Mother and child at Mianzhu Church: The spirit of Christmas - love and hope - shine in the faces of a mother and child. The photo was taken in June at the badly damaged Mianzhu church in Sichuan, soon after the area was hit by a killer earthquake. The mother and child are still living in a tent in the church compound.
Dear Reader,

Warm greetings for Christmas and the New Year!

There is no doubt that the year 2008 will be remembered by many for a long time to come for its store of events that have wrought havoc in the lives of people around the world. For the people of China, the share of suffering has been inordinately large. The year began with a destructive snowstorm in southern China. This was followed by the tragic earthquake in Sichuan. As if this was not enough, China’s economy will suffer from the repercussions of the financial tsunami that has engulfed economic institutions globally.

But Christmas is a season of hope and it is this eternal faith and hope that is very much alive in China today. We witnessed it in the faces of the mother and child we met at Mianzhu church, after the earthquake in May. And we learn about hope and renewal in the reflections of Christians after 30 years of reform and opening up (p. 12 and 20), in the transition to a younger generation of church leaders, in the surging interest in Christianity among Chinese youth (p. 15) and their hopes for a more peaceful world (p. 17). Most of all, Chinese Christian leaders are reaching out and are looking forward towards building a more united church (p. 4 and p. 7) that will increasingly express its loving concern towards society. There is much to celebrate and to be thankful for.

May God’s grace and blessings be yours this season and for the New Year to come!

Sincerely,

Theresa Carino
Dear Friends,

The annual Christmas season is just around the corner. Christmas is essentially a day of joy, praise and thanksgiving. During this special season, I send you my best wishes for a happy holiday!

At this time, the financial crisis is having an impact on economies around the world, affecting people's work and people's lives. I do believe, though, that through the concerted efforts of all nations, we will be able to overcome these difficulties.

During the past year, China has suffered greatly from natural disasters such as the snowstorm and the earthquake. We are extremely grateful to friends and churches around the world for their love, concern and support and for this, we give our thanks to God.

With God's guidance, the church in China has been making progress. We are continuously trying to improve our work in various areas of ministry such as theological education, lay training, social service and so on.

Please continue to pray for the church in China.

May God be with us,

Rev. Gao Feng
President
China Christian Council
December 15, 2008
In October 2008, a CCC/TSPM delegation visited Hong Kong at the invitation of the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union and the Hong Kong Christian Council. On October 22, 2008, Elder Fu Xianwei, Chairperson of the TSPM addressed a public gathering, bringing greetings from the CCC/TSPM and churches throughout China. In his talk Elder Fu spoke of what the church has achieved and the challenges it faces. His remarks were translated, summarized and excerpted here by Janice Wickeri.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of China’s policy of reform and opening, a policy that has invigorated China and caused it to flourish. The restoration and development of Chinese Christianity progressed nearly in tandem with this policy; the church both benefitted from the nation’s reform and opening, while at the same time it made its own contribution to the process.

I  The Current State of Chinese Christianity

Elder Fu presented statistics showing the growth of the church in China in a number of areas: From over 16 million Chinese Protestant Christians in 2005, there are about 20 million today, and in cities like Shanghai, the proportion of well-educated young and middle-aged believers has risen steadily. Today there are over 55,000 churches and meeting points, 70% of them newly built. 2005 statistics show about 3,700 pastors and assistant pastors, over 5,000 elders, 27,000 evangelists, and 150,000 lay volunteers in churches throughout the country, with a new generation of young, dedicated and well-trained pastoral workers gradually moving into the leadership. By the end of 2007, the CCC/TSPM had printed over 43 million Bibles and set up a national distribution network with over 70 distribution points through the country.

In recent years nearly 3 million Bibles a year have been printed, including a variety of editions in new formats to meet the different needs of diverse believers. Elder Fu mentioned the Chinese Christian Bible Exhibition which travelled to Hong Kong, the U.S. and Germany, as well as special printing of an Olympic commemorative Bible for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

“Anyone on the mainland can easily obtain a Bible. The CCC/TSPM will provide sufficient Bibles wherever there is a need, including to those brothers and sisters who for whatever reason are not yet in relationship with us.”

There are now 18 seminaries and Bible Schools at the national, regional and provincial levels, with an enrolment of over 1,800 students and professional teaching staff of over 260. Over 1000 students graduate annually—a total of over 10,000 in the last thirty years. The new campus of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary occupies 200 mou of land, at an investment of over 100 million yuan, and will accommodate 500 students. In the past five years the CCC/TSPM has raised 35...
million yuan at home and overseas and initiated over 700 social service programs in over 20 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions which have benefitted one hundred thousand people. Chinese churches donated 150,000,000 yuan for relief aid and rebuilding following the Wenchuan earthquake; most recently the CCC/TSPM raised another 12 million for rebuilding churches in the disaster zone. Restoration and development of ecumenical relationships: Since the return of Hong Kong to China, contacts with Hong Kong churches, based on the "three mutuals" principle, have grown ever closer and more frequent.

II Continue to Carry Theological Reconstruction Forward

The greatly expanded challenges the church faces have led the CCC/TSPM to reflect anew on how to run the Chinese Church well. Elder Fu noted a number of significant results since Theological Reconstruction efforts were launched a decade ago.

1) Wider understanding among pastoral workers that Theological Reconstruction is helpful in biblical interpretation, in safeguarding a pure faith, in distinguishing truth from falsehood, in raising believers’ quality of faith, in spreading a message for the times, and in guiding the healthy development of the church;

2) A more profound faith reflection on real issues facing the church. Integrating theological perspectives such as “God is love,” with traditional Chinese cultural views and relating Chinese theology and issues that face believers everyday such as moral and ethical themes;

3) Welcome changes in preaching ministry. Sermons now include theme of concern for society as well as the Christian gospel of salvation, loving concern for others as well as “Christian abundance”;

4) Christian ethics as a means of Christian social service and an important entry point for faith witness and education in workplace ethics, family ethics and so on; and

5) A gradual shift from a narrow focus on personal salvation to care for others and loving concern for society, with a strengthening awareness of social responsibility and service, all of which improves the image of the Chinese church in society.

