The Bible in China

Almost 40 percent of the population in Yunnan province in the south-western corner of China consists of ethnic minorities. Seven of China's 55 officially recognised minority nationalities have the entire Bible or some parts of it printed in their language. Special focus on the Bible, its distribution and translation, pp. 6-11

Chinese Bible Ministry Exhibition Rates as one of the Greatest Christian Events for 2006

Christian Post, an interdenominational Christian news provider in the US, has listed the Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Chinese Protestant Church as one of the top five "first-ever" mission events of the year 2006. The other listed events included a global research project by Mission Aviation Fellowship and the growth of Pentecostalism. In China, the Bible Ministry Exhibition received high appraisal from the participants of the annual CCC/TSPM Standing Committee Meeting in 2nd - 4th December in Shanghai. The exhibition, which introduced the history of the Chinese Bible and the present-day Bible printing and distribution through artefacts and multi-media presentations, offered a historical occasion for those outside of Chinese borders to see glimpses of real Chinese Christianity. The exhibition toured the US from May to June. For more extensive news coverage on the Bible Ministry Exhibition see the CCC/TSPM website: http://www.chinesechristianchurch.org.cn/en/news.html
Dear Reader,

With this renewed ANS, we extend our warm Easter greetings from the Amity Foundation Hong Kong Office!

Christians in China reach out. The Bible Ministry Exhibition, recognised as one of the major missionary events in 2006 by Christian Post, will travel outside the Chinese borders again, this time the exhibition will be on display in Cologne, Germany (Kirchentag on 6th - 10th June, 2007). Chinese theologians build exchange with their Hong Kong counterparts (p. 4 & 17). Christian Councils reach out to believers of other religions through interfaith dialogue (p. 16). It seems that the religious ground is fertile for growth: a recent survey indicated a notable increase of believers in China (p. 5).

The main theme of this issue revolves around the Bible and its modern applications. The Word of God lies at the core of Chinese Christianity: good pastors quote the Bible in their sermons and know how to explain its message. Apart from Christians, people who face problems in modern society look for answers to their questions in the Bible. While the Chinese Church searches for ways of presenting the thousand-year-old message in new formats (p. 6), the academics turn to biblical truths in order to explain ecological imbalance (p. 20). Ultimately, Christians are encouraged to apply their faith to practice in new ways, so as to follow Jesus' example: the Son of Man came to serve, not to be served (p. 18).

The news reports above highlight extraordinary, "first ever" events, but the majority of Chinese Christians lead their daily lives in simple trust in God. They go to church to have fellowship, to pray and sometimes even to learn to read. They are blessed if they have a pastor and even more so if the pastor has a God-given gift of caring for his/her congregation, like pastor Ma from Huangshan (p. 3). At the grassroots level churches, a seemingly insignificant problem may evolve into an issue which risks splitting the entire congregation (p. 22).

When this ANS reaches you, churches worldwide will be celebrating Easter. Many Chinese Christians will also be celebrating the baptism of their friends and family members since Christmas and Easter are the most common times for baptismal services in China. We may all join in prayer for those who have decided to take this step of faith.

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

Elisa Nousiainen
Dedicated to Christ

Two women stand in front of a large Chinese calligraphy in a photograph of the Chinese Bible Ministry Exhibition Catalogue. The forehead of the gray-hair woman hardly reaches the shoulder of the younger one. The caption of the photography reads that this elderly woman hid her Bible in a grain vessel during the Cultural Revolution; the younger woman is her daughter, Pastor Ma Jianhua. The photograph dates back to 2004; in March 2007, the ANS editorial team met Pastor Ma in Hong Kong during her five-month study course on theology. She shared with ANS glimpses of her life as a Christian and a pastor.

Pastor Ma Jianhua is a minister of the Huangshan Christian Church in the City of Huangshan (Anhui), which is famous for its majestic mountains often depicted in Chinese traditional “shan-shui” (literally ‘mountain-water’) paintings. She was born in the neighbouring province of Zhejiang, but the entire family moved to Anhui for her parents’ work. Her parents were both doctors so it was not surprising that she had a calling to pursue a medical vocation. She became a nurse and worked in the local hospital for a good many years. Yet in March 2007, she reveals that she has had almost 20 years of experience as a pastor of a city congregation. Why would a young woman leave the vocation of a nurse which is stable and meaningful, and decide to become a pastor which would entail facing a more uncertain future?

“It was because of my mother who was a truly devout Christian”, responds Pastor Ma. “During the Cultural Revolution, my mother treasured the Bible to such a great extent that she was willing to risk her life for it. She hid her copy of the Bible in a rice container and managed to keep it intact during the difficult times. Like many other Christian families, we used to have regular family devotions in our home when churches were closed. You could not organise any big gatherings, but our small meetings were sufficient for keeping our faith alive.”

“When I was small, my mother had a very serious bout of TB. She was very close to death, but recovered eventually. In her prayer of thanksgiving, she promised to dedicate two of her four daughters to serving the Lord”, discloses Pastor Ma. Indeed, Mother Ma saw her promise come true, in actual fact, she gave to the Lord more than she had promised: three of her daughters and a son-in-law are currently involved in church work. Mother Ma died last year at the age of 75. She bequeathed all her savings to Huangshan church.

Huangshan church was reopened in 1981 and naturally, there was a need for pastors. Mother Ma encouraged her daughter Jianhua to enter a theological seminary. “Initially, I was not a hundred-percent sure what theology actually meant. I took the entrance examination three times before I was accepted to study at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Yet, the time of preparation was not in vain, because I prayed a lot and gradually, I matured in my understanding of theology”, explains Pastor Ma.

When Pastor Ma revealed her plans to enter the seminary in 1984, people around her responded in different ways. “My supervisor at the local hospital was a wise old man, but still, he had a lot of trouble understanding that I wanted to enter a theological seminary. Even so, he told me that I could always come back and work at the hospital in case I decided that the theological seminary was not suitable for me. My church, on the contrary, was very supportive of my change of vocation”, continues Pastor Ma. “When the old pastor of the Huangshan city church fell ill, I was invited to replace him from my teaching position at the Anhui Theological Seminary.”

Pastor Ma graduated from the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1988. She worked as a teacher at the Anhui Theological Seminary for a year before...
Interview with Presbyter Ji Jianhong in Hong Kong

The chair of the national TSPM (Three Self Patriotic Movement), Presbyter Ji Jianhong headed a delegation of theological seminary principals and teachers from mainland China to visit different theological seminaries in Hong Kong in the beginning of February. During this visit, Presbyter Ji shared current challenges to theological education and church work in China with the editor of ANS Elisa Nousiainen.

Ji Jianhong, the chair of the national TSPM committee since 2002, has been involved in ecclesiastical issues in China for more than half a century. His silver-haired personality exudes an air of authority which is further accentuated by his systematically formulated ideas. His immediate answer to the question what is the most important development in the Chinese church during his chairmanship is: "The development of Chinese theological thinking".

Presbyter Ji continues: "In the development of Chinese theology, theological seminaries are the key players. They are, first of all, the sites for theological research and promotion of the ideas of Theological Reconstruction in China. Secondly, they have an important long-term aim which extends twenty, thirty, or even one hundred years ahead: to train students of theology for future development of the Chinese church."

