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Dear Reader,

“I have seen the Lord” (John 20:8). This is the Season of Easter. The darkness of Lent has passed and we experience the joy of resurrection in the risen Christ. For Christians in every part of China, Easter is a very real, personal, and community experience.

China is increasingly becoming an urbanized country. The *Blue Book of Cities in China* (2009) reported that urbanization had reached 45.7% by the end of 2008: 607 million Chinese citizens now live in the 655 established cities and towns throughout the country. And, as Elder Fu Xianwei, chair of the national TSPM, notes in this issue that this shift has forced many to make significant lifestyle changes. The move to urban living has wrought tremendous changes in Chinese society; its impact on the church has been equally challenging. In recent months, the church monthly magazine *Tian Feng* has carried a variety of articles examining the consequences of urbanization, its challenges, and its possibilities for the future development of the Protestant church in China. In this issue, we continue to bring these to your attention.

In “The Rural Church Today and the Path Ahead,” Cheng Jinliang looks at past experience in rural churches, noting that, with the resurgence of regular church life following the Cultural Revolution, the rural church became the locus of tremendous vitality and growth in the Protestant church in China. Today, with the movement of so many younger and better-trained people to cities, the rural church may be losing numbers, suffers from inadequate finances, a lack of well-trained pastoral workers, poor management, and the prevalence of heresy. Like the authors of other articles in this issue, Cheng believes the future of the rural church requires building networks of mutual aid, pastoral care, and management districts in which smaller and larger churches could effectively pool resources and strengthen finances. Churches are strong communities and could help the larger rural society around them by becoming focal points of community and social service activities.

As urban churches have grown and prospered, many have begun various kinds of fellowship groups and outreach programs. And they have extended the hand of fellowship to the many migrant workers in their midst, who often turn to churches for help as they face hardship and loneliness far from home. Xu Qing recounts moving stories of migrants and the congregations that minister to them in the Hangzhou area.

Two articles on Christian concern for the environment round out this issue, providing evidence that Christians in China act out their role as stewards of God’s creation both practically and prayerfully.

This issue also includes excerpts from an interview with Mr. Wang Zuo’an, director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA).

As always, much credit for this issue is due to our translators. Photos are courtesy of tspm/ccc.org unless otherwise credited.

Your comments are most welcome.

*Janice Wickeri*
Reflections on Urbanization and Church Development

Fu Xianwei

One of the notable features of China's present development is the process of urbanization taking place. According to the Blue Book of Cities in China released by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) following the 2009 China Urban Development Summit, by the end of 2008, urbanization in China had surged by 45.7 percent: the total urban population living in China's 655 established cities and towns had reached 607 million. A total of 118 of these cities have a population of over a million, including 39 that have been labeled “mega cities.”

While this urbanization has been taking place, the Chinese Protestant church has re-emerged and developed in a healthy direction since the revival of religion thirty years ago. According to partial statistical data, the number of Christians in China has already surpassed 20 million, a more than thirtyfold increase since 1949. The demographics of the membership have changed tremendously as well, with a continuing influx of young people, intellectuals, and professionals from various fields. To accommodate the increase in the number of people attending church, there has also been an increase in the number of church buildings in China. Today there are more than 5.5 million church buildings in the country. More than 70% of these facilities have been built only recently. Some of these churches can seat only several dozen worshipers, while others have extensive buildings that can seat between seven and eight thousand. To go along with the increase in the number of Christians, there has also been a need for printing more Bibles. By the end of 2009, more than 50 million copies of the Bible had been printed in China. These statistics clearly demonstrate that the thirty-year period of Opening and Reform has been a period of rapid development for both Chinese society and the Chinese church.

When we reflect on questions related to the future development of the Chinese church, we need to keep two things clearly in mind. First, we need to understand that the church has legal protection under the law and the support of the entire society. And second, we should clearly understand the rapid changes taking place in society. There is a particularly keen need to have an accurate understanding of the process of urbanization taking place and the challenges and opportunities that urbanization presents to the church. In the wake of this rapid urbanization, the lifestyle of vast majority of the Chinese population has shifted from a rural to an urban way of life. Consequently, those who have made this shift have come into contact with new ideas, notions, and customs that have forced many to make significant lifestyle changes. All of these changes have had an enormous impact on both the urban and the rural church. The four points below summarize some of the impact of urbanization on the church.

The church will address real problems and challenges from a theological perspective … [that will] make it a better witness for Christ.

More and more people now shuttle between the familiar countryside and the unfamiliar city, creating new pressures on pastoral care work in urban churches. Because new migrants to the city face work...
The Church Today: Rural and Urban

pressures, drab spare time, and other emotional challenges, they have an even greater need to develop community than do permanent city residents. On most Sundays, urban churches have many people coming for the first time, something that gives these churches the appearance of flourishing. Many urban churches, however, do not have the resources to handle the pastoral care needs of this large influx of new people. Urban churches not only need to be concerned with the spiritual care of these newcomers, but they must also be concerned with the living conditions of new residents and do whatever they can to help them adjust to the city.

The rapid modernization of cities has caused a great deal of pressure, anxiety, and loneliness for new residents. The pace of urbanization, industrialization, and the resulting social divisions has increased urban residents’ feelings of loneliness and alienation. The fast pace of urban life along with its social competition can make urban residents feel physically and emotionally exhausted and tense. The widening disparity between the rich and the poor and the strong urge to accumulate material possessions often causes people to lose heart. Because the Christian faith has a clear concept of human sin and offers the possibility of a new direction in life, it can aid people in dealing with pressures and provide them with comfort and hope. Consequently, with the many needs facing recent urban arrivals, it is vital for the church to proclaim the message of the gospel. The message of the gospel can help these people move from a sense of worthlessness to a positive, vigorous outlook on life; the message of the gospel can help these people face the hardships and challenges of life; and the message of the gospel can enable them to deny themselves, to follow Jesus with sincere humility, and to serve others.

