CHAPTER 5

Training for Ministry in China

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Marvin D. Hoff, executive director of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia, made his first visit to China in October 1982. Because China restricted foreign travelers to approved tour groups, his friends in Hong Kong creatively made him a group of one. He visited Nanjing and Shanghai. In addition to visiting with Professors Chen Zemin and Xu Rulei in Nanjing, he attended Sunday worship at the International Church in Shanghai and met with some leaders in the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement office in Shanghai.

With the 1979 opening of the first Christian church in Shanghai, the Peoples Republic of China, a new day for ministry in the name of Jesus Christ began in that country. Gradually, churches were reopened in the key cities of China. Shortly after the opening of the churches, the National Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) began to function and the China Christian Council was organized. As K.H. Ting reported in “A Call for Clarity: Fourteen Points from Christians in the Peoples Republic of China to Christians Abroad,” the Three-Self Movement “is a patriotic movement of Chinese Christians themselves,” and the “China Christian Council [CCC] has been established for the pastoral needs of the Chinese churches. It is
the church affairs organization of Chinese Christians.” Each province and many local areas in China have established similar organizations.

In September 1982 leaders of the church in Nanjing reported that approximately six hundred churches have been opened throughout China. Two or three additional churches are being opened weekly. Because the church buildings have been used for factories and offices, the opening of a church is sometimes delayed while the former occupants find new facilities.

Since the reopening of churches, it has become necessary to provideministerial leadership for them. Under the city or provincial China Christian councils, individuals have been ordained to ministry. Recently the council in Fujian Province ordained more than twelve new ministers. Their average age was sixty-five. They had received their theological training years ago. The China Christian Council chooses and ordains leadership for the churches, but it has been moving slowly in areas of polity, liturgy, and more formal organization. The China Christian Council calls this a time for mutual respect for the various traditions.

Center for Religious Studies, Nanjing University

The facilities of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary first began to function as the Center for Religious Studies of Nanjing University. The center opened in 1979 and has been staffed by the faculty of the seminary. The center has had three students, one having graduated with a master’s degree. He wrote his thesis on Teilhard de Chardin. The faculty gave him high marks for his oral examination. None of the three students is Christian. In addition to teaching the students, the center has sponsored five lectures at the university. More than a thousand students have attended these lectures. A course on the history of Christian thought has been offered in the university, and forty students were expected. The final registration totaled 120. On behalf of the center, several faculty members have prepared a Chinese work entitled, Allusions to Western Literature. It is being printed now. This work explains many literary references to Christianity, like the “Judas kiss,” in literature. Through the efforts of the center, several faculty members, with the help of seminary students, have translated the three volumes, The History of Christian Thought, by Gonzalez. This translation has been particularly difficult because there are no standard Chinese words for traditional theological terms.
Nanjing Union Theological Seminary

Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (Nanjing) was formally reopened in February 1981. The 1980 meeting of the China Christian Council decided to reopen the seminary. It has functioned under the sponsorship of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council, who supply its funds. In addition to receiving contributions from individuals and local churches, the Nanjing maintains its programs through rental income from the properties it owned prior to liberation. Since Nanjing was formed in 1952 through a union of more than twelve other seminaries and Bible schools, it is able to claim the rent from many properties throughout China. With the rental income and the contributions, the seminary has enough financial support for its programs.

Students

When the CCC decided to reopen the seminary, it looked to local and provincial Christian councils to recommend students for acceptance. More than 300 students were recommended for the first class, and 52 were accepted after taking the examinations. Eight students have graduated from the university or its equivalent and are enrolled in the three-year graduate program. The program is four years for nonuniversity graduates. The first class included 22 women. The churches recommended 180 people for the second class, and 20 were accepted after taking the examinations. The new class has 7 women. Between the two classes all but three provinces and autonomous regions of China are represented. The average age of the students is twenty-five, with thirty-five being the upper limit. Ten students are married. The majority of the students have not had much time to exercise leadership in their local churches because the churches have chosen young people for the training.

Faculty

The Nanjing unit has a faculty and staff of thirty-five people. Fifteen are teachers. Because the teachers are involved in many activities for the church, like serving on the provincial and national Christian councils, writing courses, writing articles, and doing research, they only teach one or two courses. The cultural courses, like history, geography, the Chinese language, and English, are taught by outside instructors.