Presbyter Ji’s delegation to Hong Kong consists mainly of principals and teachers from six theological seminaries in mainland China. Although the main purpose of this visit is to exchange ideas with counterparts in Hong Kong on theological thinking and education, the visit conveys more. Presbyter Ji elaborates on the rationale behind the visit. "The Chinese Church is part of the church universal. In order to develop, it must retain an open attitude to others and its staff needs knowledge of languages in order to communicate and exchange ideas with Christians elsewhere. This visit is an occasion of exchange with our HK counterparts. We wish to build relationships of mutual understanding and trust, to learn about the theological education here, and in return, to share recent developments of theological education in mainland China."

With a view to the developing theological education, the construction of the new Jinling Union Theological Seminary campus illustrates that CCC/TSPM has taken concrete steps to improve this sector of church work in China. The new, larger facilities will offer scope for development in annual student intake, material facilities and academic aspects of theological education. In addition, the new NJUTS location in the university "Universities have departments for religious studies, exchange with them will benefit theological education", continues Presbyter Ji. "In the past, Nanjing University professors and teachers have been invited to teach subjects like history and philosophy at the seminary, and now, we are negotiating options for young seminary teachers to do further studies at Nanjing University."

The contact between academics and Church personnel is not confined to Nanjing circles only. CCC/TSPM has recently hosted a symposium on interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims which was organised in Shanghai (see Newsbriefs on Interfaith Dialogue on p. xxx of this issue). For extending the dialogue to a wider range of religions, new inter-religious exchange is being planned.

"CCC/TSPM is currently facilitating interfaith dialogue between all five officially recognised religions in China", says Ji Jianhong. "In addition to believers of five different religions, academics are invited to participate in this dialogue which will also be published in a printed edition. The core questions of the dialogue will be how to establish harmonious relations between different religious circles and whether it actually is possible for the members of the entire society to live in peace with one another. In other words, the purpose of this dialogue is to give different parties an opportunity to express their beliefs and visions, and to seek common ground within Chinese culture and contemporary society, in addition to a wider aim to contribute to the construction of a harmonious society", expounds Ji Jianhong.
Shifting Believers

The results of a survey on religious beliefs caught wide attention in the media both in China and abroad. Based on a cohort of 4,500 people, this survey indicated that there are 300 million believers of all religions in China, which is three times the official estimate. According to the survey, Christians, numbering 40 million, account for 12% of all the believers. Presbyter Ji Jianhong agrees with the survey to the extent that these numbers rightly show the growth in religious adherents in China, but he is more cautious in his estimates.

"There has been an increase in religious adherence in China, but I would see the quoted numbers as being overestimated," says Chairman Ji. "When looking into the results of a survey, you need to bear in mind the representational validity of the research. If you conduct a survey for example in Henan, which is the province with the largest Christian population in China, the survey will indicate a higher number of Christians nationwide than it actually is. An official survey carried out five years ago estimated Christians to number some 16 million, and without doubt, the number of Christian believers has increased since, being currently probably some 20 million, but the growth has not been as fast as the survey claims," he points out.

Ji Jianhong links the results of the above mentioned survey with recent trends of social development in China. Migrant workers moving from the countryside to the cities for employment are a recent phenomenon in Chinese society. The majority of Chinese believers (some 70%) still live in rural areas, but along with the migration, the number of rural believers has decreased. "The new trend in Chinese society, the migration of workers from rural areas into cities, also affects the churches. As a result, the numbers of Christians seem to show growth in country seats and cities, but in fact, many believers have moved from the countryside," says Presbyter Ji.

"In some rural areas, the young people, including lay church workers, have left their churches and moved to cities for work. The number of people attending rural Christian fellowship has clearly diminished and those who still remain in these areas are elderly people or children. Many elderly women are still illiterate," elucidates Presbyter Ji. "This poses a challenge to us: who is going to take care of the congregation if there is no one left to take care of the meeting points?"

Deep care for the churches in China has been the motivating force in Presbyter Ji Jianhong's long and active career. He explains that during the course of Chinese history, the country and its church have seen great changes. Due to the Cultural Revolution, there is a gap of one generation in the Chinese church, and this is one important reason why Presbyter Ji wants to pursue his vision in building the church. He concludes: "God has put this burden on my shoulders. According to the Bible and traditional Chinese thinking, we cannot only follow our own interests, but need to be attentive to others' needs. Even if we do not always excel in what we do, the love of God and the love of the Chinese church encourages us to carry on in our ministry."
Chinese Church Seeks New Media in Christian Publishing

Ever since the reopening of Chinese churches in the 1980’s, church leaders have dedicated time and effort to Bible printing and distribution. In present day China, the Bible belongs to the top 100 most read books in the nation, and the Publication Department of the China Christian Council/Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM) toil at developing new ways of meeting spiritual needs of individual believers and growing churches. Xu Xiaohong, the head of this Publication Department, shared some recent developments in the work of his department with the ANS editorial team in January 2007.

Bibles for Spiritual Needs and Educational Purposes

Xu Xiaohong belongs to the generation of Chinese church leaders who have graduated from Jinling Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing in the late 1980’s. He was born in the northern province of Shaanxi and as a young believer, he himself experienced a time when Christians gathered together to listen to Bible reading, simply because the entire congregation possessed only one copy of the Holy Book.

"Chinese Christians consider the Bible very important. In order to gain respect in church, the preachers must know the Bible and quote it in their sermons”, explains Rev. Xu who has first-hand knowledge of the grassroots level church work: he worked as a pastor for ten years before joining the national CCC headquarters. In Shanghai, Xu Xiaohong first joined the Training Department travelling a lot all around the country, and since 2004, he has worked in the Publication Department.

The development of the distribution network is of primary importance in a country where geographical distances are enormous, and where 70% of the believers live in rural areas. According to Rev. Xu Xiaohong, the current Bible distribution network consists of more than 70 Bible distribution points, and for example in Shandong, there is an effort to deliver Bibles within 24 hours after the orders have been taken. Small transport vans take the Bibles to remote areas.

In addition to distribution, pricing is an important factor in making Bibles accessible to rural believers. Rev. Xu Xiaohong explains some principles in determining prices for different Bible editions. "Bible printing is subsidised by the United Bible Societies, and with these subsidies, we try to ensure moderately priced Bibles for the less affluent believers. The prices of the bilingual Bibles, in contrast, are relatively high because their readership is very different from poor rural believers.” According to the CCC/TSPM internet publications catalogue, the Good News – Contemporary Mandarin bilingual Bible costs RMB 50 (USD 6.45), while the price of the cheapest monolingual Chinese Bible is RMB 7.5 (USD 0.96). A Chinese New Testament can be purchased at RMB 4.5 (USD 0.58). Bibles are also delivered free of charge to the poorest.

“We provide free Bibles in particular to some western areas, such as Yunnan, Guizhou, Qinghai and Gansu; by now, we have delivered in total some 700 000 copies free of charge. People in remote areas are usually extremely happy for this free gift, as I have seen in poor mountainous regions of Hebei. In some areas, however, we have asked a minimal price of RMB 1 for a Bible...
in the Braille script, and it seems that people treasure their book even more there because they have paid something for it", continues Rev. Xu.