With urban development has come an increase in the knowledge level and cultural attainment of urban residents. As more and more young intellectuals are entering the church, they are fast becoming an important focus of ministry for pastors, especially in the area of preaching. Although the problem of the disparity between the large number of believers and the shortage of pastors continues, there is an urgent need to embrace updated pastoral care approaches to meet the pressing present situation. Pastors are faced with the challenge of improving the level of pastoral care in order to guide believers to a higher level of spiritual maturity.

The development of convenient transportation and accessible technology has given Christians many choices. Because of the widespread development of transportation, both in the cities and in the countryside, Protestant Christians can freely choose where to worship on Sunday. This ease of transportation often means that Christians do not stay in the same church, which in turn increases the challenges of pastoral care. The development of the Internet and other forms of electronic media has also presented new challenges for pastoral care. The ease with which the younger generation can access information from a wide variety of sources provides new opportunities for learning. At the same time, however, we should also note that the wealth of information readily available makes it hard to separate the good from the bad, includes many one-sided views on issues, much negative information, ideas not suitable for the development of our society, and some material that is even heretical. So for all of its positive potential, the ease of accessing information also holds the possibility of challenging the growth of wholesome faith, of a healthy spiritual life, and of a positive perspective. From a pastoral care perspective, this ease of access to information challenges the task of helping Christians widen the angle of their vision of the Christian faith, of increasing their ability to discern truth from error, of defending the orthodox faith, and of raising the quality of their faith.

The above four areas are all challenges facing the Chinese church which have arisen as a result of...
of urbanization. But it could also be said that these challenges are opportunities for the church to grow. In order to effectively respond to these challenges, I think the focus should be on promoting the following three tasks:

**Continue to support Theological Reconstruction and strengthen the work of pastoral care.** It is crucial to incorporate the fruits of Theological Reconstruction as we focus on preaching that is authentic and relevant to our times. At the same time, the urban church needs to strengthen and refine its pastoral care to focus on the spiritual needs of the “new arrivals,” i.e., the migrants coming to the cities seeking work. This pastoral care should include addressing and helping with the difficulties that these migrants experience in their daily lives. Related to this, the church needs to enhance the cohesion of the local congregation and expand the unity among churches. Through various media, the church should also address the many practical problems facing Christians and suggest ways for dealing with these problems.

**Strengthen the work of lay training in order to enhance the quality of clergy and believers.** The Chinese church today must not only focus on numerical growth, but also pay attention to raising the quality of believers’ faith. In order to do this, the national TSPM/CCC and their local branches both need to use a variety of training programs that focus on diverse groups, different districts, and various administrative levels. To consolidate and strengthen the church at the grass roots, the effort to strengthen the work of training of clergy at that level should be expanded. At the same time, in order to achieve a higher level of clergy effectiveness, when there is a need, the church should establish contact with churches overseas and utilize professional expertise in training young clergy in the areas of psychology, marriage counseling, and church administration.

**Strengthen the social service ministry of the church and thereby improve society’s image of the Christian faith.** The status of the church in society depends on its actions in society. As the process of urbanization has unfolded, urban churches have already developed a strong foundation with a good economic base. Urban churches need to develop a plan for intentionally participating in social projects in the larger society so as to put the teaching of the Bible into practice as well as to enhance the social image of the church. This is a vitally important avenue for the urban church’s ministry.

The process of urbanization in China will take time, and as it evolves new problems and challenges will continue to arise. This continuing process of urbanization will also continue to have an enormous impact on the Chinese Protestant church. But as it does, the church will steadfastly adhere to its Three-Self principles, promote Theological Reconstruction, continuously liberate its thinking, update its concepts, and raise its awareness of the needs in society. The church will address real problems and challenges from a theological perspective. These efforts will promote the advancement of a harmonious socialist society that is in the process of economic and social development. They will also promote the healthy development of the Chinese church and make it a better witness for Christ.

(A speech given by Elder Fu Xianwei at the annual meeting of the Shanghai Religious Society.)

*Translated by Kurt Selles from Tian Feng No. 362, February 2010*
The Rural Church Today and the Path Ahead

Chen Jingliang

In 2006, the well-known director Gan Xiao’er made the film “Raised from Dust,” a straightforward record of the lives and faith of rural Christians in China. The director’s own take on the film was: “The film depicts the struggles of the flesh and the peacefulness of the soul. This is the normal state of existence of ordinary Chinese Christians in the rural areas.” Coincidentally, Shanghai University Professor Cao Yuanming’s oil painting “Rural Church” drew a great deal of attention at the 2007 Fourth Chinese Christian Art Exhibition. When the artist spoke about the motivation for his creation he said: “The social status of China’s farmers and the pattern of ownership of the means of production doubles the farmers’ hardship. The comparison between the actual church buildings in the countryside and the elaborate and lavish “true cathedrals” of the cities is a distressing one. As an artist today, one feels called to express love and concern for one’s own people by showing love and concern for the least within society.” These sentiments led this writer to reflect on the rural church.

