Dear Reader,

Looking at our choice of articles for this summer edition of ANS, inculturation and matters of finding a Chinese way for the church emerge as the unspoken, yet potent topic that binds this issue together. In "How Can The Church Win People's Hearts?", Lu Qingxi examines how early foreign missionaries failed to adapt their message to the Chinese environment and finds similar problems among China's contemporary evangelists (p2).

One such adaptation in the Chinese context is certainly the fact that Chinese Protestant Christians worship in a post-denominational environment. Yet this achievement cannot be taken for granted, Sun Yude warns in his article, calling for respect of the Three Self Principles and unity of the Chinese church (p4).

Two more articles add to the different viewpoints that examine the "Chinese way of being church" in this issue of ANS. Geng Weizhong elaborates on problems that certain Bible translations create for the descendants of the Dragon Throne (p8), and Wang Jiarong gives travel impressions on the Chinese church from an overseas Chinese perspective (p6).

For some lighter reading, we offer fascinating glimpses into two local Christian communities and the very different challenges they face. A Fujianese believer recounts the development of deaf ministry in his congregation (p10), and Du Zhongchu brings us to Banli Church in Yunnan, where "Bumper Crops Aid Spiritual Harvest" (p12).

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

Katrin Frieder

If you read Chinese, check out the Chinese Protestant Churches' website. Surfing to

http://www.chineseprotestantchurch.org.cn

will give you access to latest news and views from the China Christian Council and the National TSPM Committee.
How Can The Church Win People's Hearts?

(ANS) For the church to win people's hearts requires, above all, a message that is relevant to them and their context, says Lu Qingxi. In June's edition of Tian Feng, the Zhejiang-based author sets the ongoing movement for theological reconstruction into a historical context. Over the centuries, the church has always struggled to adapt to society - or remained insignificant, he contends.

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For us evangelists, taking an active part in the movement for theological reconstruction is helpful to our ministry in several ways: it helps to broaden our vision, leads believers to love the church and the country and encourages active participation in building our material and spiritual civilization.

Especially in the countryside, churches have reached a point where the adjustment of theological thinking has become an absolute necessity. The leadership of evangelists has a very direct influence on believers, just as the Chinese saying goes: "Planting melons will bring melons and planting beans will bring beans." Paul phrases this similarly in Galatians 6: 7: "... a person will reap exactly what he plants."

Many evangelists who have never received any theological training do not attach any importance to theological reconstruction and think that with some preaching, praying and singing skills there is no further need for anything else. As a result, they become more and more narrow-minded in their theology and may lead themselves and believers onto a dead end in their faith journey.

I once heard the following story: An apparently very devout evangelist bumped into an old acquaintance. The two men started to chat, and when the topic came to Christianity, the evangelist said: "You have to believe in Jesus Christ, if you believe in Him, you will ascend to heaven, if you don't believe in Him, you will go to hell." The man became furious and replied: "The way you believe that those faithful in Jesus will go to heaven, I would rather not believe in him, because aren't you cursing me right now?" The two men then had a big fight. This leads us to the question of how to raise interest among those outside of the church to listen to the Gospel. How can we spread the Gospel in a way that is appropriate to our times?

Bishop K.H. Ting says: "Over the past few years, people within the church have been raising the issue of theological reconstruction. Theological reconstruction protects our basic faith and does not clash with it or change it. Through theological reconstruction, our basic faith will be interpreted in a more rational way." As he points out, theological reconstruction has been an ongoing process over the 2,000 years of church history, reconstructing theology in an ever more beautiful way. "Instead of reconstruction, we can also call it 'development' or 'the raising of standards'."

Our church exists, after all, on this Earth, and apart from their faith, Christian believers are the same as other people. We have no reason to indulge in parochial arrogance as the "children of God"; this will only lead us into isolation from those around us, who will not be able to understand or love us. Is that what we really want?
Throughout its history, the church has always strived to develop in adaptation to society so as not to be abandoned by it. Looking back at the history of Christianity in China, we can see that the first encounter with Christianity was through Nestorian Christians in the 7th century. Under the support of the Tang emperor Taizong, the new religion enjoyed a period of flourishing development until a later emperor, Wuzong, banned it. Why was it possible that a religion that had been popular for 210 years could be prohibited from one moment to the next? In today's language, Nestorians had not observed the Three Self and had failed to contextualize their faith for the Chinese context. Besides maintaining the appearance of a foreign creed, both the Nestorian believers and church workers at that time were mostly foreigners. There was no way for them to "self propagate" and "self administrate", and ever since its arrival in China, the Nestorian church had enjoyed the financial support of the emperor. The final ban on the religion had financial reasons.