Bibles are not used for spiritual purposes only, but also serve as material for literacy classes. "In rural congregations, there are still elderly believers who cannot read, and therefore, many churches organise literacy classes. Literally, these people learn to read the Bible. My grandmother, for example, attended a church literacy class and she could read the Bible passages after the course, but she could not necessarily recognise the characters in other contexts", explains Rev. Xu with a smile on his face.

**Modern Media in Church Publication Work**

The Publication Department of the Chinese Protestant Churches strives for developing a variety of Christian publications for different needs and age groups. The department, including a bookstore on the ground floor of the CCC/TSPM headquarters' building, had 20 staff members and produced 40 different publications in 2006.

According to Xu Xiaohong, Head of the Publication Department, one of the big challenges in publishing is keeping up with the times. "We used to publish audio tapes and VHSs, but they are old-fashioned now. Therefore, we are developing audio-visual material in different formats. Hymns are already available on CD, and we plan to produce them in MP3-format, too. Bibles also come out in new designs", explains Rev. Xu and gives a whole list of novelties introduced by his department. For example, Bibles with monochrome black covers are no longer the only item on the shelves of church bookstores. Readers may choose a cover in different colours and designs, or even a Bible with a denim case. The Gospel of Matthew is available in DVD-format, and the recording of different books of the Bible in audio-format is in progress; a 13-part DVD-series on different Bible characters is on sale.

In addition to delivering Bibles and its stories in different format to believers, the Publication Department is responsible for developing the variety of other printed publications. Currently, "Hymns are already available on CD, and we plan to produce them in MP3-format, too."

the printed material range from titles on basic Christian belief and simple Bible stories for people with low literacy skills to advanced theological thinking. The Publication Department also recommends foreign titles, that is, Asian, European and American theological works and other Christian literature, to be translated into Mandarin Chinese. For instance, Desmond Tutu's An African Prayer Book and John Stott's Bible commentaries figure in the internet catalogue of the CCC/TSPM bookstore in Shanghai.

"In the Publication Department, one of our biggest challenges is to keep up with the needs of the grassroots. Different Christians have different expectations, and we need to make decisions on what to publish so as to meet these expectations", says Xu Xiaohong and mentions problems in family relations, created partly by rapid changes in the society, as an example. "We have published books for the youth in order to provide them with some counselling on family issues. A title on marital life is one of the most sold editions in recent months. However, we haven't really focussed on children yet, even if children are the future of the church, and these days, it is possible to publish Christian material for them", concludes Rev. Xu.

Church publications are marketed through annual catalogues and some new titles are introduced in the Tian Feng magazine. The bookstore with a large display window at the ground floor of the CCC/TSPM headquarters is the immediate outlet of the Publication Department. Apart from books and audio-visual material, there is a small selection of gift items with Christian motifs and verses on sale. Two round tables by the window offer a quiet spot for browsing titles of interest.

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Xu sheds light on some reasons for undertaking this translation project: "The church in Hohhot, the capital of Inner-Mongolia, has developed quickly and needs our assistance. The number of Christians is not necessarily high, some 100,000, but the believers are spread onto a very large area. For the lack of churches, they have to attend church services in neighbouring provinces. On the other hand, translation in Mongolian is needed because many Mongolians cannot read Chinese."

"Bibles in minority languages are usually widely used," continues Xu Xiaohong. "The level of education in minority areas is generally low and illiteracy is a common problem. Among those ethnic minorities, who have a Bible translation in their language, the members of the Christian community are respected for their literacy skills. They have prospects for continuing their education further than others because they learn to read in their churches. Junior middle school is already considered a high level of education, but some minority Christians have even continued their studies up to the university level. Educated people often become leaders of the entire community", he concludes.

Rev. Li Congming is of Yi ethnic origin. Before coming to Kunming, he worked as a pastor in a village church in Chuoxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, which lies some one hundred kilometres to the west of Kunming, the provincial capital. The New Testament translation exists in the variant of the Yi language spoken in his area and is in active use in the local church. His father, who was a pastor and a keen supporter of Bible translation, wished to accomplish the translation of the Old Testament in the Yi language but he died before his dream came true.

When mentioning the issue of Bible translation into minority languages in China, people usually ask: In China, people speak Chinese, why has the Bible been translated into some minority languages? One reason for need of translating the Bible into a minority language is given by Rev. Li: "Most members of our congregation are illiterate in Chinese, but they learn to read the Yi language in church. The church organizes literacy..."
classes while in schools, children have bi-lingual education in first two grades. Yi, which is the first language of these children, is spoken in class while Mandarin is learned gradually.”

In other words, a large part of uneducated people in remote minority areas are monolingual in their ethnic language. If a minority language has a writing system, literacy in the language can become a direct means for upward social mobility and an indirect means for preserving ethnic identity and culture, because language reflects and carries the culture and tradition of its speakers. In China and elsewhere, religious texts are often the first written works in a language. The Bible was the first book translated into the Yi language in Chuxiong, and the language seems to have preserved its vitality: “In our village, everyone speaks Yi language, so the language has no apparent risk of dying out”, says Rev. Li.

Generally speaking, a prerequisite for Bible translation into a minority language is an existing writing system. The orthography of the Yi language spoken in Rev. Li’s home region is based on the so called Pollard script which was created by Samuel Pollard, a British missionary working among the Miao ethnic groups in Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan in the early 20th century. Samuel Pollard translated the New Testament into Miao language. Like Miao, Chinese minority languages use an alphabetic writing system while the Chinese orthography is logographic, or character-based. Most orthographies in the existing minority New Testaments in China were created in the late 19th, early 20th century, and modified in the 1950’s or later. After different strata of modifications, one minority language may even have several orthographies and the speakers’ preferences to use them may vary.

In 2004, a centre for Bible translation was opened in the newly constructed Trinity International Church in Kunming. The centre consists of an office with a computer and some space for a future library. Local translators meet there at regular intervals for discussion and consultation. The church provides accommodation for the translators in the adjoining dormitory. In October 2005, there was a group of minority Bible translators at the centre who were revising a translation into Eastern Lisu language. The team members came from very different educational backgrounds but they were all fluent native speakers of the language. As one of their revision aids, they used an early Bible translation in a closely related language spoken in Myanmar. The orthography in this Burmese copy of the Bible was different from the one used in China but it was intelligible to the translators.

To date, the Amity Printing Company has printed Scriptures in seven minority languages spoken in China: Yi, Miao, Dai, Jingpo, Lisu, Lahu, Wa and Korean. Apart from the Koreans, these ethnic minority groups live mostly in Yunnan, Guizhou and in south-western Sichuan. Rev. Li was involved in getting the first scriptures in these languages to print while he was studying at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in the 1980’s. He acted as an advisor during the printing process of the Bible and Hymnal in the Yi minority language.