III The Church’s Response

But at a time of profound social transformation, the church faces both great opportunities and vast challenges. There is a need for more evangelists and pastors with good theological training. The demands for pastoral care have become quite diverse, and this poses increased demands on our pastoral workers, who must keep pace with changes in order to solve the real problems of believers. The rural church faces a drain as more Christian youths go to the cities for work, while many city churches have not yet begun pastoral care aimed at this group. Different levels of economic development between eastern and western China mean disparities in finances, pastoral salaries and church development. The church lacks a well-developed and effective management model. In social service work, the church lacks experience in many areas, including human resources, methodology, program management, etc., limiting further progress in social service work.

“With regard to those Christians in home worship gatherings that for a variety of reasons have not yet registered, as long as they observe a pure faith, do not deviate from the true way or follow heretical teachings, we will do all we can to unite with them, draw near to them, help them and serve them, striving to bring them with us on the path of observing the law, loving country and loving church, glorifying God and serving the people.”

Although our experience is insufficient and our ability limited, since God has called us, we must contribute to bringing about a better tomorrow for the Chinese Church. For
this, we must redouble our efforts in the following areas:

1) The three-self path is both the path along which Chinese Christianity must develop, and the impetus guiding it forward. Elder Fu thanked churches, lay people and colleagues in Hong Kong for their support and prayers, noting that context and history differ, but “as long as we maintain mutual respect, pray for each other, share with each other and support each other, we have a broad future of cooperation before us. ... Some Hong Kong churches are in contact with grass roots churches on the mainland and have open cooperation with them, and I am not at all opposed to this. But I hope that you will liaise with us before starting any work there, and that it will be possible for you to have mutual respect with the CCC/TSPM.”

2) Theological Reconstruction will continue to be the most important among the many important programs of the Chinese Church.

3) Based on a respect for the plurality of different historical traditions in Christianity, we will maintain and protect unified worship and follow the path of church unity. This, does not imply a return to denominations, a broadening of divisions or mutual attacks. We will always advocate mutual respect in matters of faith, “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

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4) Theological education will be improved based on advanced pedagogical concepts; funding will be increased, conditions improved and management standardized; research and curriculum strengthened. Seminaries will be built to improve training at home, and cooperation with the ecumenical church strengthened by sending students to seminaries overseas.

5) Close attention will be given to development of the rural church and churches in the middle and western regions, solving their practical difficulties.

6) Social service will be further expanded by following the biblical teaching that “it is better to give than to receive,” and spread the good Christian tradition of loving concern for society and benefit for humanity. In cooperation with the ecumenical church, resources and work will be shared to open up a greater space for social service.

Elder Fu quoted Bishop K.H. Ting’s hope for a new Chinese Christianity to emerge that “will have an important message to bring to the whole world.” This is precisely our vision of Chinese Christianity -- loyal to God’s command and the teachings of the Bible, able to develop healthily in the midst of modern Chinese society, upholding three-self principles, loving country and church, both rooted in Chinese culture and adapted to our present society, rational, ethical, stressing service and unity, a church pleasing to God and humanity, a church that glorifies God and benefits the people. This is the hope of Chinese Christians, it is the goal we strive toward, and it is our prayer.

* The three mutuals refer to “mutual respect, non-subordination and mutual non-interference.”
This article is an abridged version of a winning entry in an international essay competition organized by the World Council of Churches among Christian youth. Mr. Gu Mengfei has a History degree from Nanjing Normal University and a MA in Religion and Philosophy from Beijing University. He has served on the staff of the CCC/TSPM since 1996.

"Since the Chinese Christians long for more and look for yet greater things we hope to see in the near future a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions." C.Y. Cheng at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910.

Between 1807 and 1922 more than 130 different (foreign mission) Boards and Societies worked in China. Denominations with the western outlook and thought were replicated and denominational rivalries and mutual attacks became the hallmark of churches. There were differences, for instance, over how to translate “God” into Chinese, creating confusion even among Chinese intellectuals.

In 1913, Dr. John R. Mott paid a visit to China. He urged that “some more definite provision for united planning and effective cooperation was essential.” Prof. T. C. Chao, one of the first WCC (World Council of Churches) presidents elected in 1948 at the founding Amsterdam Assembly pointed out that “the (Chinese) Church is weak because she is still foreign and divided.” The National Christian Conference in 1922 in Shanghai, the first really representative gathering of Protestant Chinese Christians in China, expressed regret over the divisions caused by denominational-ism and called upon Western missionaries and church representatives "to remove all the obstacles in order that Christ's prayer for unity may be fulfilled in China".

In the early 20th century, unity was a hot discussion topic and practical efforts were made to pursue church unity. However, due to the strong denominational influence by the foreign missions and missionaries, as well as the unsteady social and political situation in China such as the war with Japan and the civil war, it was impossible to fulfill the purpose.

In 1950, Chinese Christians initiated the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Through the principles of self-governance, self-support and self-propagation of the gospel, we set out to build the Chinese churches, and break away from the old image of Christianity as a “foreign religion” in China. During the process of promoting the Three-Self principles, Chinese Christians belonging to different denominations found more consensus than differences on faith issues.

"Since the Chinese Christians long for more and look for yet greater things we hope to see in the near future a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions.” C.Y. Cheng at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910."
If you are interested in Chinese theology, read the Chinese Theological Review (CTR). CTR provides an excellent follow-up of theological discussion in China.

Find details on the Amity News Service website: www.amitynewsservice.org

United worship began to appear where believers from different denominational backgrounds enjoyed joint worship and service in a church which was often conveniently located and had better facilities. They formed a new congregation. While the new congregation still kept different forms of baptism, ritual and so on, it gave up denominational titles and structures, and did not emphasize denominational church order or doctrine. Mutual discrimination or attacks stopped. United worship was initiated at the grass-roots by churches in Ningbo and Wenzhou, areas in Zhejiang province, in the Spring of 1958. It soon was welcomed by many other churches throughout China. Since then, denominational structures and systems have gradually waned.