The Current Situation in the Rural Church

“In close-knit rural society, churches exhibit a community function not often seen in urban churches. Rural believers are often family and friends, affording them the opportunity and time nearly every day to come together and share their feelings or read the Bible. They may be inspired by, and influence others, singing catchy hymns. Christians in rural communities can pray for one another when they are ill; help one another out in production; and offer assistance to those in need. Christianity can not only promote harmony and good relationships, to a certain extent it can also alleviate and supplement the deficiencies of public service.” (Zhang Yaojie: “Thoughts on the Culture of Rural Protestant Christianity.”) However, there are also a number of worrying circumstances in rural churches today.

Prevalence of heresy

Due to the fact that in some areas the religious policy is not adequately understood, or because some management departments think registration means they must manage and be responsible for churches, it is difficult in some areas to register religious venues. Some local people cannot make a clear distinction between religion and heresy, and because the pastoral presence in some rural churches is weak, heretical cults run rampant.

Inadequate training of pastors

In rural churches and meeting points especially, there is a shortage of religious leaders and their level of education and training is often inadequate. The number of those with formal theological education is extremely limited. In the majority of churches and meeting points, volunteers are responsible for the work of the church. Very few of these volunteers have gone through formal training, and their study of biblical knowledge has been far from systematic. In addition the salaries of pastoral workers in the rural church are quite low, and their time and energy is limited. Some churches cannot properly accommodate seminary students.
school graduates, or they can offer work, but no guarantee of a livelihood, even though the churches lay heavy burdens upon them. Thus the predicament: “A horse cannot run on an empty stomach.”

**Self-Management should be strengthened**

The management structure of the post-denominational church has been inadequate. The charters of the two national organizations indicate a relationship between Christian Councils and Three-Self organizations at all levels as that between leader and led. The rural church structure has been influenced by the Chinese patriarchal system, and is lacking in management and control mechanisms. These factors all affect unity within the rural church, leading to abnormal activity during gatherings and the impossibility of developing its work in an orderly way. This damages the image of the church and cripples the centripetal force it may otherwise possess.

Currently Chinese society is strongly advocating new rural construction. How the rural church, under these circumstances, can better integrate with society and improve its image through strengthened self-construction is a pressing question that calls for much thought.

**Looking Forward to a Vibrant Rural Church**

**Build a flexible rural church leadership training system**

The rural society is still one that goes to work when the sun rises and rests when the sun sets. These times of rest could be used to have related church organizations integrate existing resources to engage in training in biblical knowledge study, church music, and church administration, including financial management training. Of course this could also involve training for healthy marriages and homes and the mental health of children left in villages by parents who have gone to work in cities. One the one hand this could improve the quality of lay volunteers in the churches, and on the other it would allow the churches to better serve and care for the community.

**Build a mutual aid mechanism to provide a guaranteed livelihood for rural evangelists**

Currently, extremely low salaries are the norm for China’s evangelists, especially in rural areas. This creates a situation in which seminary graduates do not return to the countryside, or return to face poverty. Many churches would rather maintain the status quo with volunteers rather than employ a seminary graduate, in the belief that a graduate would only add to their financial burden. If there were a mutual aid system through which rural pastors were guaranteed basic sustenance, then the rural churches could keep talented people and there would be hope for future development in the rural church.

**Build an administrative model appropriate to positive church growth**

Bishop K.H. Ting’s call during the 1980s for a “reordering of relationships,” and for “the church to become the church,” along with recent voices calling for a “focus on the ecclesial nature of the church,” remind us that contemporary Chinese society is demanding that the Chinese church build up the church as an institution, along with its corresponding belief system.

This writer hopes that in the near future the rural church will be a church fellowship that holds high only the Bible; that is filled with vigor and life; a church worthy of the multitudes of prophets, apostles, church fathers and religious reformers who came before; a church in which clergy and lay believers are modern and civic-minded, live according to holy values, and together form a team to manage the church; that it will be a Chinese rural church that provides the ethical and spiritual driving force for the construction of a new Chinese countryside.

*Translated by Derrek Arce from Tian Feng No. 362, February 2010*
Pastoral Work in the Countryside
--The Impact of Urbanization

Zhang Yuanlai

China is undergoing rapid urbanization. This means fast development for city churches but has also brought or may in future intensify difficulties and challenges for rural churches. Writing from the perspective of a church worker who has gone from a rural church to a city church, I suggest strategies for pastoring the rural church in this age of urbanization.

Rural churches since the revival of religion

The revival of Protestant Christianity that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s took place mostly in rural churches. During this time, city churches also grew, but not to the same extent as rural churches, since society was mostly comprised of people living in the countryside. People responded with enthusiasm to the new opportunities that came with the start of the policy of Reform and Opening. The economic and political reforms and new developments in society brought a fresh lease on life to the rural churches as well. At the time, over 80% of the nation’s believers were from China’s interior.

As China has urbanized, a huge number of farmers has thronged to the cities: migrant labourers, university graduates who have remained there, and others who have managed to move to cities by a variety of means. Although in one way, revival in city churches today is an extension of that of rural churches, in certain places, it is an undeniable fact that pastoral work is in chaos, and numbers are dropping.

Strategies for rural church pastoral work

Churches have failed to use pastoral work strategies that can keep up with changes in society. I would recommend the following strategies for dealing with the decline in the rural church:

Pastoral work by extension

Revival in city churches had its origins in the countryside. A great many believers from country churches moved into the city, but they were still country church people or members of rural churches. In Guangzhou, for example, approximately 85% of believers are not actually from Guangzhou originally. In that church, some people have received good pastoral care, and some have even emerged to be key volunteer workers in the city church. But there are others, however, who succumb to the worldly environment of Guangzhou. Rural churches, then, should continue to care for believing workers who migrate to the city, following them up regularly and building friendships with them. Or they should seek help from the city church to care for the faith needs of these new city folk. Another advantage is that believing workers can also attend to the needs of the churches back in their hometowns.