While reflecting on current problems of Bible translation into minority languages, Rev. Li Congming brought up the issue of education. “The Bible is God’s Word, so you need to have discernment to translate it. Translation of the Bible is difficult because it is not a literary work of art. Most of the minority Bible translations only have the New Testament which was finished before 1949. The greatest problem at the moment is the translation of the Old Testament. People are eager to have the translation done, but a low level of education in minority congregations becomes a hindrance to this task”, explains Rev. Li. Lack of education has prevented the Chuxiong Yi Christians from realising old pastor Li’s dream to have the entire Bible in the Yi language.
Two Hundred Years of Protestant Bible Translation in China

Translating the Bible into Chinese was an intrinsic and even honorable part of the Protestant missionary enterprise in China. In the 19th century alone, nine different Bible translations went to press despite many difficult questions which the translators had to answer: Into which form of the Chinese language should the Bible be translated? How to render texts which had originated in semi-nomadic societies of the Middle East into a language of the Far East with a completely different cultural background? How to encapsulate almost 2000 years of church history and theology in the translation?

The history of Bible translation shows that the right choice of language is vital for success. Martin Luther translated the Bible into a German dialect that could be understood by everybody in almost all of the German-speaking countries of his time - his translation transformed the Christian world. In China, there were three possible variants from which to choose: 1) colloquial Chinese, which was spoken and understood by people in the streets, 2) Classical Chinese, which would attract the educated ruling class, and 3) vernacular Chinese, a mixture of the two, which had been used in novel writing since the Ming dynasty. Which form of Chinese would be equally acceptable to a Hunan peasant, a Shanghai merchant and a Beijing palace official?

The first two complete Bibles in Chinese, published almost simultaneously, were both translations into Classical Chinese. Robert Morrison from the London Missionary Society arrived in China in 1807 and soon started working on a Bible translation with a capable assistant, a Chinese printing expert from Guangdong called Liang Fa. Morrison’s vision to have his translation printed and distributed in China seemed achievable, but the project ran into trouble early on for legal restrictions. The Great Qing Legal Code made it illegal to print material related to Christianity in China. In addition, Christianity had been banned by the Qing emperor Kangxi in 1721 after the so-called “Chinese Rites Controversy”. Morrison was thus forced to have his translation printed in Malaysia. Baptist missionaries who prepared the other Classical Chinese Bible had their translation printed in Serampore (North India).

Foreign mission societies increased their activities in China only around the First Opium War (1839-42). Nevertheless, long before the opium wars forced China to open up to international trade and, subsequently, to foreign missionaries, significant numbers of overseas Chinese living and working in South East Asia had already become Christians. It is likely that many of these converts brought the Gospel and their Bibles along when they returned home from Siam (Thailand), Malaysia, India and other places.

Morrison’s translation triggered a lengthy controversy among the missionaries in China. The dispute, later called the “Term Question”, centered around the Chinese equivalents to Christian terms for “God”, “soul” or “Holy Spirit”, to name a few. In Chinese both Shangdi 上帝 and Shen 神 mean “god” but they are used in different contexts. Missionaries disagreed which term to use for Christian God. They kept producing new Bible translations in order to render theological concepts better into Chinese – and to please the growing number of Chinese Christians. This dispute has never been completely settled.

After Morrison’s version, several other translations of the Bible came out in Classical Chinese, even if only highly educated people could read them. The translators held fast to the idea that the Bible should be a book of high literary value, so it had to be written in Classical Chinese. Classical Chinese can only be understood in written form, so these translations could not be used for reading aloud, and thus they were of no use to ordinary people. Classical Chinese translations were produced (e.g. by Schereschewsky, Goddard, etc.) until the publication of the Chinese Union Version in 1919.

The situation started to change in 1867, when a Bible translation called the Mandarin Delegates’ Version was published. This translation sold around 100,000 copies. Its success depended on several reasons. Firstly, it was based on “Mandarin”, a colloquial variant of Chinese which could be understood in all of Northern und
Western China. Secondly, a well-known Chinese scholar and fluent speaker of Mandarin, Wang Tao, was actively involved in the translation. Thirdly, Christianity had started to take root in mainland China among common people.

In the last decade of the 19th century, a large group of representatives of various mission societies started to collaborate on a new translation. In order to finally produce a version which would be acceptable to everyone, these representatives decided to prepare three translations: one in Classical Chinese (or “High Wenli”), one in a simplified form of Classical Chinese (the so-called “Easy Wenli”) and one in Mandarin. The Mandarin Bible, or the Chinese Union Version (CUV), was published in 1919.

The Chinese Union Version eventually became the most popular translation of the Bible ever published. It hit the market in 1919 when the May Fourth Movement was in full swing. The leaders of this movement urged people to use colloquial rather than Classical Chinese. Since Classical Chinese was no longer considered the only language variant up to literary standards, both the literati and ordinary readers could accept the Union Version. The Bible actually found an eager readership among leading intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Lu Xun and Mao Dun.

In the 1920’s and 1930’s, Bibles were printed and distributed in great numbers by several Bible societies in China, and that continued even after foreign Bible societies had left China and the Chinese Bible Society was shut down. Between 1949 and 1955, several million copies of Biblical texts were distributed in China. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Bible publication came to a complete halt but the work was resumed in 1979. Interestingly, the first Bibles published in China after the Cultural Revolution were printed at a printing press owned by the People’s Liberation Army.

To date, over 40 million copies of the Chinese Bible have been printed since the foundation of the Amity Printing Press in the mid-1980s. The (revised) Chinese Union Version remains the most popular edition although other more contemporary translations are available. The Bible has reached ordinary Chinese, even rural poor in remote areas. The Bible even has a part to play in China’s ongoing struggle against illiteracy. You may hear young people in China say: "My grandmother used to be illiterate, but now she can read because she went to a Bible reading class in her church."

For further reading:
Zetzche, Jost Oliver: The Bible in China. The History of the Union version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China, Sankt Augustin, Monumenta Serica Institute, 1999.
Eber, Irene, et al. (Ed.): Bible in Modern China. The Literary and Intellectual Impact, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 43, Nettetal 1999.
Moved by the Holy Spirit and Beauty - Fourth Chinese Christian Art Exhibition Opened in Nanjing

Over a hundred paintings, calligraphy, prints, paper-cuts and photos were collected for the Fourth Chinese Christian Art Exhibition opened at the Nanjing Art Gallery on January 21, 2006. The art works, originating from all over China, illustrate Bible stories and scenes from the daily life of Chinese Christians, the techniques ranging from traditional Chinese ink painting to modern mixed media. The exhibition is an affirmation that Christianity in China is constantly searching for new ways of expressions which derive from the Chinese contemporary context. Bishop K.H. Ting, who attended the opening ceremony together with national church leaders, provincial religious authorities and other dignitaries, expressed the main idea in his opening address as follows: “The works of art displayed in this exhibition is not only the newly created Christian fruit by Chinese artists, but also the perfect integration of Christian culture and the traditional art form of Chinese nation.” The exhibition was organised by the Amity Christian Arts Centre. Illustrations on this page are from the exhibition:

Yu Jiade: Jesus Raises the Widow’s Son at Nain (below)
Fan Pu: Birds in the Sky (right)
Social Service Ministry Thanks Donors

A donation ceremony was organised on December 7, 2006 to present donations which were received in response to the church appeal for hurricane victims in Fujian province autumn 2006 (see the appeal on Amity News Service website at: http://www.amitynewsservice.org/page.php?page=1717). 40 leaders and representatives of the Fujian provincial CC/TSPM, Social Service Department of the national CCC/TSPM, and respective government departments in disaster-hit areas attended the ceremony. In their addresses to the audience of the ceremony, the president of the provincial CC and the representative of Social Service Department praised the donors in China and overseas for their willingness to help. Local representatives thanked the national CCC/TSPM for their fundraising initiative which has been "a great encouragement for Christians in the disaster-hit areas to start rebuilding their home districts". Tian Feng's December 2006 issue published detailed information about donations made by individuals, different organisations and church bodies in China, Hong Kong and overseas, amounting to a total of RMB 1,070,000, approximately USD 138,225.
Wu Yaozong’s Memorial Unveiled in Shanghai

When the Wu Yaozong memorial was unveiled in Shanghai on 4th November 2006, more than 100 friends and representatives from different Christian institutions in China were present to honour the occasion. In addition to a report on the unveiling ceremony, in its December 2006 issue (number 299) Tian Feng published a commemorative article on Wu Yaozong written by Bishop K.H. Ting in 1981. The following is a summary of Tian Feng’s report with a few excerpts from Bishop Ting’s text, originally published in English in Love Never Ends.