There are several reasons why Chinese Christians were able to achieve united worship. Biblically, Chinese Christians follow the biblical teaching on unity, and recognize that unity is first and foremost God’s gift through the work of the Holy Spirit. Culturally, peace, reconciliation and unity are the main characteristics of traditional Chinese culture. Confucianism stresses that “peace is precious. Protestantism in China has a short history and denominational identity has never been strong in the minds of Chinese Christians. Historically, the constructive efforts of Chinese church leaders laid a massive cornerstone for united worship. Contextually, it was one of the fruits of the Three-Self Movement, which helped Chinese churches to cast off foreign control and dilute the strong denominational influence that came with it.

The merger of theological seminaries provided a specific experience of unity for the churches. Twelve theological seminaries in East China originally run by different denominations were merged to form Jinling Union Theological Seminary in 1952 in Nanjing. Another seven theological seminaries in North China were merged to form Yanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1953 in Beijing. In 1958, with the launching of the Great Leap Forward Movement by the Chinese government, people were called upon to participate in all kinds of production work. Many believers were too busy to attend church activities, forcing churches to reorganize and share their resources. Thus, united worship came into being. God used the external environment to lead Chinese churches toward unity.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) halted Chinese Christians’ efforts at unity. All churches were closed, congregations were clamped down. In April, 1979, churches began to re-open. After suffering and covering up for ten years, hundreds of thousands of Christians swarmed into churches to praise God, to worship, to pray, to listen to sermons, to sing and to enjoy fellowship with their Christian brothers and sisters. They did not care about denominations, and churches adopted the worship style that could be accepted by most Christians. This not only continued, but also enhanced the practice of united worship.

With the rapid increase of Christians and flourishing of the churches, the China Christian Council was established in 1980. One of its significant purposes is to “uphold united worship; advocate mutual respect in matters of faith and worship, and the spirit of ‘bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ in relationships among churches.”

To consolidate united worship and promote post-denominationalism, CCC/TSPM produced a series of documents. In March 1983, “The New Hymnal” was published containing 400 hymns. It was the first Chinese hymnal that was suitable for use throughout the country. Another important document is the
catechism, or the “100 Questions and Answers on the Christian Faith” that was edited and published in July, 1983. It advocates: “on the presupposition that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God, where traditions are not uniform, there should be mutual respect, with uniformity neither demanded nor imposed on others”; following the biblical teaching “accept one another, as Christ accepted us.”

In 1992, the trial version of the Chinese Christian Church Order was promulgated, and in 1997, the revised version was brought into effect officially. In January 2008, the latest revised Church Order was approved by the joint standing committee of CCC/TSPM. The following articles were added: “Chinese Church should be built in love, and be united in Jesus Christ”, “Chinese Church insists on united worship…..on the basis of Three-Self principles, Chinese Church should seek the common ground while keeping the difference, respect one another, accept one another, and not attack and divide one another on faith, traditions and rituals”.

These documents manifest the spirit of unity but not uniformity, and seek to preserve diversity as well. Christians of an older generation may still feel connected with the heritage of particular denominations, but, in general, new Christians have no idea what a denomination is. Nevertheless, denominational traditions are still practiced because they are the spiritual wealth that God bequeaths to us. For example, baptism either by sprinkling or immersion is used depending on local churches’ tradition or the request of the candidate. The same is true of the Holy Communion, or the Breaking of Bread.

Bishop K.H. Ting has said that “We Chinese Christians have chosen the road of post-denominational unity, not because we are better than anyone else, but because we live in our particular historical situation”, and all in all, “we can only say that this has been a result of the leading of the Holy Spirit, who has allowed us to bathe in the ocean of God’s grace.”

The road to unity is still a long one. There is no blueprint for us to follow in the era of post-denominationalism. It is quite a new thing, and not perfect. Chinese churches have not yet developed such a rounded theology which might combine ecumenical principles and particular Chinese churches’ experience to sustain and develop the post-denominational era. The movement for the reconstruction of theological thinking, initiated in 1998 by Bishop K. H. Ting, encourages preachers and theological teachers to reflect and sum up the spiritual experience in Chinese churches and explore the way for their development. Ecclesiology is, of course, one of the main themes. This requires Chinese churches to go beyond post-denominationalism on the basis of mutual respect, towards the formation of the Christian Church of China as totally united, or at least, to strengthen the ecclesiological basis of churches in China.

With China’s further opening to the world, the revival of denominationalism by some foreign churches poses a serious challenge. We appreciate very much that more and more churches overseas respect our independence and have assisted us to build up our churches on the basis of equality, transparency and legality. The Chinese church needs the ecumenical movement, and the ecumenical movement needs the Chinese church. On church unity, we Chinese Christians believe that we should absorb all the good experiences, ideas and spiritual resources of churches ecumenical while offering our own unique contributions to enrich the ecumenical movement.

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The Rev. Dr. Sam Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, in his 2006 visit to China stressed that “When we think about Chinese Christians, we think about the future, because more and more Christians are realizing that if we are to live the prayer of Jesus Christ that all should be one, then we need to be post-denominational in character”, and “as a post-denominational church, you are in a class of your own, and we want to learn more from you.”
The earthquake in Wenchuan County, Sichuan province, on May 12 touched the heart of every Chinese person. In the month that followed, everyone gave their all for the area and the people affected by the disaster -- from the nation’s most senior leaders personally visiting the front lines of the relief effort, to the whole nation flying the flag at half-mast for the very first time; from the financial generosity of major companies, to disabled beggars giving all they have; from soldiers to volunteers, with donations of tents and other relief items to greetings and smiles. All have been moved by these demonstrations of love and sympathy.

In the midst of this immense catastrophe, Chinese religious organizations have been silently yet actively contributing to the relief effort in all kinds of special ways.

Religions’ involvement has been quiet. The public has rarely heard it reported on television or radio, in newspapers or other media. The ways in which religious organizations have participated have also been special -- aside from concrete actions such as donating funds, rushing to the scene and rescuing people, we have also seen them holding large gatherings to make offerings and say prayers for their compatriots who perished. In fact, many religious groups are still counselling survivors at this moment. In addition, words which carry strong religious connotations such as “prayer,” “thanksgiving,” “compassion” and “blessing” have appeared in public places with unprecedented frequency. It seems that this, too, has enabled the greater public to appreciate the role of religion in modern society.

