunity to share some women-
related developments in modern theology with the students, and called on women
believers to confidently take on challenges and to help promote the church's
women's work.

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Lay Training. In Yunnan's Simao City, the local CC/TSPM committee organized the
first pastoral training course for members of the Piao Piao minority. From February
9-21, more than 80 lay workers from 17 different churches and meeting points
learned more about their faith, studied the Bible and were taught how to oppose
sects and heretical teachings as well as how to run a church according to the
principles of the Three Self.

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Conference. Representing two mainland Chinese churches, Rev. Meng Yinling and
Rev. Wang Peng attended a seminar on "Biblical Research and the Future" in Hong
Kong that ended on May 28. Jointly organized by the Association for Biblical Studies
Among Ethnic Chinese and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the seminar
brought together scholars from the Chinese mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In
their presentations, Peng and Meng shared recent developments in mainland China
with regard to hermeneutics, in the quest for a correct understanding of Scripture in
the contemporary Chinese context.

ANS 2004.5/6 page 15
1) Shanghai
2) Nanjing (Jiangsu)
3) Hong Kong
4) Simao (Yunnan)