Bishop K.H. Ting describes Wu Yaozong (1893-1979) as a “forerunner” and a visionary “out of the common”. Wu Yaozong worked hard for a form of Christianity that was in essence Chinese and for a self-governing, economically independent church. He was among the 40 Chinese Christian leaders who issued the “Three-Self Declaration” in summer 1950 and was elected Chair of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in 1954. He held a Master’s degree from Columbia University and dedicated his energy to the social gospel through his work at the YMCA during four spells in four different decades. The unveiling ceremony of Wu Yaozong’s memorial was an occasion to recall Wu’s life and career.

In her speech at the unveiling ceremony, Rev. Cao Shengjie, the president of the China Christian Council, recalled Wu Yaozong’s personal characteristics and vision of Christianity. Rev. Cao Shengjie remembers Wu Yaozong as a Christian of integrity whose actions coincided with his words. Wu’s Christianity was not self-seeking but he sought to make the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount visible in society. He did not confine himself to sustaining justice in the church, but made his contribution to religious freedom by joining in political activities and boldly speaking the truth in his discussions about current affairs.

Presbyter Ji Jianhong and Rev. Luo Guanzong (Chair of the national TSPM committee and the CCC/TSPM Advisory Council respectively) concentrated on Wu Yaozong’s contribution to the creation of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement which was an event of historical significance for the development of the Chinese church. The speakers of the ceremony recognised unanimously Wu Yaozong’s exemplary career as relevant to contemporary Christians. Wu Yaozong’s son, Wu Zongsu, who assisted in the actual unveiling of the memorial, expressed his thanks to the audience on behalf of the Wu family. The president of the Shanghai Christian Council, Hua Yaozeng led the congregation in prayer.

Tian Feng concludes the report on the unveiling ceremony with Bishop K.H. Ting’s words: [...] Dialogue with society was Wu Yaozong’s special characteristic. He reflected on the challenges he faced in society and was willing to learn from society. [...] Only God has been able to raise such thinkers and implementers in the course of the history of China and of the Chinese church.”

“Symposium on the Missionary Movement and the Chinese Church” in Shanghai Nov. 28-30, 2006

"Symposium on the Missionary Movement and the Chinese Church", organized by the CCC/TSPM, was held in Shanghai Nov. 28-30, 2006. The following article is an abridged translation of the conference report published on the website of the Chinese Protestant Churches. The report was translated by John Strong, a staff member in the Amity Foundation Hong Kong Office.

Christian council representatives from every province and autonomous region in China gathered at the conference, as well as seminary church history faculty, scholars and research specialists – altogether 150 participants.

Presbyter Ji Jianhong, head of the TSPM, opened the proceedings with a speech, and then four major topics were discussed: The Early Period of the Missionary Movement in China, Christianity and Chinese Culture, The Awakening of the Chinese Church and
the Three Self Patriotic Movement and Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church. 27 papers were presented in all. The president of the Chinese Christian Council, Rev. Cao Shengjie, presided over the closing ceremony and gave a speech.

Conference themes:

1. “The Early Period of the Missionary Movement in China” topic thesis: Through bringing to light the historical background of the missionary movement, including the political, historical and ideological contexts within which missionaries operated (e.g. colonialist expansion), we can recognize the necessity and significance of today’s Chinese church’s new approach which advocates the Three Self principles of self-support, self-management and self-propagation.

2. “Christianity and Chinese Culture” topic thesis: When Christianity entered China, missionaries believed that the Christian faith should replace or transform Chinese culture. This way of teaching and preaching has had long-reaching influence, so that even today there are many places in the Chinese church’s ideology and theology that strike discordant notes against Chinese society. The papers discussed how to have the Chinese church take root in Chinese culture and become a Christianity that is truly Chinese.

3. “The Awakening of the Chinese Church and the Three Self Patriotic Movement” topic thesis: The reason for looking back at history is to guide today’s practices. Through a critique of the theology that served western colonialism and of its style of evangelization, we review the awakening of the Chinese church’s consciousness as well as the challenges that face the present-day church’s Three-Self principles.

4. “Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church” topic thesis: Today the Chinese church is advancing the necessity of theological reconstruction; establishing the Chinese church’s own theological system so that the church and Chinese socialism can mutually adapt, and build a harmonious service to society.

The main speakers accurately employed historical data, quoting generously from many sources to illuminate their themes. The speeches drew periodic applause from the participants, and there were good responses and interaction around each theme.

This symposium marks the first time that scholars have been invited to attend such a conference. They approached the topics from various perspectives to explore together the Chinese Church’s history and present situation, as well as views on future developments. Furthermore, they raised many dynamic suggestions.

The energetic participation of the scholars indicates that Chinese scholars of Christianity can not only cooperate with the Chinese Church, but can also spur the Chinese Church’s thought into action and push forward the development of theological reconstruction. The scholars themselves hope that there can be more opportunities hereafter for similar interactions, since their theological research cannot do without the resource of the church itself.

This conference laid much emphasis on history, “using history as a mirror.” This was a time for “Christian circles and academic circles” to meet; to bring historical considerations together with ponderings about the future; practical demonstrations together with scholarly deliberations. It was a time to hold up 200 years of Christian missions in China for objective analysis and reflection. Conference participants realized that the western missionaries’ methods of evangelizing had flaws, resulting in Christian practices that could not effectively take root in Chinese traditional culture.

Through discussion, the participants looked at the direction of the church’s development, pondering over its position and responsibility amidst new circumstances. The Chinese Church must take on its own social responsibility and not abandon its own guiding doctrines. It must not waver from the Three Self principles. Continuing a thoroughgoing pursuit of theological reconstruction will bring into play the Chinese Church’s cultural, educational and social function so as to become fully integrated with Chinese culture. Being harmonious with Chinese culture and contributing to the dynamic development of social service will make Chinese Christianity a religion that is concordant with mainstream Chinese culture, making due contributions in building a harmonious society.
Interfaith Dialogue Initiated in Shanghai

A symposium entitled "Symbiotic Harmony - Interfaith Dialogue between Christianity and Islam in Shanghai" was held November 26-27, 2006, to initiate interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Shanghai. The symposium, organised by the Shanghai Christian Council, Shanghai Christian Committee for Education and Shanghai Islamic Association, brought together believers, academics and religious authorities to discuss the beliefs and challenges of Christianity and Islam in today's China. Also attending were the vice-director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) Wang Zuo'an and the director of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Zhuo Xinping.