This service on the part of religions is just one manifestation of their social function. Religion, which is a sociological system, is one of the most widespread phenomena in human societies. According to philosophers, “everything that exists is reasonable”; according to sociologists, “everything that exists has a function”. From an historical perspective, “in the development of human societies, religion has a value and significance that cannot be replaced by other social structures”. In traditional societies, it is fundamental to social cohesion, a means through which people understand and explain the world, and a standard by which social values are integrated, morality standardized and behaviour guided and judged.

With the waning and even loss of many of these functions in modern multicultural societies, religion is in one respect being marginalized, and gradually retreating from the core of society. Yet on the other hand, its function of helping individuals to make sense of life (and death, suffering, happiness, etc.) is being strengthened. That is, people need religion more than ever before due to their alienation from nature and other people, the contrast between their material abundance and spiritual need, and the feelings of loneliness and indifference that have accompanied modern society. The importance being attached to the inner cultivation and improvement of the individual and the even greater emphasis placed upon social service have provided food for thought and also opportunities for many religious organizations to re-enter the public sphere. Because of this, religious groups have felt duty-bound to take on the long-term, formidable and painstaking task of consoling the victims of this massive disaster.

Social service provided by religious groups has several distinctive qualities. First is its “regularity”. Aside from providing humanitarian aid for unexpected incidents such as natural disasters, religious groups also provide day-to-day care through their financial support for public welfare causes such as the disabled, AIDS sufferers, child drop-outs, widows and widowers, family relationships, psychological and drug counselling and environmental protection. Second is its “continuity”. This sort of service has always been a mission of religious groups, and a component of their longstanding traditions. Third is its quality of “transcending”; the social service rendered by religious groups transcends ethnic and national boundaries. On May 12, one slogan articulated the thoughts of all Chinese: “We are all Wenchuan people!” professed our willingness to share the burdens of the people of Wenchuan. But when Myanmar was struck by a typhoon, when hurricane Katrina hit the USA, when the tsunami occurred in the Indian Ocean and when the World Trade Center was attacked by terrorists, many of us were unable to transgress ethnic and national boundaries, and it was mainly religious organizations that expressed this sentiment. The fourth distinctive quality of the social service offered by religious groups is...
its “trustworthiness”. Because it is founded on their religious faith, the entire process of delivering the services is guided by it and carried out by religious believers, thereby increasing its degree of trustworthiness, and this trustworthiness is upheld by a track record of many years’ giving. Finally, I should mention its “gratuitous” nature (although this is not unique to religious groups). In line with such ideas as “being truly benevolent and witnessing to the faith,” “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” “mercy and charity” and “good deeds are rewarded”, religious groups do not seek worldly rewards. Since no great fanfare is made about their efforts on the radio or television, nor lengthy coverage in print, theirs is a silent contribution.

Of course, religious organizations’ involvement in social service is upheld by their faith. Religion has both personal and social dimensions. In the depths of people’s souls, religious faith is truly a personal matter, but because this faith necessarily has a social expression, it cannot be restricted to the field of private life. Therefore, religions can bring common values into play in public life, and the response of religions to the May 12 Wenchuan earthquake is a fine demonstration of this.

We believe that the May 12 earthquake will cause increasing numbers of people to recognise that whether in the rescue effort or in the reconstruction effort, a mature civil society needs to bring non-government and non-profit organizations into play. Their role is not only extremely important, beneficial and effective, but is also entirely necessary and indispensable. This is not only a pressing concern for the current rescue and reconstruction efforts, but is moreover an important sign and inexorable trend in China’s path to a modernized society. It is precisely for this reason that as non-government and non-profit organizations, the role of religious organizations is not only to share the government’s burden or compensate for their omissions and deficiencies; nor is it only to help out and share the work of businesses and all other types of organizations. It is more important that as with other similar organizations, religious organizations should become practical means for us to realize social values.

This has already been achieved in developed nations: many religious organizations are effective in mobilizing the broader public for social service and participation, and have been hailed as “the pillars of civilized society”. The public welfare programs initiated by religious groups cover a broad area, from poverty elimination, crime prevention and battling drug and alcohol abuse, to helping refugees, providing health and medical assistance, and developing culture and education … they are all-encompassing and pervasive. These acts of care and service bring tangible benefits to people of low income, low formal education, and the vulnerable, and are of great significance to them. These social functions of religious organizations have met with society’s approval, promoting the return of religion to public space and social life, and religious organizations have become as important a pillar of society as government and enterprise.

Compared with developed nations, there is still much room for China’s religious organizations to play a more active role in society. Compared with the huge absolute number of Chinese religious believers, the role played by religions remains very small, and their scope quite limited. While there are many reasons for this, we should remember the historically significant wording of the 17th Communist Party National Congress’ resolution “to give full play to the positive role of religious personages and the mass of believers in accelerating economic and social development”. This is not only needed for the development of Chinese society, but is also a sign of China’s social progress.

Gao Shining is a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in the Institute of World Religions in Beijing. This article was reprinted in Tian Feng No. 341 September 2008 from the journal Chinese Religions. It was translated by Emily Dunn and edited by Janice Wickeri.
Witness to 30 Years of Reform and Opening

By Lin Dunqi

Thirty years have passed since the policy of reform and opening went into effect. It has also been 30 years since churches were reopened for worship. As far as China is concerned, these 30 years have been crucial, a glorious thirty years. For me, they have been exciting and productive. As I think back on the past 30 years of reform and opening, my heart overflows with thanks and fervour.

Reform and opening paved the road for full time service

The Cultural Revolution smashed my dreams - schools closed, ideals became empty, industries were crippled, and the future was unclear. Out of boredom, I made the mistake of falling in love. Who could have known that it would be like the story of the cowherd and the weaving maid who were separated against their will? We lived far apart, bitterly waiting for nothing, sick with worry and grief. When my life was lonely, desolate and hopeless, the grace of Jesus Christ shone forth, redeeming me from the hopelessness of my life and from sin’s thrall, and bestowing peace, joy and contentment. I tasted God’s kindness and knew His beautiful goodness, and was willing to live for the Lord, considering gaining Jesus the most valuable treasure. In this life of abundant faith, devout worship brought rest to my soul, prayers and hymns shaped me; biblical truths caused me to praise heaven, to repent and be born anew......