Christianity made inroads into China a second time during the Mongolian reign (1271-1368 A.D.), but again failed to win many Chinese converts or to establish a church that would be autonomous and self-administered. Accordingly, Christianity disappeared with Mongolian rule.

Christianity entered China a third time in the Ming and Qing dynasties, this time on the initiative of Jesuit missionaries. After some success, especially during the 17th century, Christianity again faded away from the Chinese landscape. Among the causes were conflicts between the Vatican and Mateo Ricci as well as the Pope and the Qing emperor, rows between different Catholic orders and an anti-religious attitude of the Qing dynasty in the 18th century.

A fourth attempt to introduce Christianity to the Chinese started in the 19th century, when Robert Morrison, a Protestant missionary, landed in China. The advent of Morrison and later Protestant missionaries coincided with colonial enterprises of foreign powers in China. The imperialist powers used Christianity as one means to invade China, and some missionaries participated directly in their political, military and economic invasion. How could such a religion win the hearts of the people?

The real Chinese Christianity is the Three Self Patriotic Movement that was set up in September 1950 by Wu Yaozong and 1,527 other leading church representatives. Through following the principles of the Three Self, Christianity liberated itself from the image of being a foreign religion. Especially over the past few years, the church has won the approval of many knowledgeable personalities through its adaptation to society. Numerous Christians are making contributions to society, each according to his or her own place, and the church lends its force to the building of China's socialist and spiritual civilization.

All this goes to show that the church is adapting to China's development. Only with continuous theological reconstruction can we adapt to the development of society and win people's hearts.
Threat of Denominationalism Requires Our Vigilance

(ANS) No matter where they go, visitors to a Chinese worship service will likely be impressed by the devout attitude of believers as well as the sincerity and commitment of the preacher. Liturgical aspects of the worship experience can vary greatly, though, depending on the original tradition of the congregation, or the tradition its leaders were exposed to. "Seeking the common ground while respecting the differences" is the paradigm under which Chinese Christians of different denominational backgrounds form a uniting church. However, there are also forces that are trying to reinforce old denominational affiliations. In July's edition of Tian Feng, Sun Yude discusses a phenomenon that has caused some concerned China watchers to describe the current church situation as "pre-denominational" rather than "post-denominational".

From the day when the Gospel was first brought into China, it carried characteristics not only of foreign cultures, but also of different denominations, although few people know what denominations the missionaries of the Tang (618-907 AD) and Yuan (1271-1368 AD) dynasties belonged to. When Christianity re-entered China in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), this happened through more than 150 mission agencies linked to a dozen countries.

For Chinese people, accepting the Gospel from these foreigners also meant to accept their denominational background. While some denominations would be mutually respecting and accepting, others would be less tolerant of each other. Hence, from the very beginning Chinese Christianity was divided into numerous denominational backgrounds. In response to this, Chinese churches started the Three Self, and in 1958 unified worship from Christians of different backgrounds took place for the first time.

After the reopening of churches, the number of those saved has been growing from day to day. At the same time, the awareness of denominations among Chinese Christians has faded, in particular among those of the third generation.

Following the opening of China to the outside world, many foreign Christians have been wanting to go back to the places where they or their ancestors were active as missionaries. On the one hand, they cherish the memory of the hard work done by these missionaries, on the other hand, these visits allow them to see the fruits of their work. They also share their love of God and their financial resources in a generous way with their Chinese brothers and sisters, helping to build the Chinese church.

But there are also foreigners who do not only bring the Gospel, but also their denominational ideas. When brothers and sisters who are young in their faith are confronted with these issues, they cannot discern what to accept and what not; they follow blindly and may in some instances become the laughing stocks of their neighbours. For example, some believers follow a vegetarian diet, eat very crude flour products or drink hot water mixed with wheat seedlings because of religious reasons, causing their previously good health to deteriorate. They are part of an Adventist group in Henan that worships on Saturdays so as to "respect the Sabbath", living in the belief that any other worship practice will not bring salvation.
Others believe that only continuous crying honours Jesus' death on the cross and will bring eternal life. There are also those who, because of the influence of foreign evangelists, support the house churches. They advocate house churches with the argument that this is an apostolic tradition, as well as the trend for the Chinese church of the 21st century. They also refer to Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them." Making this biblical passage the basis of a denomination or a church split distorts the original meaning of the quote and will displease God. Going the way of the house churches would not only mean that the church will disintegrate; it would also pose problems for church administration and pastoral work.