Values Alliances

Early this year, the author visited a rural church in Anhui province, in an area where there was almost nobody under the age of 60, whether believer or nonbeliever. But the elderly believers took the initiative to organize themselves into a values-alliance type church fellowship, joining together to help one another farm and uniting to assist elderly residents who were without other support, Christian or non-Christian. During the quiet season in the agricultural year, they gather for study and visitation, sharing the gospel and building up the church. Even though most young people have left the village and the actual resident population is declining, the church continues to grow. A church building has been built and...
A distinctive church culture is developing. After the Sichuan earthquake the year before last, the church became the biggest donor among all local entities. During the blizzard of 2008, they also helped elderly people rebuild homes that had been destroyed by the snow.

By having those few believers who remain in the villages pull together in small groups as a kind of alliance, supporting one another in both the life of the church as well as in agricultural and technological production, the church becomes a type of local rural cooperative. I believe that the current rural market’s decline is a gift of God to the rural church in providing a critical turning point for its development.

**Care for society**

The local government is not able to deal with all aspects of rural issues such as supporting the elderly and caring for children. Groups in society such as churches, on the other hand, are able to do good works to supplement the work currently being done to address such problems. In this way, the church’s contribution to society brings even more glory to Christ than building churches does.

With pastoral care as the focal point, rural churches can join with city and town churches, taking a centrally located church as the nucleus, with pastoral care providing the links among them. They can then pool the resources of each church to advance charitable works and gradually form a significant church charitable entity. When charitable work in the local area is well done, the church in that area will become more effective and united.

**Skills training**

The city offers many opportunities for work, but it is not the only path of opportunity for rural people. Because of the church’s distinctive character as a fellowship, it has the advantage in terms of greater resources for development. The rural church should consciously search out local resources and offer training to believers in skills appropriate to local development. Enabling believers to set up such enterprises in their hometowns will enable the churches to retain people.

**Church management by district**

Rural churches would do well to function around larger towns or a central church, implementing an administrative management system comprised of area-style networks suited to the local situation. Each district should hold a monthly meeting for church workers. Resources can be shared, people can learn together, encourage one another and exchange news, combat heresy, enable greater cohesion among churches, and strengthen the pastoral care provided in the churches.

**Building the institutional church**

Rural churches do not necessarily all have fully developed Christian Councils and Three Self organizations. But there may be an organizational model even more appropriate for rural churches; given the organic friendship that exists on the local level, a sort of Council could be formed among local churches, a networking mechanism with pastoral care as the link. And those who can give shape to this bond of friendship in local churches are the local church leaders.

In situations where Christian Councils and Three-Self organizations cannot be established, these networks will fulfill a similar function and church resources can be integrated. The practical impact will be to allocate and administer pastoral resources in a coordinated way. All this must be built on a foundation of leaders who love the Lord, and are virtuous, loyal persons of good conduct and good repute.

**Churches should guide meeting points**

The integration of churches and meeting points...
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points is a concrete realization of the organizational structure described above. Churches at the township level should serve as a focal point for smaller churches and meeting points in their area. The central church can join with the meeting points under it, helping with pastoral care.

Teaching Teams

Rural churches differ from city churches in that they don’t necessarily need the highly structured fellowship of a city church. In the rural church, fellowship groups are often formed as people help one another in their daily lives. Because population is scattered and believers are few, meeting places are dispersed over a wide area, and good preachers are often lacking. To address this problem, rural churches can organize all the good evangelists in an area within town or county boundaries to establish a Teaching Team. These Teachers will preach at worship services in churches and meeting points. During the slack season they will conduct preaching tours and run simple lay training classes. During these training courses, they can also identify and train others who can serve.

The local churches should intentionally provide Teachers with opportunities for study and ongoing training, as well as an evaluation system. They will be sent to help with pastoral work at the invitation of local churches and meeting points or at the direction of church organizations. Through church networking mechanisms, pastoral workers or members of Teaching Teams will receive a stipend.

Helping one another with pastoral care

The Apostles’ Creed says, “I believe in the communion of saints.” This is not only a communion of faith, but of unity and mutual help. Regardless of whether we view it as a teaching or as a function of the church, rural churches need to emphasize friendly interchange among churches. Rural churches can draw on the concepts discussed above of providing pastoral care by extension to expand their relationships, establishing contact with city church ministries, such as mutual visits, preaching invitations, and training, while city churches can run retreats, etc. for country churches, in order to integrate church resources within a broader scope, and establish networking mechanisms that will facilitate church expansion.

Church Funds

The churches tend to be stingy in their care for church workers. Those who preach the gospel must not serve for financial rewards, but in the same way, we should not deny evangelists the guarantee of a basic living allowance just because we are tight with money. This will affect the service of the church worker. In order to improve church conditions, it is first necessary to renew our concept of ‘church’; then the church organization can establish a church fund, such as a pastoral fund. Church districts can raise or collect funds to guarantee basic living for evangelists. We must understand that talented people are more important to the church than are buildings.

In conclusion, this author would like to say that the decline in the rural churches is inevitable because of crises and challenges inherent in a changing society. However, rural churches need not become weak. In fact the transformation of society in the countryside actually provides us with a rare opportunity for rural church development – the opportunity for the rural church to revive itself in showing its value in taking up charitable work, and in reviving itself, to take on greater social responsibility. As churches carry more responsibility within society so they are also revitalized. Then the future of the rural church will be as bright as its past.

