Dear Reader,

Social harmony continues to be a hot topic in the People's Republic these days, and the church is no exception. "What role can the church play in building a harmonious society?", participants at a Shanghai conference organized by the city's Christian Council asked recently. Not only were the questions addressed, but also the setting, with members from the academe co-organizing the meeting. (p3)

As church representatives at a second meeting noted, if the church is to engage actively in building a harmonious society, this requires building a harmonious church first. Tensions within the church affect a variety of relationships, such as groups of various denominational backgrounds, among church workers, and between Christian believers and non-believers.(p1)

Discover more for yourself!

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

2005.9/10.1

Reconstructing Theology, Building A Harmonious Society

(ANS) Organized by Jiangsu Provincial Christian Council, the seventh provincial meeting on theological reconstruction took place in July of this year. More than 100 participants joined the two-day meeting which focused on the question of how the church can contribute to building a harmonious society. Rev. Zhang Keyun, President of Jiangsu Provincial Christian Council, Rev. An Xinyi, Chairman of the Provincial TSPM, and Rev. Zhao Zhi'en, Honorary President of Jiangsu Provincial Christian Council, jointly presided over the meeting. Xiao Wang reports in August's edition of Tian Feng.

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Representing the National China Christian Council, Rev. Mei Kangjun shared some recent developments in theological reconstruction with the audience. Three books had already been published, and related contents were slowly becoming integrated into sermons and the lives of individual believers, Mei reported. Jiangsu Provincial Christian Council had collected valuable and good experiences in theological recon-
struction, and particular efforts had been made in the area of theological research. All of this made local efforts at theological reconstruction very convincing, Mei said. He reminded his listeners that theological reconstruction was the church's response to its social environment, as the church in its three forms - communion of believers, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit - was also part of society.

Exploring the relationship between social harmony and the church from a variety of angles, 142 articles were collected during the seminar and 12 co-workers made presentations on topics such as "Proclaiming the Gospel of Peace, building a harmonious society", "God is Love: A look at theories of harmony" and "What role can the church play in building a harmonious socialist society?".

Life in a transforming society subjected people to numerous pressures and psychological difficulties, which sometimes can contribute to a lack of social harmony participants at the meeting noted. Christians could play an important role in this kind of setting, accepting and comforting people, relieving them of distress and sin. Bringing Christian faith into life could definitely bring about peace and harmony, in fact, being at peace with oneself and others was a natural by-product of Christian faith if Christian made it a part of their life in society.

Galatians 5:22-23 reminded Christians of some core virtues that are preconditions of social harmony: "But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control." These values could find their expression in various ways, such as abiding by the law, love for one's profession, sincerity towards other people, caring about others, and performing social services.

Some conference participants pointed out that building a harmonious society also had an intra-church dimension. Problems within the structure, management and personnel problems all were factors that created disharmony within the church. Congregations that came from a denominational background often also suffered from ruptures in the areas of theology, overall management, use of financial resources, and from strains with the CCC/TSPM bodies. In some cases, disharmony within the church had even affected overall social stability. How to lead brothers and sisters onto a way of living God's kingdom on earth was a practical theological task to be solved. If the church was to contribute to building a harmonious society, this required, above all, building a harmonious church first.

To achieve harmony within the church was a multi-faceted task that included harmonizing a variety of relationships such as between groups of various denominational backgrounds; among church workers; between evangelists and ordinary believers as well as between believers and non-believers; among believers as a group and so on. Contributing to peace within the church in this sense meant building a harmonious society.

Chinese society has presented the church with the task of contributing to social harmony, and the Biblical response to this task was to proclaim the loving God, the Gospel of Peace, and to love one another. At the same time, linking words and deeds in this task was important to make the church's message of love convincing, as Christian love found its expression in serving others.
The Love of God in China: Can One be Both Chinese and Christian?

by John S. Peale

(Published by iUniverse, USA, 2005, 271 pages; available in paperback)

This well-researched and thorough work presents Chinese Christianity in a way that will lead Christians and others to better understand their faith and China. The Love of God in China examines various aspects related to Christianity in this socialist country, including the status of Chinese Christian churches; the policy of Chinese government for state control of religion; the attitudes of Chinese people towards Christianity; theological perspectives in China; the Chinese perception of religious principles; and successful efforts to cultivate Chinese Christianity.