Some "evangelists" proclaim that registered meeting points "belong to the government and are not of the spirit." Other accusations include that people there "believe in the Three Self," "womanize" and "are too secular and cannot be saved." Such attitudes disrupt ordinary church life and create divisions between believers and non-believers as well as between the church and society. Therefore, we call on all Christians to uphold biblical truths and to be vigilant against the emergence of denominations in China.

2004.7/8.3

Model Ministers: How To Make China's Evangelists More Convincing

(ANS) With busy schedules and often equipped with only basic theological training, Chinese evangelists struggle to meet the demands they face. Yet successful evangelism relies on more than time and theological training, says Yan Qing from Fujian Province in June's edition of Tian Feng. In his opinion, what many ministers lack most is an attitude of acting as a Christian model.

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Evangelists should be models for believers. As Paul says, this should be the case first and foremost in the language we use. Whether it is preaching on the pulpit or sharing things with believers and colleagues, we always rely on language to transmit our inner thoughts and feelings. Language is the voice of our heart. Besides, believers do not differentiate between the words that an evangelist speaks from the pulpit and the things he utters outside of the sanctuary. Whatever their minister says will be noticed by them.

Above all, evangelists should not use any foul language (Eph 4:29), as well as "have nothing to do with superstitious myths, mere old wives' tales." (1 Tim 4:7). With colleagues, we should be honest and avoid quarrels if we don't want to come into discredit with our listeners. When making house calls to believers, we should not make preposterous remarks or engage in sweet talk, but say things that will educate and edify believers.

There once was an evangelist colleague who was not sincere in his words. It did not take long for him to be seen through by his colleagues, and as a result, some co-workers distrusted him. Even his sermons, though delivered earnestly, fell on deaf ears.
Apart from being a model in terms of language, preachers ought to set an example with their behaviour. As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. Likewise, our actions should reflect what we preach. "You should not preach behaviour that you cannot attain yourself," one seminary teacher of homiletics once said.

So, how can an evangelist be a model for believers through his actions? Many people like to teach those around them morals, but fail to live up to these standards themselves (Romans 2:21-22). If there are pastors who smoke, there will necessarily be ordinary believers who smoke. Some evangelists take church property for their personal use, or hanker after believers' money or clothes. Evangelists must not falsely pretend to be good, neither ought they be focused on profiteering.

Preachers ought to be very clear about the fact that we do not engage in good deeds for our own reputation, but so as to encourage believers to emulate us, just like we try to follow the example of Jesus. Of course, evangelists are only human and will not be able to live like Jesus, but at least we can match our speech and actions to the image of a preacher.

Love has the ability to really move people. Accordingly, we should express our love for others not only in words, but also in deeds. One single action of loving care surpasses a piece of beautifully written theological literature. A loving heart means to recognize our neighbour's needs and treat them as our responsibility. Every preacher is familiar with the story of the good Samaritan who came to the rescue of a robbery victim on the road to Jerusalem. Before the Samaritan reached the man, two other travellers had passed him without helping him. Both of them were religious leaders who preached daily in the temple. If they had stopped to save a human life before returning to their normal space of serving, their work could have been much more effective.

What the church is lacking today are not people who are able to preach, but evangelists who can be a model among our ordinary believers.

2004.7/8.4

Chinese Impressions: Overseas Chinese Christians Visit Mainland China

(ANS) "To slowly improve understanding of the Chinese church and the TSPM as well as to gain understanding of the ongoing process of theological reconstruction" were some of the expectations with which a group of San Francisco-based Chinese church leaders came to China in spring of this year. Wang Jiarong, who acted as head of the delegation, reports in July's edition of Tian Feng.

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Following an invitation by the China Christian Council, representatives from the Chinese Christian Union of San Francisco visited Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou and Beijing in March of this year.

Accompanied by former Chinese Christian Union chairman Rev. Wang Jiarong, who was assisted by Presbyter Huang Zuoshu, the current chairman, in heading the delegation, the group comprised representatives from various local churches. The
American guests used their 13-day visit to introduce the history of Chinese churches in the U.S., their current ministry and the challenges it is facing, to their Chinese counterparts.