Translated by Suzanne Rowe from Tian Feng
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* Jiaoshi, or Teacher: a lay position similar to a Deacon in some Protestant churches.
We Must Also Care for Migrants

Xu Qing

Our church is situated in the Hangzhou Bay new district, Cixi County, Ningbo District, Zhejiang Province. This is an industrial park district developed in recent years, and vast numbers of migrant workers came here from rural areas of other provinces. At present, Cixi County has a population of about 2 million, made up of half local residents and half migrant workers, which means that there are one million migrant workers in our midst. Our church has a Sunday congregation of over 200 people, half of them migrant workers: we call them our “migrant” brothers and sisters. They come from all over our country; from places where the economy is less advanced and life is much poorer… these migrant workers are people who need the care and concern of our church.

In our church, we call our ministry among fellow believers and catechumens “visiting.” This work includes visiting new believers, those who are sick, those who are weak in faith, and believers with family problems. Depending on the need, visitors share Bible readings, offer prayers and comfort, and may even offer suitable financial assistance.

Migrant workers normally earn about RMB $1500 per month; in rare cases they may earn more than $2000. When their children get sick, or start school (very difficult as their parents’ registered residence is elsewhere), they have no family nearby to rely on, and turn to the church for help. These believers, like other migrants, usually cook, bathe, and sleep in a single rented room 8-10 meters square, regardless of whether they are single persons or a family of three. Some construction work sites are quite far from city areas and the migrant workers live in temporary sheds of around 15 to 20 square meters put up by the site bosses. Six to eight single men or four couples share one shed; couples put up canvas dividers around their beds to form small “rooms.” We visit all migrant workers in our church if we know where they live. Through visiting, talking, and listening to their stories, the church is able to understand them better. They tell us:

We wish those farms we slaved over would fetch better prices, so we could sell easily and our children could be like city children, wear new clothes, and snack on the potato chips they love; so our elderly parents wouldn’t have to work so hard in the fields for a few pennies anymore. Some of us have forgotten our spouse’s face, our children’s loveliness, or our brothers and sisters. We no longer know those who once lived so close; we can’t hear the sighs of our parents yearning for us through the long dark nights. For a better life, we chose to leave home and work far away. I long for Sunday, when I can go and worship at church. I can praise God there. God’s love melts away my exhaustion and misery…

God has gathered them from all over the country. As Jesus said to his disciples so long ago, “You give them something to eat” (Luke 9:13).

One couple in their fifties from Anhui came here to work about seven years ago. When they first arrived, a motorcycle crashed into their bicycle, which was parked at the roadside on a winter day. The biker got off his bike and shouted at them and beat them up. It was quite close to the new year, and one of our church workers learned about it and gave the couple several hundred yuan to tide them over. He even took off his winter coat right there and then and gave it to them. This couple has more than once recounted this incident to me in tears. I was so moved I cried with those who cried.
Each Mid-Autumn Festival, we organize a fellowship gathering for migrant workers with fruit and moon cakes, so that even if they are far from home, they will still feel the warmth of their family in Christ. At the end of each year, the church sets aside some money for elderly believers and migrant workers, to give them a little financial help. When others are all enjoying their new year, we want them to feel the true love within Christ, and the love their brothers and sisters have for them.

Although migrant workers make up half our congregation, the composition of the migrant group changes completely every two to three months. All the familiar faces are gone and we see new faces everywhere. In the past few years, only ten or twenty migrant workers have managed to stay with us. We have no way of knowing how the brothers and sisters who have left are doing. As the hymn says, we meet for a short while and are separated for long periods, but we will not forget we are all within Christ, and we will bless you all in Christ… Because of this, we have set up a faith enquiry team for each Sunday to help migrant workers find answers in faith and in life. They can ask questions about the sermon, they can tell our colleagues about their family, work, or life problems. Our colleagues try their best to answer, and they pray with them. Some migrants make it to our church only once, and we never see them again, but the church tries to give timely response to their needs when they are with us.

There is another problem with visiting migrant workers: they work long hours and have no fixed day of rest. A “statutory holiday” is a bit of a dream or luxury to them. Not having a fixed day of rest means they may not make it to gatherings, and many more cannot come to Sunday worship. We rent or borrow venues close to their work places, and hold Sunday evening gatherings where they are, asking them to lead the singing and prayers, while our colleagues provide the sermon.

Migrant workers come from all over China and their backgrounds vary a great deal. Some of them do not understand even the basic elements of faith, such as repentance, being born again, prayer, and Bible readings. Some have been influenced by heresies. Generally speaking, we need quite a bit of time before we can understand what they believe, so that we can plan how to address any errors through sharing and visits. We don’t always have that chance, however, because just as we begin to know them better, they move on.

Superficially, it seems that migrant workers have been forced by circumstances to come to cities to work, but in fact, they have been sent here by God (see Ex. 45:5). We see this as an opportunity to evangelize and serve the church. God has given us the Great Commission, and at the same time God has gathered them from all over the country. As Jesus said to his disciples so long ago, “You give them something to eat” (Luke 9:13). We know very well that even if we are to give our all, their needs would not be satisfied, but we have the simple dedication of a child: O Lord, five loaves and two fish are all we have, but we give them whole-heartedly. Grant us your blessing! (See John 6:9-11.)

Translated by Cinde Lee from Tian Feng
No. 362, February 2010
Working to Save the Planet in Kunming

A Harmonious Church Reflects a Harmonious Society

“Then the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat … They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:6-9)

In the Bible, the prophets painted a beautiful picture of harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world. In real life, however, pollution of the land, air, and sea is wreaking havoc at an alarming pace.