Author John Peale objectively presents the competing and conflicting positions of the diverse Chinese Christian groups. As he identifies the challenges faced by Christian individuals and churches in China, he not only suggests resolutions, but also proposes what Western Christians could learn from their Chinese family in the faith. Peale explores the ways Christianity can be submerged into Chinese culture.

John Peale’s passion for China goes back twenty years and that for Christianity all his life. He is a Professor of Philosophy and a Christian minister, the son of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. John Peale has immersed himself in research work in Chinese studies, in Christianity and in native Chinese religions.

What Role Can The Church Play In Building A Harmonious Society?

_ANS_ New questions, new forms of discussion: On July 15 of this year, representatives from a variety of spheres came together in Shanghai to discuss "Building a Harmonious Society and the Chinese Protestant Church". Organized by the Shanghai Municipal Christian Council, the meeting brought together church representatives and members of the academe from Fudan University, Shanghai University, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the Shanghai Academy of Religions. Chen Zhimin reports from Shanghai in August's edition of _Tian Feng_.

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The meeting was jointly presided by Rev. Hua Yaozeng, president of the local Christian Council, Presbyter Fu Xianwei from the city's TSPM, Wu Mengqing, the president of the city's Academy of Religions, and professor Xu Yihua from Fudan University.

Wu Mengqing, a veteran of theory on religion, presented a paper titled "Religion and Building a Harmonious Society". Religions were important social and cultural resources, and these resources could be used in building a harmonious society, he emphasized. Ways in which religions could contribute were economic development, preserving social stability, and fostering culture through a spiritual civilization. For Christianity, theological reconstruction with its efforts to adapt religion to contemporary socialist society was at the heart of building a harmonious society.
Speaking from the perspective of the Three Self Movement, Liu Jian and Zhang Hua emphasized that after having shaken off the influence of foreign missionary societies, Chinese Protestantism had become a positive force in society. The ongoing efforts to involve the church in building a harmonious society brought theology closer to society and also marked a deepening of the Three Self Movement.

Based on her studies of Christians in Shanghai, Luo Weihong from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences divided the development of the relationship between local Christians and Chinese society into several phases. According to her, the situation had progressed from a relationship of disharmony to one of relative harmony. With increased socio-political spaces, Christianity was now in a position to make a contribution to building a harmonious society.

Xu Yihua added yet another perspective to the discussion, looking at the problem of building a harmonious society from the angle of international relations. He reminded the audience that the development of religions in the international sphere had a direct bearing on the development of religions in China and vice versa.

Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the China Christian Council, underlined the importance of inter-religious dialogue for the building of a harmonious society. As a religion of peace, Christianity could play a positive role in creating social harmony. Of course, Christians hoped that ever more people would commit themselves to Christ, but this did not mean to reject believers of others faiths. Christians had to encounter those of other beliefs with a loving heart. Promoting religious dialogue in this kind of spirit was an active contribution to a harmonious society, Cao said.

Social harmony referred to a variety of relationships, Rev. Xu Xiaohong underlined in his presentation, such as harmony between man and nature, among people, and between individuals and society. As a stabilizing force in society, Christianity had to encourage believers to perform a harmonizing function in their work sphere.

In his presentation, Presbyter Fu Xianwei emphasized the positive role Christian religion could play in building a harmonious socialist society. In Shanghai, churches had already opened a home for the elderly, and a rehabilitation centre for autistic children was being planned. Such activities were contributions to peace and social stability, Bo said.

The meeting was greeted with positive reactions from Shanghai's Commission for Ethnic and Religious Affairs. Cao Binfu, Director of the Commission, praised the church for having responded to the government's call for building a harmonious society and expressed his confidence that this move would also benefit the church in its internal growth and development.

2005.9/10.3

Raising The Standards Of Theological Education: Yes, But How?

(ANS) On August 2, 2005, more than 50 representatives from Bible Schools and seminaries came together in Nanjing to discuss the future of China's Protestant theological education. Raising the standards of theological education has long been on the agenda of the church, but is bound to be a long-term process. Wang Rorgwei reports in September's edition of Tian Feng.