Below, I would like to share some of my impressions and reflections from my visit to China. Although Christianity was introduced to China as early as in the Tang dynasty, it did not grow genuine roots in the country - where it was regarded as an alien religion - up until the 20th century. Accordingly, Chinese people with their strong self-respect would not want to listen to the Good News. As a result, from the 1920s onwards a number of independent churches sprang up that emphasized the need for Chinese churches to be led by Chinese. At the same time, a national structure for Chinese churches was set up.

"Self governance", one of the Three Self principles, aims at having the Chinese church manage its own affairs in matters of pastoral work, building theology, Bible printing and distribution of spiritual literature. "Self support" means reliance on the financial contributions of Chinese Christians rather than accepting subsidies from the West. And "self propagation" refers to the fact that Chinese Christians proclaim the Gospel themselves. The Three Self principles do not interfere with our faith or command the church, they only promote independence.

In fact, the Three Self principles are grounded on biblical principles as well as church history. In the 15th chapter of Acts, we find recorded the historic decision to make adherence to Christianity independent from belonging to the Jewish community. The Christian congregations that emerged as a result of this ruling were independent from their "mother church". The 16th century-decision by English church reformers to use English for Bible reading is likewise a "Three Self Movement", and the principles of self administration, self propagation and self finance were also advocated by 19th century missionary Henry Venn as aims for his African mission.

Nowadays, the Chinese church has gotten rid of the image of belonging to a "foreign religion", which greatly aics the dissemination of Christianity. Chinese Christians today also are patriotic, which means above all that they care about the well-being of the Chinese people and participate actively in the building of their nation.

The Chinese church is no longer an area on a mission map, but China's very own church. It also embraces a theology that does not aim to eliminate, but coexist with the local culture, and thus is easier to be accepted by Chinese people.

The ongoing efforts at theological reconstruction aim at providing a theology for spreading and living out the Gospel in China's socialist society. With its decision to strengthen theological reconstruction, the church leadership emphasizes the wish to develop a genuinely Chinese theology that has grown out of the reflections of the Chinese church and will at the same time reconcile Christianity with traditional Chinese culture.

Theological reconstruction is founded on biblical truths, including the notion that God's most important attribute is love, and can certainly not alienate itself from Christ. Christian tradition as well as historical materials are cherished and appreciated as means to formulate this theology. Questions that will have to be
answered include: What is the relationship between believers and unbelievers? How to understand the Bible in an appropriate way? Is there a contradiction between love for one's country and love to the church? And so on.

"Dragonizing" Over Creatures In The Bible

(ANS) Symbol of China's greatness for some, uncanny reminder of superstition for others: The dragon divides Chinese Christians and their non-believing neighbours. Tales of discarded homemade and of marital disputes about bed quilts featuring the dragon and phoenix are not uncommon among Chinese Christians. In June's edition of Tian Feng, Geng Weizhong tackles the problem from a cultural and hermeneutical perspective.

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I remember an incident from my student days. Having bought a handcarved cup with a dragon on the handle, I one day returned to my dorm only to find that the cup had been the object of further handicraft - somebody had taken off the dragon. Another student admitted to the act, saying that the creature embodied Satan and that we should not let the dragon enter our dormitory.

In my later pastoral work, I have encountered many similar incidents, with believers treating dragons on everyday objects as a source of bad luck. "No wonder you have fallen ill," I once witnessed one person saying to another believer, "if you sleep with a hot water bottle with a dragon on it." Some Christians go even further in their argumentation, saying that as a culture deeply enamoured with the dragon, the Chinese venerate Satan, and that this is the source of China's backwardness, as such behaviour would invite God's punishment.

This line of argumentation is based on a problematic understanding of the Bible, incorrectly equalling the dragon in Revelation with the dragon in traditional Chinese culture. The dragon is a thoroughly auspicious symbol in China. Juxtaposing "the dragon versus the cross" is not in line with the Christian Gospel of harmony, nor with the Chinese "dragon" culture of mutual coexistence.

From a translator's perspective, it can be noted that the Greek word that is rendered as "dragon" in the Chinese Union Version can be found only in one book of the New Testament, Revelation. The Old Testament "dragon", on the other hand, makes several appearances, and in a number of Chinese forms: as a big fish, a crocodile, and a snake. It is important to know that to the peoples of the ancient Middle East, the sea was a representative of evil forces, and the snake was considered the most evil of all reptiles, often being seen as a "holy" animal that symbolized the devil. And the book of Revelation draws on these ideas, using the Greek word "dragon" in a usage corresponding with the old Hebrew tradition.