In his keynote address at the Fifth China-EU Business Summit, Premier Wen Jiabao, speaking on the topic of developing a green economy and promoting sustainable growth, quoted from the World Conservation Strategy (1980): “We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.” He pointed out that if we are to leave future generations with a planet that is conducive to survival and development, we must set up a national economic framework that is low-investment and high-productivity, low-consumption and low-emission, recyclable and sustainable. We must transform our current mode of development and consumer models so as to set society on a path that will achieve productivity and development, prosperity, and a healthy environment.

In brief, humans have realized the harm in recklessly destroying the planet, and have started on the slow road to environmental conservation. Heads of nations are advocating a green planet and a green economy; people throughout the world are also actively responding, and striving to be environmentally conscious citizens.

Aside from trying to be environmentally friendly citizens, as Christians we should also look after society and our immediate environment. This is something that all Christians should consider. It is also one of the issues that the staff at Kunming Trinity International Church often thinks about. Through constant reflection and conscientious attempts, the pastoral staff here has realized that Christians not only help set standards of civility in society, but also pioneer new cultural philosophies. Christians must not only implement but also model the culture of environmental protection that is being advocated across the world at present. To this end, Trinity International Church has organized the following conservation activities:

**Picking up litter in the Western Hills tourist area**

In May 2008, we organized an event to “climb the Western Hills, gear up for the Olympics, promote environmental friendliness, and advance harmony.” More than 600 Christians responded to the call and headed to Kunming’s Western Hills to pick up rubbish. Donning red T-shirts printed with the Chinese characters for “Jesus loves you,” they set to work in the depths of the forest. The participants ranged from ten-year-old children to seniors of the grand old age of eighty! Armed with tongs and trash bags, they attacked the 20-kilometer trail of trash that...
Christian Concern for the Environment

greeted them and left the ground spotless. When they reached the summit, the pastor led the brothers and sisters in song, prayer, and Bible reading. They chose passages relating to conservation, thus sharing God’s word and promoting environmental awareness at the same time. The event not only aided bonding within the church, but also raised awareness of the need to walk and talk environmental protection.

Distributing environmentally friendly bags at Christmas

It is our tradition here at Trinity International Church to give Christmas presents to our members. So what did we give for Christmas 2008? After discussion at various church meetings, we finally decided that in order to promote environmental protection and reduce plastic waste, we would produce a batch of environmentally friendly bags with the words “Merry Christmas” and “Trinity International Church” printed on them. These were then distributed to the Christians and spiritual seekers who attended our Christmas services. In this way, as we celebrated Jesus’ birth, Trinity International Church also proclaimed the need to protect this planet that God has created. At the heart of our message of an environmental friendly culture are the ideas that the church moves along with society, that Christians’ fortunes are tied to those of the times, and that environmental protection starts with the small things -- including all the small things that Christians do.

Contributing to Kunming’s “Four Creations and Two Attempts” campaign

2009 saw the attack phase of Kunming’s “Four Creations and Two Attempts” campaign. The “four creations” referred to creating a city of national ranking in the four areas of parks and gardens, hygiene and sanitation, environmental protection, and civilization; the “two attempts” referred to Kunming’s efforts to become listed as a “city of national ecological importance” and to receive the United Nations’ Habitat Award. By way of supporting the campaign (which was headed by the Municipal Party Committee and the Municipal Government), pastors and preachers linked it to God’s creation in sermons on multiple occasions, preaching that as God’s people, Christians should fulfil their obligation and responsibility to protect the environment. They urged the Christians of Kunming to do their bit for the “Four Creations and Two Attempts” campaign and encouraged them to start with the little things like saving energy and refraining from spitting on the ground or littering and by using disposable chopsticks or plastic bags.

Teaching the Bible’s view of environmental protection

The natural world God created in the beginning was good. It was inhabited by all kinds of life, secure and content under the Lord’s sustenance and the earth’s provision. However, humans’ unbridled destruction and squandering of natural resources has damaged the ecosphere and altered the normal climate. This has been in complete violation of God’s good and original intention, and has blasphemed the sacred duty of stewardship that God clearly gave to humans when he created them.

For this reason we must promote the notion of environmental protection in our churches, and help Protestant Christians to understand that protecting the environment is not only needed by human society, but is moreover a sacred duty entrusted to us by God. We must help them to comprehend that just loving God is not enough -- they must also love the natural world that God has created. Here at Trinity International Church we have taught environmental protection in Sunday church services and all kinds of other gatherings. We have also published articles on developments in environmental protection at home and abroad, on Christians’ efforts to protect the environment and on basic information on environmental protection through the Trinity International Church website and our weekly church newsletter, Living Waters.
From the depths of our faith, calling for people to recognize that our environment is deteriorating with each passing day

In response to the daily deterioration of our natural environment and human sin, our church started a 24-hour prayer watch. We called upon brothers and sisters to pray whenever and wherever for the countless forms of life that are fighting for survival, for the environment which deteriorates day by day, and for this planet upon which we all live. The prayer watch aimed to arouse Christians' spiritual concern around environmental degradation, and to engender an understanding that environmental protection is not just the responsibility of society and the government, but also of every world citizen—including Christians!

Practicing what we preach by striving to become advocates for and implementers of environmental protection

On the basis of our past experiences in environmental protection, we are of the opinion that as Christians we must start with our daily lives and the little things around us. We should change our lifestyles, reduce consumption, resist using products that are environmentally unfriendly, and model simple and restrained living.