The oppression of the Cultural Revolution finally came to an end, and we welcomed the light brought by the policy of reform and opening. In the course of bringing order out of chaos, the government re-instituted the policy of religious freedom. In 1981 I participated in the Christian lay workers training program in Fuzhou, then in 1990 attended the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary advanced pastoral course, which greatly expanded my breadth of mind, especially confirming the path for the continued existence and development of Christianity during the new period and settling my commitment to serve. In 1993 I was ordained by the Fujian Christian Council, knowing myself to be like a sacrificial lamb, tied onto Jesus Christ’s altar of sacrifice, with no possibility of escape. Had there been no policy of reform and opening, I would certainly have remained adrift in a society which rejected religion. It was the implementation of the policy of religious freedom which meant that my faith was legal and normal, and spurred me on to embark on a career of evangelism and service.

People help each other in times of need

Many outstanding cadres in religious work have been tempered by the policy of reform and opening, have bravely faced up to their own biases, cleansed themselves of ultra-leftist poisons, and loyally carried out the Party’s religious policies and guiding principles in this new era. They have withstood opposing currents and pressures, and opened up a new situation in religious work. I have endless admiration for these excellent religious affairs cadres whose loyalty and fearlessness mean that they experience for those around them a kind of absolutely sincere friendship, worthy of their role as advanced representatives of the Communist Party......

When the religious policy had been issued, some time in 1979, the united front department of the Jinjiang County Party Committee invited 9 people from Christian circles for discussions at the Anhai Qiaolian Hotel, in preparation for the restoration of the CC/TSPM organizations and work; I was the youngest of those invited. During this meeting, I was deeply impressed by the sincerity of the united front cadres and their respect for the Christians and their faith. In the meetings, a bold proposal was made for a team of young preachers to do a preaching tour throughout the province. The proposal was met with serious consideration and furthermore was adopted, an action which united the mass of believers, and which also laid a foundation for setting up a powerful CC/TSPM and creating a stable situation in Jinjiang.

Five churches were reopened in Jinjiang, and the religious affairs cadres worked extremely hard, doing their utmost, in order to restore the property rights.
from the work units occupying church property. They wore out their shoes visiting people, to find that the door was often shut on them; and were sometimes even contradicted and stigmatized. Shishi Church had been occupied by five work units, and it was very difficult to get its property rights restored. The religious affairs cadres proceeded with negotiations, succeeding only after a great deal of effort. The leaders of the work units occupying the property unexpectedly berated the religious affairs cadres in public, saying, “Who are you doing this for? Do you still have Party spirit or not?” The religious affairs cadre responded with the confidence that comes from knowing justice is on his side, saying, “The policies and principles are the life of the party. I am doing this for the Communist Party, so I will go through fire and water but not withdraw from this place!” The religious affairs cadres answered accurately according to the religious policies and carried out the policies impartially, dispelling the misgivings of many believers towards the religious policies as well as their lack of understanding of the government.

As the policy began to be implemented, most intellectuals and the upper strata in the church took a ‘wait and see’ approach. Some older brothers and sisters and those believers without much education -- enthusiastically came forward to help, coordinating with the religious affairs cadres in discussions to restore property rights. Because of this, they gained the respect of the believers, taking important positions in the church council. However, because of their limited education and Bible knowledge, they often hindered the work of theologically trained professional pastoral workers: improvements in the church’s governing structure were imperative. Surprisingly, the serious difficulty with the church administrative system and suggestions for reform came, not from the church, but from a cadre in religious affairs work who had stood with the church through thick and thin. Originally this cadre worked with both Catholics and Protestants. In order to get into his role and become familiar with the work, he worked with the CC/TSPM, doing diligent investigation and study in churches and meeting points at the grass roots. By so doing, he realized that the greatest problem in church and meeting point management at the grass roots was institutional. Thus, in a spirit of sincere friendship, he made suggestions for reforms to the responsible persons in the city CC/TSPM. His suggestions inspired them, and after several rounds of theological discussions aimed at reform of the church management system, the city CC/TSPM returned to the Bible, unified thinking, established “pastors govern the church” as a management principle, thereby raising the quality of church management and creating good conditions for building a harmonious church.

**Reform and opening arouses love for country and love for church**

Due to the implementation of the policy of freedom of religion, the religious lives of the great mass of Christians have been safeguarded and their spiritual needs satisfied. The love and fervor their faith engenders in them is then very naturally expressed in their everyday lives, particularly in love for the country and love for the people. There are several reasons for this: one is reciprocation for the government’s guarantee of a stable religious life; another is accurate theological guidance and the government’s provision of a service platform. In recent years, discussions on theological reconstruction have been initiated within the church; among pastoral workers, certain negative and backward elements of faith and inaccurate theological views have been corrected and positive revelation that glorifies God and benefits the people has been recovered from the Bible, thereby guiding the great mass of Christians in their conduct and motivating them to do good. Apart from this, the environment has provided excellent opportunities for the church to do good and benefit people. Since reform and opening, the church has experienced three stages - the return of properties and the restoration of worship; rebuilding the institution of the church; and raising its quality and reaching out to the community. Right now the church is in a period of turning towards society and showing it loving concern.
In terms of patriotic education, the Quanzhou CC/TSPM in which I serve has broken with the old view that ‘Politics is not a factor in religion and the national flag is not hung in the church.’ It upholds the ‘Law of the People’s Republic of China on the National Flag,’ displaying the national flag in the city CC/TSPM offices and actively initiating patriotic activities. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, a city churches sports meet was organized in which several hundred people participated, a spectacular and unprecedented event. To formally commemorate the 66th anniversary of victory over Japan and the defeat of Fascism, we hosted a forum and organized a television viewing. Every year on March 8, Women’s Day, we mobilize Christian women across the city to pray for world peace and for China. We have organized tours for leaders of city and county CC/TSPMs to the patriotic sites of Huang Hua Gang Martyrs’ Cemetery and Humen in Guangzhou, as well as the Three Gorges on the Yangtze River. And we have organized office staff and church council members, as well as the main church and council members to study the spirit of the 17th Party Congress and aspects of General Secretary Hu’s speech dealing with religious work. We make frequent visits to the Mintaiyuan Museum, the Maritime Museum and History Museum in Quanzhou and often organize visits for groups of believers.