The modern Chinese version renders the apocalyptic dragon as "dragon of sin" or "perverse dragon" (li long). This translation has the advantage of explaining the evil character of the animal, but the appearance of the word "dragon" will always be the cause of misunderstandings in a "dragon culture" such as the Chinese.
Occidental researchers have pointed out the close association between the dragon and the snake in western cultures. Moreover, modern Bible translations emphasize the principle of finding the "dynamic equivalent" to what is meant in the original, rather than translating the literal meaning. Accordingly, the most appropriate translation for the New Testament "dragon" might be "serpent" or "snake creature".

This translation would have the advantage of alluding directly to the Old Testament snake in Genesis (Genesis 3:15), the story of which can be read as a prediction of the story of the "dragon" and the woman in Revelation (Revelation chapter 12). Such an interpretation would also come close to John's original meaning in Revelation. Besides, rendering the "dragon" as "snake creature" would also have the advantage of sparing Chinese believers the confusion over "the Biblical dragon" versus the dragon in traditional Chinese culture, with its apparent incompatibility between traditional Chinese culture and Christianity. Finally, although it does not exactly correspond with the notion of a dragon, the "snake creature" translation matches Chinese ideas of the snake as an animal representing sinister and treacherous behaviour.

Until today, the Chinese Union Bible dating from 1919 enjoys a dominant position both in China and among overseas Chinese churches. In that sense, eradicating the misunderstandings stemming from the translation of the "dragon" will continue to exist for a while, but it is important to be clear about the terminological problems.

Looking at the "dragon" in Revelation from a hermeneutical perspective, it is much more difficult for us today to understand than it was for contemporary Jewish readers, who were familiar with the symbols and allusions used. The "dragon" in Revelation does not only go back to a specific faith and cultural background, but is also the product of a "revelatory" tradition within Jewish literature.

For Christian readers from a Jewish background, the connection between the dragon in Revelation and the snake, the crocodile and the big fish in other Biblical passages would have been natural and immediate, as well as associating these animals with the origin of sin.

To its contemporary readers, Revelation conveyed an important message: Through several symbols and plots, it reinforced faith in the true and trinitarian God who remains victorious over the evil forces as represented by the "snake creature".

Whether we look at it from a translator's perspective or from a hermeneutical angle, both the theological meaning and the cultural implications of the "dragon" (snake creature) in Revelation are different from those in traditional Chinese culture. To treat the "dragon" (snake creature) in Revelation as identical to the Chinese dragon neglects both the Biblical meaning and the image of the dragon in traditional Chinese culture. As a result, conflict between Christian faith and Chinese culture emerge causing problems between Christians and non-Christians. All of this highlights the need for an appropriate understanding of the Bible, and linked to this, the importance of strengthening theological reconstruction in China.
If Only I Could Sing...

(ANS) Ministry to believers with special needs is still a rarity in China. In June's edition of Tian Feng, Zhuang Guomin recounts the story of how the deaf ministry in his church in Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, developed.

“If I could purely sing a song, 'twould be of thanks and praise to You;  
In all my trials You comfort me, and in my wavering You give wisdom.  
Although I cannot wholly sing, I desire to present before You  
My ardent honor and worship;  
Every time Your hand draws me, You tenderly open up my heart.  
Oh sparrows in the sky and all singers everywhere, won't you sing for me  
The praises of the incomparable beauty of the Lord?  
My own ears will hear, my heart will ring.  
In my inmost being, this will be the most exquisite sound—  
Oh Lord! I love You!”

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This moving and inspiring piece of music was written by a sister named Huang Meilian. Since she was a child, Huang Meilian has suffered from cerebral palsy, which hinders her speech. Her hands and feet are far from nimble, and yet she clearly possesses a great love from God. From her inmost being there emanates sincere praise and thanksgiving to her Creator. The above song was passionately presented by Zhangzhou Dongbanhou Church's Deaf Choir at the 2003 Christmas Eve worship service. Everyone present was moved to tears.

In fact, this story began long before that Christmas Eve. At every Sunday service in Dongban Church there was a group of young people sitting quietly in the sanctuary. The good news preached from the pulpit could not be heard by them, because they were deaf and mute.