From 2010, environmental activities will become a sustained and long-term project of our church. We plan to organize Protestant Christians to head into the city on a regular basis for activities such as picking up litter. It is our hope that these activities will help all Christians to understand that picking up trash is not just about cleaning up the environment, but also serves as a kind of declaration to others. More importantly, it can help Christians to appreciate that they are advocates for and implementers of environmental protection.

Mao Zedong once wrote “Do not say the strong pass is a wall of iron; with firm strides we are crossing it.” It is our hope that a culture of environmental protection will find its way into every Christian's heart, and that Christians will become a rising force for conservation. We hope that the green dream will not fade into a beautiful memory, but that Christians will lead lives that are in true harmony with nature. As shepherds of the church, we believe in doing our bit for environmental protection. Society needs it, and it is pleasing to God.

Translated by Emily Dunn from Tian Feng
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Thank You!
Love, Creation, Harmony:
A Christian Eco-Ethics from Genesis 1-3

Wu Libin

Genesis begins: “First, God made heaven and earth” (Gen. 1:1). This is the starting point of Christian faith as well as the beginning of God’s self-revelation. In the passages that follow we are shown a universe full of harmony, order, and love. Starting from Genesis 2:4, the main focus is on humans, created by God in God’s image and likeness and placed in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8), which is a harmonious, beautiful, friendly world and a miniature of the initial state of creation. Here there is love between humans and God, among humans and animals and plants, and between humans; there is no boundary between them in this world of love. Humans can eat the fruit of any trees they wish except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; this is the first and only commandment that God set for humans in order to convey the truth: God is the of life and all that is needed for creation; the only One who truly knows what goodness is and what evil is.

When humans broke this commandment, the harmony and perfection of the Garden of Eden was destroyed; this destruction made all of God’s creation sigh and suffer until now (see Rom. 8:19-23). Therefore, it is fair to say that the destruction of the natural environment is the consequence of humans’ violation of God’s commandment. Based on this, if Christians want to establish an appropriate ecological ethics, they must be clear about the role and duty that God gave to them at the beginning of creation. In what follows, the author will further discuss some thoughts on chapters 1-3 of Genesis.

Embrace love: love for people and love for creation

Love is one of the most important attributes of God and a necessity of human nature; life is meaningless without love. From the beginning, Genesis posits three sets of relationships, God and humans, God and nature, humans and nature, close relationships of harmonious coexistence. Because their existence is a true realization of the will and the purposes of the Creator, namely harmony, goodness, and love, they are “good” in the eyes of God. In the Gospels, when Jesus was asked what the first and greatest commandment was, Jesus replied: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt. 22:37-40).

Thus, if one loves God sincerely, he must love his friends and all creation around him; this is the most profound reason for the universality of God’s commandment of love and the reason that we should love other species. As one scholar put it, “People who love God are capable of bringing creation to perfection.” This shows us that humans should love all that God has created. For since everything has been created by God, all God’s creation should be respected. St. Francis expressed his love and respect for creation in a unique way; he saw all creatures as his brothers and sisters. Not only did he love these creatures, but was grateful to God for them all. This universal sentiment and spirit of love for all creation is an extension of love for God.

Christians in China should participate proactively in the work of protecting the ecological environment.

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Prudent guardianship - a reasonable and prudent use of natural resources

From the Bible, we understand that there is no harmonious relationship between humans and nature because of the breakdown of the relationship between humans and God resulting from humans’ violation of God’s commandment. From this perspective, the whole human race is under the control of the power of the sin. It is well known that meeting basic human needs and expressing cultural creativity entirely rely on prolific, diverse, and dynamic stability in the natural world. In such a situation, the extinction of the ecological system is the extinction of humankind; because once natural resources are used up they cannot be regenerated. Thus, people should utilize those useful resources in an energy-conservative, restrained manner, and make efforts to replace them with renewable fuels and materials.

At the 15th APEC meeting, President Hu Jintao proposed an important initiative: the setting up of the Asia-Pacific Network on Forest Rehabilitation and Sustainable Management, known as the “forest proposal,” to combat climate change. Christians in China should participate proactively in the work of protecting the ecological environment.

Improving legislation

In the Garden of Eden created by God, humans lived harmoniously with nature, and could enjoy the scenery and fruits of nature freely and without care. They had no worries about sudden disasters or invasion, an example of God’s intention to grant peace and happiness to humans. Humans’ disobedience led to disharmonious relationships between humans and nature as manifested in current food shortages, environmental pollution, climate anomalies, greenhouse effects, and so on, which resulted from the broken relationship between humans and nature. Christians as God’s witnesses in this world are duty bound to bear the responsibility of protecting the environment.

Therefore, this author believes that the most effective and direct way method of dealing with this is to establish good laws and regulations to preserve the ecological environment and draft legislation to protect nature so that people have laws and rules to follow. The government organizations should step up enforcement of such laws and people who purposely sabotage the environment should be severely punished. Additionally, ecological legislation should not only be aimed at particular big industries and big factories, but at every citizen. All citizens should: 1) Faithfully comply with existing environmental laws and regulations; 2) Support political measures which are necessary for environmental protection; 3) Take responsibility for protecting the natural environment and put an end to things that have adverse effects on the natural environment. As Christian members of society, we should be even more conscientious in complying with measures and regulations for environmental protection promoted by government.