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Reporting for Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Wang Peng explained at the conference that China's flagship seminary had further explored the area of theological education after theological reconstruction was made part of the syllabus. Wang, the Dean of Studies at the seminary, said that after a process of evaluation (conducted at the institution a few years ago), education at the seminary had become better regulated and had acquired higher scholarly standards. In efforts aimed at incorporating theological reconstruction into the syllabus, the seminary had included sessions on how to view the Bible, Wang reported.

First-year undergraduates now had to take a class on "The Three-Self and theological reconstruction", enabling them to appreciate the concept of the Three Self from a historical, Biblical and theological perspective, the Dean of Studies continued. In terms of Biblical research, systematic theology, church history, history of Christian thought, Christian ethics, practical theology and other basic classes, there was a process of consolidation going on, Wang said. Instead of courses that are less relevant, scholarly topics such as philosophy of religion, psychology of religion, sociology of religion and so on had been included. Practical theology would be broadened in scope, to include topics such as pastoral counselling and church management. On the whole, there was an effort towards having a better balance between spirituality and rationality, Bible interpretation and theology, historical and contextual theological approaches.

Other seminaries also reported an increased interest in practical theology, a move that is intended to further integrate the church, society and people. Wuhan-based Zhongnan Seminary approaches practical theology from a variety of angles, such as its theological, humanist, and scholarly sides, its contemporary nature and moral implications. Speaking for the seminary, Rev. Zhu Zhenen and Rev. Xiao Anping said that China's theological education has entered a new stage, and in order to adapt to the development of the church in the 21st century, the seminary had conducted several seminars on theological reconstruction in order to foster students' interest in theological reflection. This had greatly contributed to the students' overall growth and had helped them to better appreciate courses like systematic theology and the history of Christian thought. The seminary had also organized guest lectures by eminent scholars in order to raise the overall scholarly nature of the school. On top of the changes made to the curriculum, extracurricular activities had been offered to enhance the students' social awareness and patriotism, such as general knowledge contests, involvement in social services, and outings to sites of historical and cultural significance.

Participants at the Nanjing conference emphasized the need to better balance spiritual formation, church service, theological reflection and moral formation in theological education. Chen Yilu, Principal of Guangdong Union Theological Seminary, elaborated on his understanding of "great" and "dedicated". The Chinese church not only needed big buildings, but above all a spirit of great love, powerful brains, master teachers, and high ideals. Great teachers were characterized not only by in-depth factual knowledge, but also a deep sense of service. To instil such a serving attitude in the students was of primary importance, Chen said, listing patriotism and tolerance as two other characteristics to be fostered in students.
Turning to the topic of dedication, Chen emphasized the need for both professionalism and whole-hearted devotion to one's tasks.

Rev. An Xinyi from Jiangsu Bible School underlined the School's commitment to theological reconstruction and the role theological teachers could play in it.

Several participants at the conference highlighted the importance of theological education for the future of the Chinese church. The meeting was also attended by Vice Director Li Ge from the State Administration of Religious Affairs' Department of Education. In his speech, he illustrated the transformation process that Bible schools and seminaries were currently undergoing. They had already shifted from an emphasis on quantity to an emphasis on quality, he said, adding that education had to find the balance between making use of the function of the teacher and placing students in a position where they were subjects, not objects of instruction. Seminaries and Bible schools had to emphasize the following qualities in teachers: religious knowledge, humanist character, and personal qualities. Li encouraged schools to discuss and reflect on their pedagogy.

2005.9/10.4

Revisiting Revivals: Do's And Don'ts

(ANS) Revival meetings are popular in churches all over China, a writer using the pen name of En Hui from Zhejiang Province reports in September's issue of Tian Feng. However, he sees a number of worrying trends in connection with the revival practices that he encounters.

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Revival meetings are intended as means of spiritual growth; they usually extend over three to four days and often involve guest preachers. Because of this "celebrity factor", it is not uncommon to have more people attend than for an ordinary worship service. Especially for rural churches, organizing such a revival meeting requires a significant amount of resources, both in terms of manpower and finances. However, in relatively wealthy areas such as Zhejiang, it has become customary for most churches to run at least one big revival gathering per year. Revival meetings undoubtedly foster spiritual growth and believers' understanding of the basic faith, as the author himself had the opportunity to experience. Yet it has also to be noted that some worrying trends are emerging in this context.