Zhang Jiezong, an administrator for the church, looked on them and saw them as baby birds waiting to be fed, like sheep still waiting for a shepherd. He felt anxious about it and prayed to God: “Lord, You are the source of wisdom - please give me wisdom; how can I help these young men?” God's answer came to him through the Gospel of Luke: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19) Zhang was also inspired by Proverbs: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; oppose any that go to law against them” (Proverbs 31:8), and then Isaiah: “Then the lame will leap like deer, and the dumb shout aloud; for water will spring up in the wilderness and torrents flow in the desert.” (Isaiah 35:6)

Zhang Jiezong saw these passages as enlightening guidance from God, and resolved himself to study sign language. But for a 50 year-old man, learning to communicate in sign language is no easy task. It is like one who has been a calligrapher and is suddenly asked to take up a scalpel and perform surgery. But just at the time when he was getting discouraged, once again God's word guided him. Jesus said, “For men this is impossible; but everything is possible for God.” (Matthew
19:26) That set his mind at ease again, and he could start really focusing on learning from the deaf brothers, assured of his calling. From one word, one sentence, he started his language study, and then it wasn’t long before he was able to use simple terms to communicate about God’s Word.

In his exchanges with the deaf group he discovered their faith was simple and they were fainthearted, needing more assurance of God’s love. Brother Jiezhong silently set for himself three goals:

First, to help these deaf believers see more clearly what is true faith, to raise their self-assurance, and to face the trials of human life trusting in God. Nowadays, some criminal elements abuse disadvantaged members of society for their own goals, forming financial rackets, and these deaf believers should be able to withstand such temptations.

The second goal was to lead these deaf believers to love each other, help one another and clearly manifest God’s love. For the sake of this goal, Brother Jiezhong made special efforts. Late one night one deaf brother informed Zhang Jiezhong that his wife, who was suffering from chronic pneumonia, was on the verge of death and urgently needed to go to the hospital. But this brother had no money and didn’t know what to do. Receiving this plea for help, Brother Jiezhong did not stop even to talk with his family, but threw on his jacket and sped straightaway to the sick woman’s house and ensured that her delivery to hospital was taken care of. He also organized for the deaf group to gather at the hospital to visit and express concern for the woman, and to pray for her until the danger passed. As for the couple themselves, they were both elated and tearfully grateful.

And then there was the time when a deaf brother suffered an injury on the job. His hand was cut by a machine. Hearing news of this, and knowing that the man’s hometown was far away, Brother Jiezhong hurried to help the man to his residence, treat the wound, prepare medicinal herbs and then stayed and cared for him so that he would heal as quickly as possible and get back to his job. The deaf man was grateful beyond measure and his courage and confidence were bolstered by Zhang Jiezhong’s caring attention.

Third on his list of goals was to guide these deaf brothers to serve God and the church. With the help and support of the pastor and the church, they set up Dongbanhou Church’s Tianjin Meeting Point for the Deaf. The deaf community then began to meet there every week and worship God together. In their meetings, they wanted to sincerely offer praise to God in song. Thereupon, they worked together to overcome their own assorted difficulties in order to fully internalize the words of hymns and use them to offer praise, using dramatic expression and sign language. The Lord blessed them and they succeeded, and in the 2003 Dongbanhou Church Christmas praise and worship service, before the Lord’s throne of mercy and in front of over 2000 brothers and sisters who had assembled, the song “If I Could Sing” was presented by one female soloist, the deaf choir ‘singing’ in sign behind her. It was followed by thunderous applause and many tears throughout the multitude. “My own ears will hear, my heart will ring. In my inmost being, this will be the most exquisite sound—Oh Lord! I love You!”
Nowadays, Tianjin [literally: heavenly sound] Meeting Point for the Deaf holds several meetings every week. Tianjin’s members also have their own chatroom on the Internet. Their lives are changing; they are progressing in their faith and proclaiming the Gospel in their unique way.

2004.7/8.7

Bumper Crops Aid Spiritual Harvest: Banli Church in Lancang, Yunnan

(ANS) Banli Church is part of Donghui Township in Lancang, a county under governance of the Lahu ethnic minority in China’s southwestern province of Yunnan. In June’s edition of Tian Feng, Du Zhongchu from Yunnan offers a glimpse into the life and recent development of this village congregation.

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Banli is a natural village with a predominantly Lahu population; 1,300 villagers are Christians. Thanks to the religious and minority policies of the authorities, religious believers of different ethnic backgrounds enjoy harmonious relationships among themselves and with outsiders.