"A symposium like this has great symbolic value", said Wang Zuo'an in his address, which encouraged religious circles to deepen mutual understanding and collaboration. He acknowledged that "In building a harmonious society, what is beneficial to religion is also beneficial to the society".

When introducing the major challenges faced by Chinese churches, the Rev. Hua Yaozeng, Chairman of the Shanghai Christian Council, told the ANS editorial team, "In the Chinese church, we need to further develop our theological thinking. We need to look into the Bible and find biblical ways of building bridges between Christianity and different groups in society. Initiating inter-faith dialogue is one way of doing that. Muslims and Christians are Abraham's children, and thus we need dialogue to increase understanding of each others' beliefs without imposing our own model of faith on the other. Instead of re-enacting the story of Cain and Abel, we also need to follow Jesus' example in dealing with people from different faiths." In this way, Rev. Hua expounded the central theme and purpose of the symposium.

Eighth National Conference of Chinese Protestant Churches Announced

The Eighth National Conference of Chinese Protestant Churches will take place in the last quarter of the year 2007 in Beijing. The venue of the upcoming conference was announced during the annual meeting of the current CCC/TSPM Standing Committees in Shanghai, December 2-4, 2006. The National Chinese Christian Conference, the highest body of the Protestant church administration in China, is convened every five years. The main duties of the conference are drafting and/or revising the CCC/TSPM constitutions, election of the members comprising the two national committees and consideration of the work and financial reports of the outgoing standing CCC/TSPM committees. The Seventh National Conference was held in Beijing in May 2002.

The Chinese Bible Ministry Exhibition in German Kirchentag on 6th -10th June, 2007

The Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Chinese Protestant Churches will be on display during the 2007 Kirchentag, in Cologne, Germany. The history of this exhibition called "A Lamp to My Feet, A Light to My Path" goes back to 2004, when it was on display for the first time in Hong Kong. Two years later, in May-June 2006, the exhibition toured on the North American continent. Through a variety of exhibits, photographs and multi-media presentations, the exhibition illustrates different stages of Bible printing and distribution in China.
A Chinese Pastor studies in Hong Kong

An increasing number of Chinese pastors and teachers of theological seminaries have first-hand experience of exchange with overseas and Hong Kong in the area of theological education. Theologians from overseas visit China and their Chinese counterparts have spent shorter or longer periods in the US, Germany and Singapore in addition to a closer option of Hong Kong. In February, a Chinese delegation visited Hong Kong seminaries and met local theologians in order to exchange ideas on theological education and wider church development on both sides of the border (see Presbyter Ji Jianhong’s reflections on this p. xxx in this issue). In recent months, Pastor Ma attended a training course in Hong Kong. The following article conveys her impressions on this educational exchange on the grass-roots level.

In late-March, Pastor Ma Jianhua from Huangshan in Anhui province completed her five-month advanced course on theology at the China Graduate School of Theology (CGST) in Hong Kong. Since 2004, CGST has offered summer courses in Mandarin Chinese while recently, the programme was extended onto autumn and spring terms as well. The participants of Mandarin Chinese programme are not necessarily all from mainland China, since many Hong Kong churches are developing their ministry in the national language. Pastor Ma’s study programme included Old and New Testament studies, in-depth Bible research, pastoral studies, ecclesiology, and management and leadership.

Pastor Ma was pleased with the course and her entire stay in Hong Kong. As highlights of this period, she mentioned learning new approaches in Bible study, which would be very useful for her ministry in Huangshan. She also praised the study environment at the CGST: the general atmosphere was lively and access to resources was very convenient. Since the students at the CGST come mostly from different church backgrounds in Hong Kong, there were opportunities to exchange ideas on church issues in the special administrative region of Hong Kong and mainland China.

returning to her home church in Huangshan in 1989. Three years later, she was ordained. Today, Pastor Ma is in charge of a lively congregation. The current church building which seats some 1,000 church-goers, was dedicated in 1994. The church prospectus reveals that believers can take part in different devotional activities six days of the week. In addition to two Sunday services and Thursday Bible studies, there is a Sunday school for the very young, special evening meeting for the youth, and an adult literacy class for the elderly.

“One of the strengths of our congregation is the morning prayer meeting which may have more than 70 participants at a time. People meet from 6.00 to 7.30 a.m. for Bible reading, sharing and prayer. They pray for different needs, including church affairs and personal problems. I am particularly touched by the seniors who are truly faithful in their service of intercession. Through their prayers, they provide pastors and other church workers with invaluable spiritual support.”

Instead of caring for patients, Pastor Ma now cares for believers whom she has not forgotten during her stay in Hong Kong. She recalls an elderly brother who learnt to recite Psalm 119, the longest Psalm in the Bible, while attending the church literacy class. She also remembers another lady in her seventies who reads through the Bible once a year. “Dedication of this old woman to Bible reading is an excellent example to us, pastors”, says Pastor Ma with awe. She is grateful for all the different ministries of her church and for all the people in her congregation who have influenced her like her mother by their devoted Christian witness.
The Son of Man Came to Minister

In recent months, Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement, has expanded its coverage of church activities at grassroots level, including church-run development projects. In its February 2007 issue (number 303) Deng Fucun, the head of the CCC/TSPM Social Service Department, elaborates on the need for church involvement in social service. The following article is based on a translation provided by Cordelia Leong, a volunteer translator for ANS.

Deng Fucun starts his article entitled “The Son of Man Came to Minister” with the theological notion of Jesus’ dual nature: Jesus was fully divine and fully human. Regardless of his Godly nature, Jesus served the society around him, or as the Gospel of Mark says, he came to minister, not to be ministered unto. Rev. Deng sees Jesus’ social involvement as an impressive example for Chinese churches and develops this idea by making five different points.

Firstly, Deng Fucun looks at Jesus’ ministry. Jesus clearly demonstrated through his actions that we need to be attentive to a person’s entire being, not only to his/her soul. Jesus’ approach always entailed both teaching the Gospel and serving people in his/her daily life. Therefore, Christians should not confine themselves to reading the Bible and practising their devotional life, they also need to witness to God’s love in their lives. Following the example of the early church, the responsibility of serving society is an intrinsic part of the church’s message today.

Secondly, God created the universe, including human beings, and therefore all human beings belong to the same family. As Christians it is our responsibility to identify those in need outside our immediate circle of friends or relatives. The parable of the Good Samaritan and numerous other passages in the Gospels illustrate clearly that Jesus loved and cared for the poor, and encouraged disciples to practise charity to any person in need. Early churches took these teachings in earnest: Early Christian writings, such as 1 Clement, Polycarp to the Philippians and Didache, exhort the readers to do good deeds. These teaching are still valid today.

Thirdly, Christians need to be active, on the one hand, in showing love and care, just as Jesus exhorted his disciples to feed the hungry crowds in the miracle of five loaves and two fish. On the other hand, we love because God first loved us. Therefore, when sharing God’s love with others, we ought to regard the giver and the receiver as equals. Yet it seems that we have failed to do so, because the word ‘charity’ bears a somewhat negative connotation in our modern society. A real act of love is not patronising but shares God’s love with respect for the receiver.