First of all, spiritual growth meetings carry the danger of "spoiling" believers for the normal activities their church has to offer. Like a child that is unwilling to eat his mother's cooking after having tasted Kentucky Fried Chicken, many church members are enthusiastic when it comes to revivals, but fail to appear on Sundays. Some even complain about their local evangelists. The more these people attend revival meetings, the less they will respect their local preachers.

While it is true that preaching skills vary, much also depends on the attitude of the listeners, and their expectant attitude may be one reason why visiting preachers fare so much better with any local church than its resident evangelists. Likewise, the feeling of participating in something special also adds to the crowd's receptiveness. God, on the other hand, will be with any group that gathers in his name, and not only
once it exceeds three thousand participants. God will also work in any church and not only when a visiting evangelist from outside is present. It is up to us to be ready to listen.

From the church's side, revivals are intended to complement, not replace, its regular pastoral work. A church that neglects its ordinary work in favour of revivals will not grow in any sustainable way and will be warped in its community life.

In some of the better-off areas, organizing revival meetings has become genuinely competitive, with congregations trying to beat each other in the "guest game": "If you invite somebody from out of town, we'll invite a preacher from a different province." "If you manage to bring an evangelist from another province in, we'll have an overseas preacher." It seems that indeed the prophet does not count much at home, although he usually will be much more familiar with his congregation than any guest preacher.

Revivals should help believers grow in their faith in the right way. However, now there are many evangelists who have a "market-oriented" attitude in their preaching; they serve what the audience wishes to hear. Because of cultural and spiritual factors or practical needs, some believers strive for very "visible" blessings, healing, speaking in tongues, or symbolism in dreams and other similar phenomena. Some evangelists disregard a balanced approach to orthodox faith in favour of these topics. In Zhejiang, healing meetings have become particularly popular. While God's healing powers are indisputable, healing meetings cannot be considered a Biblical tradition. Jesus Christ did heal many people, but he did not organize huge gatherings to perform these healings.

Finally, revivals should not be organized for financial purposes. These days, as many congregations are in the process of building churches, evangelists and pastors are very much concerned with their churches' incomes. While this stands to reason, the success of church-related activities should certainly not be measured by monetary standards alone. This author once overheard the following comment from a church worker during a revival meeting: "This revival has failed, over the past two days our income from the donation box has not reached our expenses! We are going to be broke!" Is this kind of attitude not also a form of mammonism?

2005.9/10.5

Changchun Christians Support School-Dropouts

(ANS) Social involvement beyond the confines of the congregation is becoming increasingly common among Chinese Christians, ranging from very low-key one-off initiatives to more sophisticated social programmes. In August's edition of Tian Feng, Sun Changzheng reports how one church in Changchun reached out to those less well off.

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In May of this year, churches in Changchun's Shuangyang District conducted a special collection for young school-dropouts and families with financial difficulties. 5,217 yuan [US$652 approx.] were collected on the occasion. On May 27, our group of church representatives drove to Chaoyang Primary School, an institution located in Shuangyang's Shanhe Township. We were greeted by the village accounting secretary, the school principal and some of the teachers.

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A look at the school revealed that while the surroundings were very beautiful, earning the school the nickname of "Garden School", the equipment was insufficient and old.

The village accounting secretary introduced the local situation to us, explaining that in comparison with other townships, villagers here had no township industries or natural resources to rely on, and barely made a living planting maize. As a result, some local students had difficulties raising the money necessary to attend school.

The school principal then took time to give a brief introduction of the school situation. Serving students from grades one to six, the school had 110 pupils altogether. Among those with financial difficulties were students living with their grandparents and those whose parents had divorced or lost their working abilities.

After encouraging the students to study hard, we gave 3,500 yuan to the school, with the bulk of this sum intended for equipment and 500 yuan meant as support for the very poor among the students. Deeply moved, the pupils vowed to study hard to repay society for the help received.