Reform and opening has liberated our thinking - our views have changed, and the idea of active service to the community has taken hold. Over the last 12 years, we have organized Christian medical workers to go to mountain areas, rural villages and poor ethnic minority regions to offer free clinics, providing medical treatment to over 60,000 patients, resulting in a savings to them of medical fees totalling 2 million yuan. On holidays such as May 1st or May 4th, we hold activities on Fengze Square under the rubric of ‘Gifts from loving hearts,’ providing free medical consultations, hair-cuts, and bicycle and electrical goods repair; we have established consultation services in areas of law, medicine and marriage; some churches and councils have organized young people to visit homes for the elderly; and donate to orphanages and special needs schools; they volunteer to clean up parks; organize believers to take part in green activities to benefit the environment; donate blood every year ... ... The church encourages entrepreneurs to give back to society: Christian entrepreneurs and business people in Quanzhou contribute a sum estimated at over 100 million yuan to benevolent causes and public welfare projects. They also draw in foreign capital for poverty elimination and education, they construct roads and repair bridges, they divert water and dig wells, they build schools and help with education and so on, for donations in excess of 100 million yuan. Believers wholeheartedly support church proposals for such philanthropic activities as disaster relief or financial aid to needy students; churches at the grass roots level all actively donate to disaster relief, over the past calendar year, these donations totalled over 3 million yuan. Following the terrible Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan this year, the Chinese people responded in force; churches nationwide raised nearly 30 million yuan, an unprecedented outpouring of love!

In these 30 years of reform and opening, I have been blessed and I have been a witness. Without these precious 30 years, the church would not be in this fortunate situation of unity and I would not have this stable and good faith life. For this, I want to praise God above who provided the environment and who prepares the road ahead.

Translated from Tian Feng No. 343 October 2008 by Suzanne Row and edited by Janice Wickeri.
Chinese Youth Curious About Christianity

The following article is based on an interview with Rev. Guo Feng, Director for Overseas Relations of the Shanghai Christian Council and Rev. Fan Jinfang, Dean of Studies of Jiangsu Provincial Bible School in Nanjing. Guo Feng was studying liturgy and Fan Jinfang was studying Hebrew at the Minghua Seminary in Hong Kong at the time of the interview in August 2008.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in the number of youth attending church and both pastors and congregations are "growing younger". What are some of the reasons for this phenomenon?

Both Rev. Guo Feng and Rev. Fan Jinfang agreed that Chinese youth have a great interest in Christianity and are flocking to churches to discover more. They cited several reasons for this. There is now much more access to information about Christianity in universities. The fact that the study of religion is now well established as a course or as a department in all major universities in China has contributed to this growing curiosity. In the mainland, Christianity and religion are still considered "new discoveries" and with greater access to the bible and Christian literature, more interest has been stimulated. Students in colleges and universities are open to the influences of scholars and researchers. Most noticeably, Christian scholars or "culture Christians"* have had an influence on Chinese youth.

There are 4 million youth who graduate from Chinese universities every year. They face huge challenges. According to Guo Feng, Christianity is just one of many choices. In this sense, the youth are not so different from those in other big cities. According to Guo, between the ages of 18 and 35, most young people are still "roaming" or searching. After that, they return to the tradition that they are comfortable with. Despite the large numbers (in absolute terms), Christians still constitute a minority in China.

Rev. Fan sees the "youthful" increase in churches as quite natural. Because pastors are also getting younger they are better able to respond to youth and to attract them to churches. In Chinese cities there is increasingly a multi-cultural environment and youth are being exposed to different cultures, including post-modernism.

How is evangelism done, especially among the youth?

Evangelism is done on a face-to-face or person-to-person basis. Christians share the gospel message with their families, colleagues at the workplace or fellow students in schools and colleges. The Chinese church is evangelistic and even though there are no large public rallies, there are large gatherings in churches every year, for evangelistic purposes. Every Christian has many social connections and the message is spread through social intercourse. This has obviously been very effective -- the growing numbers in urban churches testify to this. In downtown Shanghai today, there are more than 20 churches and in the whole of metropolitan Shanghai, there are altogether 163 churches and meeting points.

Youth groups have been very active and at the Shanghai International Church, they run worship and praise services, bibles studies and reading courses on contemporary Christian literature. Guo Feng explained that books by Western authors ranging from C. S. Lewis to Rick Warren have been translated into Chinese and are available in commercial book stores.

There has been a lot of exposure to different cultures too. Rev. Guo Feng highlighted the fact that in China, people are experiencing simultaneously the
modernization process, globalization and post-modernism. Issues that are being debated in churches in the west are followed with interest.

**How do you ensure that those who visit churches will stay?**

There are not enough pastors to cope with the surge in new believers. Moreover, those who have been trained in earlier decades find themselves unprepared to cope with new demands from congregations that are more youthful and better educated. Human resource development is seen as an urgent task and a priority by the CCC/TSPM. Courses for pastors on psychological counselling have been conducted with help from overseas experts and professionals. Many pastors and seminarians have been encouraged to go overseas for further training. Churches have growing links with colleges and universities which provide courses on religious studies. In Shanghai, for instance, Fudan University and the Huadong Shifan University have worked with the CCC/TSPM to train pastors and church workers in courses such as the history of Christianity and biblical studies.

The challenge to the church is how to keep those who attend church interested and involved. According to Rev. Fan, getting involved in social service could be a way of sustaining interest in the church. She pointed out that while there are many who are materialistic, there are also many who seek alternatives. Social service or diakonia can be a form of Christian witness, responding to social pressures that are sometimes too overwhelming for people.

Rev. Guo Feng mentioned Bishop K.H. Ting’s call to Chinese Christians to serve society. He said, “According to Bp. Ting, as Christians, we are ‘servants’ and are called to ‘serve.’ Being engaged in social service is also a way for Christianity to gain acceptance and better understanding in Chinese society.”

One of the pressing issues, especially in big cities, is divorce. The divorce rate is surging throughout urban China. Between 1985 and 1995, the separation rate more than doubled. It had tripled by 2006. Divorce in China was 1.12 million in 2005 rising to 1.9 million in 2006, an increase of 7 percent over the previous year with 70% initiated by women. Reasons cited included personality clashes, extra-marital affairs and economic disputes. In Shanghai, it was estimated that an average of more than 100 husbands and wives in Shanghai split each day in 2005.