Under the guidance of pastoral workers, Christians in Lancang have started to embrace more scientific ways of growing their crops. Over the past years, villagers have expanded the range of crops they grow, and some have even leased additional land for cultivation. Crops have been abundant and agricultural incomes have increased over the past years. The annual per capita income, which had been 373 Yuan RMB [US$46 approx.] in 1992, climbed to 944 Yuan in 2003. Video projection equipment and a typewriter purchased by the church helped to enrich the cultural life of Christians in the village. When a big earthquake hit this part of Yunnan on November 6, 1988, believers adopted a spirit of self-help and worked hard to rebuild their homes and the local church. Donating building materials and labour, they enabled local children to resume school very quickly.

To aid its efforts at self-support, the local church has also undertaken to cultivate 60 mu of land [1 mu = 0.06 ha], which are mostly used to grow maize and sugarcane. The money made through these crops is spent partly on worship activities, and partly on support for poorer families in the village, who receive grain and seeds. The grain given in support of the poor is intended as a loan that has to be returned after the harvest, but under special circumstances this requirement can be waived by the church committee.

The smooth development of Banli Church is, above all, due to the concern and support from the relevant authorities. As a result, the church has built up a wholesome management structure that ensures that events are managed properly by a responsible person. A second important factor is the emphasis put on education for pastoral workers. Every year, two to three training courses for pastoral workers and for women volunteers are arranged. The courses have not only helped to raise love for the church and the country, legal awareness, and standards of self-management among church workers, but have also improved their knowledge of church doctrine, church regulations and policies.
For many years now, Christian believers in Banli have maintained a good social record, refraining from fighting, theft, drug-abuse and drug sale, gambling, and other criminal activities. None of the local believers have exceeded their birth limit according to the family planning policy, and in 2003, all agricultural taxes were paid completely, which received much praise from local authorities. In their way, believers in Banli village are contributing to the government-declared aim of a moderately well-off society.

2004.7/8.8

NEWSBRIEFS

Remembering The Past. China's Northeastern Theological Seminary in Shenyang, Heilongjiang Province organized a discussion meeting about Remembering The Past As A Lesson For The Future for its teaching staff from February 23 to 27 of this year. Published in November of 2003, Luo Guanzong's book examines China's missionary history from a Chinese perspective.

Reflecting on personal experiences, seminary principal Lü Zhibin told the audience how imperialism had used religion to invade China, and re-iterated the development of the Three Self Movement.

Starting this semester, the Northeastern Theological Seminary has included the study of Luo's book in its curriculum so as to provide students with a better understanding of China's church history.

Church leaders in Jiangxi also studied the book during a recent meeting of the Provincial CC/TSPM standing committee. Under the encouragement of the provincial church leadership, churches all over the province are now following suit.

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Theological Education. The Provincial CC/TSPM Committee of Yunnan Province held its first course of continuing education for former theological graduates from March 15 to April 30 of this year. Since the reopening of churches, 258 persons originating from churches in Yunnan graduated from seminaries and bible schools all over China. Following the deepening of China's reforms and the move to further develop China's west, demands on those working within the church have risen.

The training programme was aimed at raising the general level of education of Yunnan's theological graduates. Among the teachers for the 38 students, all of whom had at least one year of working experience within the church, were Rev. Cao Shengjie, head of the National CCC, and Wang Aiming, Vice president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Topics covered in the classes were church administration, systematic theology, theological reconstruction, religious laws and more.

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AIDS Prevention. The Provincial CC/TSPM Committee of Yunnan Province held a three-day AIDS prevention course from March 19-21 of this year. Attended by 30 lay workers, the programme covered basic knowledge about the virus and transmission routes, and participants were encouraged to play an active role in AIDS prevention and care.

Further AIDS awareness training sessions were held in three other Yunnan locations in cooperation with the Amity Foundation.

In Henan Province, the local CC/TSPM Committee of Shangqiu City started a number of initiatives aimed at curbing the progress of the disease. Training, a prevention centre with an outreach car, and a hotline are among the measures taken by the city's church leadership to contribute to local AIDS/HIV prevention and care.
Places mentioned in this issue of ANS

1) Shanghai
2) Nanjing (Jiangsu)
3) Guangzhou (Guangdong)
4) Beijing
5) Zhangzhou (Fujian)
6) Shangqiu (Henan)
7) Lancang (Yunnan)