Fourthly, the Bible teaches that it is better to give than to receive, simply because offering, sharing and other expressions of love are pleasing to God. While sharing, the giver will become aware that he is rich because he can give, and he will realise that everything he has comes from God. In the miracle of the five loaves and two fish, after blessing the loaves and fish, Jesus passed them on first to the disciples who delivered them to the people. Then, bread and fish passed through many hands until everyone was fed. People did not keep Jesus’ blessings to themselves, but shared them with others, and as a result, twelve baskets of leftovers were collected. In sharing, the needy receive help and feel loved by those who give, and those who give have God’s promise that He will reward those who give in secret (Matt. 6:4). Ultimately, the act of sharing love creates a happier and more harmonious world.

Fifthly, Deng Fucun discusses the concept of offerings in churches. For a long time, offering has meant giving money, but that is only one way of understanding it. When Jesus asked the rich young man to sell all his possessions and help the poor, he did not only refer to material wealth but also to his knowledge, his time, etc. Being involved in social service ministry inherently means offering a little love: “Love one another” was Jesus’ new commandment to his disciples (John 13:34). In offering, the willingness to give is more important than the quantity in God’s eyes. Offering is also a matter of self-fulfilment: all Christians have the capacity to behave in a responsible manner and perform duties which God has assigned to them.

To conclude, Deng Fucun encourages Chinese churches to join in the work of the Social Service Department which offers them a chance to witness with words and deeds. Faith and action are, after all, inseparable elements of Christian faith. The greatest strength in the social service ministry of the church is not money but to serve with a loving heart.
HIV/AIDS Awareness

HIV/AIDS Awareness Day was organised by Wuhan City YMCA on December 1, 2006. During the event, YMCA secretary-general and staff gave talks on HIV/AIDS situation in the city of Wuhan and nationwide, its transmission and prevention. More than 200 copies of handouts and condoms were distributed to community residents and passers-by.

HIV/AIDS Awareness Day was also organised in the county of Pingjiang (Hunan) on December 24, 2006. The event is linked with the initiative of the Pingjiang county church to set up a joint HIV/AIDS prevention programme with Pingjiang county hospital and health department. In addition to raising HIV/AIDS awareness among church workers and church members, the aim of the event and programme initiative was to increase church involvement in social service to society.

Women’s Ministry

Women’s Ministry. Shanghai municipal CC/TSPM invited twenty women from seven districts within the city of Shanghai to attend a symposium entitled “Women’s Ministry and Social Service”. This symposium provided a forum for women to outline how women’s ministry has responded to current needs within their churches and wider society in their respective areas. In the district of Huangpu, for instance, women provide counselling on health and legal issues, care for the elderly and orphans and organise visits to social welfare institutions. They also offer an interpretation service in sign language in their district church. In Zhabei and Changning districts, women are engaged in ministry to migrant workers which entails helping migrant population to integrate in Shanghai society e.g. through counselling. In addition to participants’ presentations, the programme of the symposium included lectures on marital life and marriage ethics, single-parent families and women’s role in the 21st century.

[Editor’s note: the time of the event was not mentioned.]
Theological Concerns

Ten Concepts of Ecological Christianity

"The bottom line of the ecological crisis in the world of today is the clash between human beings and nature", claim two professors from Shanghai Business School in the opening sentence of their article entitled "Ten Concepts of the Christian Ecological Harmony". The writers, Professor Han Diming and Associate Professor Zhan Zhaoxiong, call for "ecological Christianity" as a response to the growing ecological crisis. In their article published in Tian Feng's February 2007 issue (number 303), the authors outline ten concepts to bring forward the biblical premise that the stewardship of the natural environment is a God-bestowed responsibility to Christians and all human beings. The following is a summary of this article.

According to Han Diming and Zhan Zhaoxiong, a clash between human beings and nature lies at the centre of today's ecological crisis. Even if many objectives of the Chinese planned economy have been realised and protection of the environment has been addressed as a major concern of the nation, ecological crises cannot be resolved by taking economic or legal measures. A new relationship must be established between human beings and nature by bringing ethical values into play.

In China, there is a growing awareness of environmental concerns. Some academics have turned to Christianity and the Bible to discover basic Christian principles of the human-nature relationship with a view to building an environment-friendly society. Professors Han and Zhan state that their article on ten concepts of ecological Christianity summarises the most recent research of this nature, their ten concepts being: Creation, Balance, Sequence, Return, Caring, Supervision, Punishment, Equality, Unification and Ecology.

In outlining the concepts of Creation, Sequence and Return, the authors look at ecology as a system of clearly defined relationships and laws which were established in God's creation. The concept of Creation entails that God is the creator and therefore, he is the sovereign ruler over creation. Only He can establish a relation between human beings and nature, while human beings cannot change nature according to their own will or foresee the ultimate result of their actions. The chronological order of creation (Sequence) implies that, because God created human beings on the very last day of his toil, they should respect nature. Furthermore, as outlined in the concept of Return, human beings need to treat nature with respect because they were made of it (soil), remain dependent on it their entire life and return to it at his death.

The long-term existence and development of humankind depends on a balance between human beings and nature. The concept of Balance refers to equality between human beings and nature. This assumption can be derived, for example, from the story of deluge, which illustrates that both human beings and other living creatures were saved from a disaster. To preserve this balance, God set limits to human beings' exploitation of creation: the Old Testament rules on Sabbath and the year of Jubilee granted the creation periods of rest. Balance and Equality are closely related. If in defining the concept of Balance, the authors looked into biblical foundations of the relationship between human beings and nature, the concept of Equality entails a study of the effects of imbalance in this relation. The authors cite the impoverishment of the biodiversity in Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau as an example of human beings' failure to maintain a balanced relationship with nature.

God also established a relationship of stewardship between human beings and nature. In the concepts of Caring, Supervision and Punishment, the authors bring forward different aspects of this stewardship. Caring, in brief, entails God's care for his creation through his gifts like sun, rain and grain in the field. Human beings are to care for the creation in the same way God does. Stewardship implies a certain degree of authority; according to the authors, supervision is a prerequisite for using one's authority correctly. God is the ultimate supervisor, and only those human beings who respect God and live according to His commands will be able to control their selfish greed and act as supervisors of their own actions as stewards of the creation. However, owing to his inflated opinion of himself and to his disdain for God's existence and nature, human beings may abuse their stewardship. The concept of Punishment implies that natural disasters can be regarded as results of such abuse.
Ecology and Unification emphasise the spiritual extension of environmental issues. Ecology is a system, where every created thing and being have their place and manifest organic, life-giving energy which is connected with God. The authors call this connection an ontological bond between the natural and the spiritual. In the beginning, God saw that his creation was good, but due to human beings' rebellion against God, the inherent harmony of creation was spoiled. While leading a hedonistic, consumerism-driven lifestyle, human beings have overlooked the fact that natural resources are finite. Human beings have lost their sense of unity with creation and with God but unity can be restored with the aid of the spiritual power of Christianity. Christians hope for an "eternal kingdom" where harmony prevails between human beings and God, and human beings and creation. Christian belief is uplifting and restores human beings' sense of duty and mission.