The Chinese Church frowns on divorce and the issue of remarriage is taken very seriously. Church members do not encourage those divorced or who have lost their spouses to remarry.

Pastors try not to interfere too much. Those who have acquired some training in pastoral counselling try to adopt new approaches but at present, most marriage counselling is done by non-church organizations.

“*The church is not a great social problem solver or leader,*” said Guo Feng, ”*but it can do more. The challenge is how to help develop a harmonious society. Christianity can make a contribution.*”

* The term “Culture Christians” has been used to refer to Chinese intellectuals engaged in the study of Christianity, who are sympathetic but not necessarily Christians themselves.
My Visit to Hiroshima

By Chen Sizhu

The “Pilgrimage to Hiroshima” has been organized by the YWCA of Japan for over 30 years, aiming to educate the younger generation in their country about peace. This is the fifth such journey made by delegates from the YWCA of China on invitation from Japan. In recent years, the YWCA of Japan has invited increasing numbers of Board members and young volunteers from China and Korea to participate, hoping that a strengthened relationship will lead to better co-operation in securing a peaceful environment in North East Asia. This year’s journey, themed “I am a seedling of peace”, was held between 14th and 19th August. Delegates also visited historic sites and sampled Japanese culture. The YWCA of China sent three delegates: Lin Yeh and Zhu Jing are volunteers from the Beijing YMCA and the Hangzhou YWCA respectively, and I am a young Board member from the Tianjin YWCA.

This was my first trip to Japan, and I could only think of the suffering and hardship of the Chinese people that resulted from the Sino-Japanese war, Japan’s official cover up of the atrocities and its refusal to apologize for its war actions, the delicate relationship between our countries and the difficulties any efforts at peaceful reconciliation had encountered in the past 50 years. I was filled with apprehension and curiosity: what kind of nation is Japan? What are its people like?

The opening ceremony took place on the 15th at 1 p.m. There were 94 participants from 9 countries. Aside from the 5 official delegates from China and Korea, there were overseas students studying in Japan from Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia, but the majority was Japanese high school students.

A pastor from Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima Province, shared a message on the topic of peace, sang a Japanese hymn and led us in prayers. A visit to the Peace Memorial Garden and Information Centre followed. Although there was mention of “The Nanjing Incident” in the Centre, it was limited to “Occupation of Nanjing by the Imperial Army”, “citizens of Nanjing were protected” and a few old photographs; the historical truth was substantially missing from the exhibition. Apparently the government and most of the population still do not have the courage to face and reflect upon history. Under the threat of powerful right wingers, the Information Centre has never shown the truth about the “history of suppression”. This deliberate omission of truth taints the credibility of the exhibition; it also causes insuperable damage for the younger generations of the 3 countries, thwarting their efforts to build mutual trust and understanding. I remember that the Curator of the Museum of the Nanjing Massacre, Mr Zhu Chenshan, commented on the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Information Centre’s view on peace. He said that it was centred upon their identity as victims and on anti-nuclear sentiments. It is a very blinkered, biased and fragile concept of peace for Japanese consumption, but this angle was never accepted by other victim nations in Asia. I left my comment in the Guest Book on the second floor: War is cruel and the people are innocent, face up to history and treasure peace!

As I left the Information Centre, I found myself in the famous Hiroshima Peace Memorial Garden. There was a large stone box placed in the middle of the horseshoe shaped memorial, filled with names of victims of the atomic bomb. This box had been replaced by a larger box in 1984, with the inscription “Rest in peace, the errors of the past will not be repeated!”

My group went to visit “the First Institute of Technology of Naval Self-Defense” in Etajima on the 16th. The YWCA of Japan invited a special guest to accompany us, the 84 year old Mr Kashiike. He was born in Taiwan and entered the college when he was 17. After graduation he served his country in the
invasion of China as an officer until Japan was defeated. He entered a theological college in 1947 and then worked as pastor to the Ushida Church. He took up missionary work in Turkey and travelled with his wife and family. He is now retired. He was explaining to us the devilish training they received in the college when youngsters were taught that the invasion of China was a holy war. They were fighting for the Emperor and to die on the battlefield was the height of honor; hence the soldiers did not help one another on the battlefield: letting your colleagues die while in combat was to allow them the highest honor. By helping a wounded soldier you were robbing him of the chance to become a hero! The days after the war were not easy for survivors like him, for they were looked upon as cowards or deserters. I could better understand why in some films, soldiers were depicted as having committed collective suicide before surrendering; they sacrificed themselves to militarism. I can still recall the photographs of the excellent young men in the Information Centre, none were more than around 20 years old. Having gained admission to the college by their outstanding achievement, they were all heading towards an abysmal end, and each would in turn become a sacrificial offering for this horrible militarism!

We Chinese led morning prayers on the 17th, sharing the message “peaceful co-existence” based on Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” I shared my thoughts with fellow participants: “63 years have passed, but it seems as if the smell of poisoned gas and rotting corpses lingers in the air of Hiroshima; I can almost hear the howling of 200,000 ghosts and of the 300,000 innocent Chinese who were massacred in Nanjing 71 years ago, and the suffering masses in Korea during the two wars. These painful and sad memories: one does not want to recall them, but they cannot be forgotten! No matter whether the cause is righteous or not, war slaughters humanity, and brings total destruction to any society!” By that time, many people were shedding tears. Finally I talked about how each of us should contribute towards peace efforts. Sometimes peace can be simply an embrace or even a smile! Peace does not begin from somewhere out there, it starts from within our own hearts. The world has too many wars, too much suffering and tears. We have to work very hard to bring change to this situation. Let us all become ambassadors of peace! Let us each become a seedling of peace, and bring the peaceful gospel to all the corners of the earth! Finally we recited the Bible passage in Japanese. After morning prayer we exchanged gifts. Our gifts were a Guizhou minority tie-dyed banner with the Chinese character “love”, to show we wish to bring peace through love, two pretty Chinese knots in red, and 3 copies of the Special Olympic Edition Bible printed by the Three Self Movement and Chinese Christian Council.