God created the world in love. The psalmist David said, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps. 19:1). David praises God’s greatness and wonder among ordinary things in our daily life. The psalmist’s respect and reverence for nature is in line with God’s intention for creation from the beginning. God created the Garden of Eden as a facsimile of a place in which humans and nature live in harmony. Therefore, if humans approach caring for the growth and reproduction of things in nature as if their aim was to restore the harmonious scenery of the Garden of Eden, they would experience in nature another kind of the Creator’s love and kindness. Humans and nature are naturally one entity—harmonious, unified, and mutually dependent. Only by ensuring harmony in nature, can humans enjoy lasting peace; only then can the nation implement its concept of sustainable development; and only through living in God’s love can harmony be made manifest.

Translated Mei-Fei Yueh from Tian Feng
No. 361, January 2010
Mr. Wang Zuo’an Speaks about SARA’s Religious Work

On January 5, 2010, Mr. Wang Zuo’an, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), gave his first interview since taking office in September, 2009 to a domestic Chinese publication, Oriental Outlook Weekly. After contrasting the Soviet and Chinese approaches of the past, Mr. Wang noted that with the implementation of the policy of Reform and Opening, and the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, China had gradually learned to approach religious issues with a scientific, objective, and rational attitude and had put forward a series of important ideas and policies, resulting in a specifically Chinese socialist theory of religion, opening up a new perspective on the Marxist view of religion. Excerpts from the interview follow.

On the difficulties in SARA’s work

With the profound changes in our society, coupled with the impact of complex international factors, many new situations and problems have arisen in the religious realm that require in-depth study on our part so they may be properly addressed. Religious issues are not isolated, but are intertwined with political, economic, social, cultural, and ethnic issues. Religious issues cannot be discussed in isolation and it is not enough to rely on the work of the Religious Affairs Department alone. Policy must be integrated within the process of reform and development, with the whole Party and people’s governments at all levels, as well as all sectors of society giving attention and support for religious work. Our greatest difficulty in religious work lies here as well.

I have been engaged in religious work more than 20 years, and I have experienced the shift from “cold” to “hot” as the social atmosphere for religious work has greatly improved. However, how to make party and government cadres at all levels give religious work its true importance, gain a correct view of religion, have an accurate grasp of religious policy, and properly deal with religious issues, so that the work of central government on religious principles and policies are effectively implemented, is still the greatest challenge we face.

On the state and religion:

China’s Constitution does not explicitly provide for separation of religion and the State, but the development of religious policy and religious laws and regulations embodies the spirit of state-religion separation, expressed mainly in three areas: First, the state respects the freedom of religious belief of citizens, protects normal religious activities, and safeguards the legitimate rights and interests of religious circles; second, the power of the state may not be used to support any religion nor to suppress any religion, state treatment of all religions shall be equal and without favoritism; third, religion must keep within the bounds of the law, and shall not interfere with the implementation of administrative, judicial, educational, or other state functions. Looking at the specific content of the principle of secularism, this differs both different from the history of church-state relations in our country and, in comparison with the principle of church-state separation in other countries, we have our own distinctive characteristics, so I have called this “a new religion-state relations.”

The starting point and ultimate goal of a policy of freedom of religious belief is to unite with those in religious circles and with the majority of religious believers, to enable religious believers and non-believers to unite for the realization of socialist modernization and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, our common struggle. Therefore, we cannot stop at separation of religion and the state, but rather move forward on that basis to pursue a relationship of positive interaction to achieve diversity and harmonious relations between religion and...
the State, a true “mutual respect in matters of faith, unity and cooperation in matters of politics.”

**On the growth of religion in China**

Generally speaking, in the process of modernization, a certain degree of growth in religion is inevitable; we need not turn pale with fright at the prospect. Many problems that have appeared during reform and development will be solved through a deepening of reform and a more scientific approach to development. There is no going back or relying on old methods to deal with such things. We cannot but take notice of the development of religion, but our concern is with normal versus abnormal development. Abnormal development is a violation of religious policy and laws. When religion hinders normal social order or incites religious fanaticism, it must be handled according to law. We cannot sit idly by, adopting an attitude of laissez-faire.

Here it must be emphasized that in measuring whether religious work is well done, the standard is not whether the number of believers is more or less, but mainly whether the Party’s religious policy is being implemented, religious activities are regular and orderly, and whether the religious sphere is united and stable, whether religion plays an active role in promoting social harmony, whether religious believers and non-believers are united in a common commitment to building socialist. Simply to use the number of religious believers as a measure of the effectiveness of religious work would certainly create problems.

The full text of this important interview will be posted on our website: amitynewsservice.org
New Leadership for Nanjing Union Theological Seminary

By unanimous decision of the Board of Trustees of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the following appointments were announced on March 1, 2010:

President of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary: Rev. Gao Feng. Rev. Gao is President of the China Christian Council and Chair of the Board of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

Executive Vice-President: Rev. Chen Yilu. Rev. Chen is Associate General Secretary of the CCC, Director of the Commission on Theological Education of the TSPM/CCC, and President of Guangdong Union Theological Seminary.

Vice-President: Rev. Dr. Wang Aiming. Dr. Wang is Assistant Director of the Commission on Theological Education of the TSPM/CCC.

Bishop K. H. Ting, who had held the position of President since the institution’s founding in 1952, will serve as Honorary President of the Seminary. The Board also accepted the resignation of Elder Ji Jianhong as Executive Vice-President, and the resignation of the Rev. Gao Ying as Vice-President. Both were recognized for their outstanding contributions over the years.

Prior to these announcements, the Board adopted a constitution and clarified the status of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary as a national institution of theological education directed by the TSPM/CCC and administered by the President of the Seminary, who is responsible to the Board of Trustees.


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