The authors conclude: "Because of selfishness and greed, human beings have become exploiters of natural resources. They have caused many ecological crises for the world around them. Human beings themselves are directly threatened by many of these ecological crises. To restore ecology, we must first restore the relationship between human beings and God."

**NEWSBRIEFS**

**Training**

**Five Religions in One Classroom for Four Months**

56 religious leaders from five different religions attended an advanced research study course at People's University in Beijing in autumn 2006. The curriculum of the course consisted of core courses on religious studies, such as "History of world religion", and "Religion and Society", etc., and general introductory courses which ranged from management, law and politics to classical Chinese, philosophy and contemporary history. In addition to academic knowledge, the participants learnt research methods and applied these methods into practice by conducting surveys in wider Beijing area and Hebei province. Teaching load was shared by academics and top level government officials, namely university professors from People's University (in particular its Institute for Studies of Buddhism and Religious Theory) and Beijing University and cadres from the United Front Work Department, the Ministry of Education and the State Administration of Religious Affairs. The four-month training course is unprecedented in China with a view to its academic depth and its range of participants: it was the first time all officially recognised religious groups (Buddhist, Taoist, Islamic, Catholic and Protestant Christian) studied in one classroom for an entire university term. The graduation ceremony was held on December 29, 2006 at People's University. (Source: http://www.chinareligion.ch/showxinwen.asp?newsid=394).

On November 20-23 2006, the district of Jiangxia (in the city of Wuhan, Hubei) organised a training course for volunteers. 80 participants of the course studied church management, reconstruction of theological thinking, religious regulations and related topics.

A two-day symposium was convened by the Huangshi municipal CC/TSPM (Huangshi, Hebei) in November 2006 to promote reconstruction of theological thinking and Hu Jintao's call for ethics discourse through his concepts of "Fight Honours and Fight
Letters to Tian Feng Editor

In October 2006, Tian Feng resumed its “Letters to the Editor” column. By February 2007, Tian Feng’s readers had addressed issues related to personal spiritual life, church discipline and gender in administering sacraments. The following letter to the editor brings forward misconduct in church gatherings as one problematic issue in rural congregations. The sender of the letter comes from the province of Shandong in Northern China.

Dear Editorial Staff,

We are a small village church where the lack of refinement among believers may be a general problem. Recently, our church had to appoint an usher to maintain order in church fellowships because some people in church meetings did not listen wholeheartedly to the teaching from the pulpit. This usher’s responsibility is to quieten the talkers by using gestures first, and if that does not help, by using words which may sometimes be of no avail, too. Therefore, the preachers usually pray for good order in the beginning of their sermons, but some people take no notice of that either. Once, two people kept talking despite all these measures. At the end, the usher could not help saying to them “Can you not stop talking?” One of the talkers could not tolerate this, but told the incident to B (a church worker) later, saying: “How can the usher intimidate an old person like me? I won't come to the fellowship to listen to something like that!” Worker B, initially with good intentions, discussed the issue with A (the leader of our congregation). B told A that believers should not be intimidated, but A confirmed that the usher’s behaviour was correct. Consequently, B responded: “It is better to disperse the congregation than manage it like this!” Each party held to their own views. Eventually, this incident affected later church work.

Would you, please, help to resolve this problem? Thank you!  
Nian En, Shandong

Sister Nian En,

As far as I understand, in many rural churches, there is constant hustle and bustle during the church fellowship: people walk and talk, children eat melon seeds, etc. This is a common but not such a good phenomenon. God is graceful and majestic, and therefore, every person who comes into God’s presence should show reverence to him. They should respect good manners and contain themselves from making noise. Preachers, while striving for raising the level of their preaching, should seek to understand believers’ needs and to sow their seeds on time in order to help the believers to focus on listening. As for listeners, they should restrain themselves from idle talk so as not to hinder others from hearing the Word of God.

What should be done, then, in churches where people lack good manners? In the long run, a church should strengthen its efforts to cultivate believers and evangelists should set an example to them by their own conduct. As for this particular incident you describe in your letter, appointing an usher to maintain order in the fellowship was correct. Those who annoyed the congregation through their idle chatter, were rightly addressed, they were even prayed for, but still they did not heed.

Nothing in your letter implies these two people were intimidated. If the usher behaved in such a manner, that would have been wrong, even for the purposes of maintaining order in the service. Intimidation seldom induces anyone to acknowledge their misconduct. However, if the usher’s address was merely exhortative, the talkers should have listened to her and corrected their behaviour.

The purpose of listening to the Word of God is to better understand God’s truth, while the aim of understanding the truth is to better follow it. If a believer cannot comply with church regulations and listen quietly to the sermon, how can s/he ever act on God’s truth? It is of course a pity, if the person addressed for his misconduct left the congregation, but tolerating, or even conniving in such disrespectful behaviour is not correct either. Ultimately, the usher felt she had done something wrong and church regulations were undermined.
The crucial issue in maintaining order in this church fellowship is not whether A or B was right but the fact that they disagreed on how to carry out this church work. Their disagreement eventually had a negative impact on future church ministry. Why did one problem lead into another here then? Your letter reveals that the people involved cared more for holding to their own opinions than for the church ministry. If a congregation is split because of addressing misconduct (which should not happen), a church will be torn apart and driven into an increasingly desolate situation, if its workers disagree and fail to cooperate.

Actually, differences of opinion are normal when carrying out church work. Nevertheless, when church workers disagree, it is important to follow Christian teaching, to learn how to make compromises and to forgive for the benefit of church unity. Only when there is unity, is it possible to walk together. It two persons completely disagree, but force themselves to walk together, how far would they be able to go? Such cooperation will result in an increasing amount of hypocrisy and falsehood. In this case, I wish to remind workers A and B that while teaching believers to listen to God's truth, should they not teach it to themselves first? The Psalmist says (Ps. 133:1):

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

NEWSBRIEFS
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Disgraces. 80 participants of the symposium came from three different administrative areas within the city of Huangshi.

On December 1-6 2006, the municipal CC/TSPM committees of the city of Yichun (Heilongjiang) organised their first training course for pastors. During this six-day training, 18 participants from different parts of the city studied e.g. interpretation of the Scriptures and religious regulations, and participated in discussions on different topics relating to their responsibilities as pastors.

A research study course entitled "Patriotism Education" was organised in the city of Huangshan (Anhui) on January 10-14, 2007. Leaders of the national CCC/TSPM and representatives of national religious administration lectured on different aspects of the principle of "Love your country, love your church", such as outside infiltration, self-governance and development of future direction of the Chinese church. Principals and full-time teachers of theological seminaries and Bible schools participated in the course. (to p. 23)

The fourth provincial symposium on the reconstruction of theological thinking was convened in the city of Hebei (Anhui) on December 6 - 8, 2006. The main themes of the symposium were "Building a Harmonious Socialist Society", "Christianity and Building a New Socialist Countryside" and "Eight Honours and Eight Disgraces". Pastors from the entire province together with full-time staff members of Anhui Theological Seminary, altogether 70 people, participated in the symposium.
Song Songbin (papercuts):
Jesus in Gethsemane
Crucifixion
Jesus' Burial