Our next stop was Middle School No.152 in Changchun, where we visited a 16-year-old named Ai Yingxu. The boy had been suffering already for three years from leukaemia, causing his family to sell all their assets as their resources were limited. After introducing ourselves, we presented the boy with 400 yuan in support of his family, expressing our best wishes that he may study hard and overcome his ailment. The boy, who had not been alerted about our visit, was overwhelmed.

Following Middle School No.152, we visited a school for ethnic Korean students in Changchun that enrolls both primary and secondary students. Seeing the equipment of the school, we were reminded of the favourable national policies towards ethnic minorities. As the school principal explained, the overall situation of the school was good, although it lacked students, and some of the pupils of rural origins were not well off. He then introduced a number of students to us, among them a six-year-old boy named Zhu Shengjie. According to the principal, the boy's Han Chinese mother had left the family a few years ago. Now, his handicapped Korean father, the boy and his grandparents were struggling to make ends meet. After hearing this story, we gave 500 yuan to the principal to be distributed among the students with financial difficulties.

Reaching out to poor students in this way, we realize that the mission of Christians does not stop at evangelism, but also includes caring for the weak groups in society. Only if we reach out to our neighbours in a spirit of Christian love and service, will those around us come to understand the Christian faith, and will our society become warm and harmonious.

2005.9/10.6

**Double Happiness - Religious Publishers Turn Ten**

(ANS) The area that shows perhaps most clearly the extent of religious freedom in China today are publications. While Bibles may only be sold on church premises, bookshops generally carry a wide variety of religious literature, from Buddhist classics to translations of leading Western theologians.
Two religious publishers that have significantly contributed to the discussion of religion in China are the magazine Zhongguo Zongjiao (Religion in China) and Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe (Religion and Culture Publishing House). Wang Rongwei reports in September's edition of Tian Feng.

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Two leading religious publishers, the magazine Zhongguo Zongjiao (Religion in China) and Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe (Religion and Culture Publishing House) celebrated their tenth anniversaries with a joint conference in Beijing in July 2005. Both work units are affiliated with the State Administration of Religious Affairs. As specialized publishers concerned with religious culture in China, they record contemporary religious affairs, disseminate outstanding religious culture, and contribute towards inter-religious understanding and a harmonious society.

Chen Hongxin, director of the two "birthday bodies", presided over the celebratory meeting, which was also attended by Ye Xiaowen, head of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, and numerous representatives from the academe and religious world.

On behalf of Protestant Christianity, Deng Fucun expressed congratulations. Ten years ago, the two publishers had been set up in order to help fully implement the policy of religious freedom, Deng reminded the audience, and had since served as a bridge between China's religions and society. They had made significant contributions in communicating religious culture to the public, and were at the forefront of Chinese religious media.

The meeting concluded with a discussion meeting on the role of religions in a harmonious society, which was attended by members of the government, religious representatives and scholars.

NEWSBRIEFS

Bible CD-ROM. In April 2005, the CCC/TSPM released a copy of a Chinese-English version of the Bible on CD-ROM. This is the first time that such a Bible CD-ROM has been produced locally within China. 5,000 copies of the CD-ROM have been made for distribution, and work is already progressing on a second version of the software which will include more Bible study tools and reference books.

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Anniversary. In May of this year, Zhongnan Seminary celebrated its twentieth anniversary with an elaborate event in Wuhan. Representatives from all over central and southern China (the provinces to which the seminary caters) as well as Presbyter Ji Jianhong, Chairman of the National TSPM, attended the event. In his commemorative speech, seminary principal Zhu Zhenren reminded the audience of the seminary's guiding principles in education. Since the institution's opening in 1985, 607 students have graduated, with most of the graduates now playing an important role in churches all over central and southern China.

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Peace prayers. Churches all over China commemorated the end of the Sino-Japanese War and the victory over fascism with a variety of events. Sixty years after the Japanese defeat, Chinese Christians gathered for prayer meetings, discussion groups and commemorative services.
Places Mentioned In This Issue of ANS

1) Shanghai
3) Wuhan (Hubei)
5) Beijing

2) Nanjing (Jiangsu)
4) Changchun (Jilin)