There are over 90 churches in Hiroshima and none of them ever lock their doors. In a very dainty home-like church, we met Pastor Yamane and his wife. He was very enthusiastic in answering all our questions. That church was built 58 years ago by local Japanese people. They have a congregation of around 30, mostly elderly people. Very few shoulder any duties in the church, and Yamane joked that he does everything from cleaning the toilets to writing up the bulletin. He spends quite a bit of time on the church kindergarten, which has around 70 children. The kindergarten supports the parish. He said that evangelizing in Japan is really difficult, perhaps due to the Japanese character. Seeing his heavy burden and the faltering church, I was filled with compassion for his toil. He said that he had never locked the church door in 40 years, so security is still pretty good in Japan!

On the 18th, I returned to the Peace Memorial Garden. It was raining lightly. I wandered over to the monument, and saw many people standing in silence in front of it. I lingered for a few seconds, taking another look at the inscription: “Rest in peace, the errors of the past will not be repeated!” Three elderly persons over 80 years of age approached the monument. One lady in a wheelchair cried out loud. Her companions tried to comfort her, but she was inconsolable, and they left hurriedly. I surmised that this must have reminded her of a loved one, maybe her parents, maybe her child, and tears welled in my eyes. The world has too many wars, too much suffering and tears. We have to work very hard to bring change to this situation. Let us all become ambassadors of peace! Let us each become a seedling of peace, and bring the peaceful gospel to all the corners of the earth! Finally we recited the Bible passage in Japanese. After morning prayer we exchanged gifts. Our gifts were a Guizhou minority tie-dyed banner with the Chinese character “love”, to show we wish to bring peace through love, two pretty Chinese knots in red, and 3 copies of the Special Olympic Edition Bible printed by the Three Self Movement and Chinese Christian Council.

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Seminar on Theological Education and Theological Reconstruction

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the movement for Theological Reconstruction, the CCC/TSPM and Nanjing Union Theological Seminary jointly organized a seminar on “Theological Education and Theological Reconstruction”. Held at the chapel of Nanjing Seminary September 23-25, 2008, the seminar attracted over 50 faculty from different seminaries in China. It was presided over by Elder Fu Xianwei, National TSPM Chair.

In his speech, CCC President, Rev. Gao Feng, pointed out that seminaries had the important task of producing personnel for the Church and for undertaking theological research. The seminar was a retrospective on the last ten years of theological reconstruction; it was a platform for the interaction and exchange of ideas and a collective effort in mapping out a beautiful blueprint for theological education and a systematic theology.

The three-day seminar discussed four major topics: “Theological Education and Curriculum”, “Theological Education and the Church in China,” “Theological Education and Chinese Culture” and “Theological Education and Social Responsibility.” Professor Yang Huilin, of Renmin University in Beijing and Professor Xu Yihua of Shanghai Fudan University took part in the seminar. Top government officials who attended the meeting congratulated the organizers and encouraged seminaries to continue giving importance to theological reconstruction in the future.

Summarized from Tian Feng No.343 October 2008.

eyes. Sixty-three years had passed, but the mortal wound still hurts, and it may be that it will never heal.

We were taken to the airport by staff of the YWCA of Japan, and as the plane was taking off, I blessed Hiroshima in my heart. I hope that she can keep peace for the world through her sorrowful past. May these historical mistakes never be repeated! As the plane climbed through the clouds, I could see the golden sunlight coming through the windows, and remembered the words of the Czech essayist Ludo Morris in No one is allowed to steal the sun: “There is a type of cloud that can block the sun permanently. This type of cloud is terrible, destructive, mushroom-like. This type of cloud will one day steal the sun from us forever. This type of cloud steals not only the sun, it steals also our life. It will wipe out all that is beautiful on this planet. We will never allow these terrible clouds to steal our sun. The sun is life itself, it belongs to all of us, and no one is allowed to steal it. The sun belongs to the children. May it always belong to us!”

This article from Tian Feng No. 343 October 2008 entitled “The Errors of History should not be repeated was translated by Cinde Lee.
On December 10th 2008, the CCC/TSPM commemorated the 30th anniversary of reform and opening with a forum in Shanghai. Chaired by Rev. Gao Feng, CCC President, the seminar brought together close to 100 participants from all over China. Mr. Luo Guanzhong and Rev. Cao Shengjie, Chair of the Advisory Committee of the CCC/TSPM, spoke about the importance of adhering to the three self principles in developing the Chinese church.

Jiangsi TSPM Chair, Rev. Li Bao Le and Henan CC president, Rev. Tang Weimin, representing the younger generation, spoke enthusiastically about how the 30 years' reform had given the Chinese church the opportunity to grow. Rev. Chen Yilu from Guangdong Seminary spoke about the impact of the reform policy on theological education -- many seminaries have been restored and a large number of church personnel who love both church and country have been trained. Seminaries provide the base for theological reconstruction. Rev. Wang Jun of Shaanxi CC/TSPM said that in the last 30 years of reform and opening, the Chinese church has grown a new image, bolstered church unity and developed church work on many fronts. The implementation of religious policy has brought about vast improvements in the working environment and status of church workers, strengthening church management. Exchanges with churches overseas have been very dynamic and the social role of Christianity has grown.

Elder Fu Xianwei, National TSPM Chair, pointed out that the Chinese church has "walked through the valley of death and experienced a resurrection." Reform and opening corresponds with what the people want and has given space for developing various aspects of Christian ministry. For the future, he said that the Chinese church should uphold the three self principles, run the church well, deepen theological reconstruction and work hard for the healthy development of the Chinese church. The church should continue to build itself, open new areas of work and pay more attention to improving the situation of rural churches.

Director Ma Ning Hong of the State Administration for Religious Affairs said that religious policy had matured over the last 30 years. The handover from the older to a younger generation of church leaders was completed this year. She hoped the new leadership will carefully consider how best to lead the Chinese church while continuing to promote the fine traditions of Christianity in China. She described the new leadership as united, hardworking, pragmatic and service oriented and made some good recommendations for future work.

In his closing remarks, Rev. Gao Feng said that the Chinese church has grown but is faced with many challenges including the lack of qualified personnel, etc. The Chinese church should have a good understanding of the situation of Christianity in China, be clear about its own mission and make greater contributions towards the building of a harmonious society.