Curriculum

In September 1982, the first class begins its third semester. The first semester was spent reading through the whole Bible because
the students had very little background in the scriptures. In addition to courses in Chinese, English, and Chinese history, the second semester included an orientation to theological education. The faculty has been developing a curriculum for the three-year program and one for the four-year program. The curriculum will include English, Chinese, world history, Chinese history, and philosophy. The theological curriculum will be divided into the traditional fields. Biblical studies will include introductions to the Old and the New Testaments; the history of Israel; studies of the Pentateuch, the prophetic literature, Psalms and Proverbs; the life and teaching of Jesus; Acts; the Pauline Epistles; and Old and New Testament theology. Church history will put a major focus on the history of the Chinese church from the Nestorians to the contemporary Three-Self Patriotic Movement and then will focus on four periods of church history: the Ancient (100-500), the Medieval (500-1500), the Reformation, and modern church history. Systematic theology will include an introduction to theology, both philosophical and applied; a one-year course on historical theology, which will use the three-volume *A History of Christian Thought*, and one year on contemporary theology; and pastoral theology, which will include pastoral counseling, homiletics, administration, and church organization. Although the format for the curriculum is similar to that used in the West, the courses will focus on understanding the gospel message in the cultural situation and circumstances of contemporary China.

The seminary has also included courses on the fine arts in its curriculum. A number of courses in music and painting will be taught. They will seek to bring the gospel message through the arts. Music courses will be taught in piano, violin, directing choirs, Chinese art, and other aspects of the fine arts. Ten of the present student body is specializing in the fine arts.

Although the present curriculum plan calls for subjects in pastoral theology to be taught in the third and fourth years, the first-year students did field work during their 1982 summer vacation. The majority of the students worked under the supervision of local pastors. Some led young people’s groups, some preached to smaller groups or directed choirs or did pastoral visiting. They began the new term discussing their field work experiences. Each student was expected to bring a written report from his or her supervising pastor. The seminary is seeking to develop a more systematic plan for field work. It is possible that most students will be asked to do one year of field work between their third and fourth years of seminary. If the student’s home area is underdeveloped, he or
she will probably be sent to a more developed area for field work experience.

Library

Nanjing has been rebuilding its library. The vast majority of books were destroyed by the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution. A number of organizations, including the FTESEA, have been providing books for the library. The FTESEA has provided more than four thousand titles in English, French, German, and a few in Chinese. Recently, the librarian ordered approximately a thousand additional books for the library. Presently, the books have been organized on the shelves according to the various theological disciplines. The seminary hopes to add a person to the staff to catalog the library. When such a person is added to the staff, the first step will be to revise the cataloging system being employed in Chinese universities for use in a theological library. The seminary has also begun to receive approximately sixty periodicals.

Presently, the librarian is exploring the possibilities of using a microfilm reader. Because so many materials regarding the history of the church in China are no longer in print, especially many periodicals, a microfilm reader would make it possible for the seminary to have available microfilms of these historic documents. If it becomes feasible to have a microfilm reader at the seminary, the FTESEA will coordinate the provision of the microfilms requested by the librarian.

Facilities

Nanjing has spent a great deal of time and money rehabilitating the facilities for its program. Three major buildings are now in use. One provides administrative offices, the classrooms, a chapel, and the library. A second serves as a dormitory for the students. A third serves as the center for the syllabus course and provides guest rooms. A fourth, but temporary, building serves as the dining hall. Plans have been made and an area is being cleared for building a new dormitory. This dormitory will include a dining hall. When the new dormitory is finished, the old dormitory will be used for the short term regional training program. In addition, a music practice building is being erected. This will house six or eight pianos for the fine arts department.
Syllabus

The seminary presently publishes a syllabus for local church leaders. Originally this had been envisioned as a correspondence course, but it had to be changed to self-teaching materials when more than thirty thousand people subscribed to the course. Eighty-five percent of the subscribers are from the rural areas, and most of them are lay workers leading house gatherings. Eight booklets have been published. The plan is to publish four per year. Each booklet has three parts: a Bible study, a section on church history, and practical guides for leading local church gatherings. The Bible studies have included general introductions to the Old and New Testaments, and studies on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Practical guides have included suggestions for doing pastoral work, hymns with a background story, sermon outlines, and guidance for preparing services and sermons. Some of the articles, like the Bible studies on Corinthians, will be printed in booklet form for continuing use. Each issue does contain a section for response to questions submitted by the readers. The editors use this section to answer the most important questions submitted. The seminary staff produces the booklets, but the fees paid by the subscribers cover most of the production costs.

Provincial/Regional Programs

Several of the local/regional Christian councils have conducted training programs for the leaders of their churches. Several months from now the Provincial Christian Council for Nanjing will conduct a two- or three-month short-term program on the Nanjing Seminary campus. Conversations have begun regarding the beginning of two-year training programs in the various regions of China. It appears that two-year courses will probably begin in the northeast, the middle, the south, and the west. The northeast expects to begin earlier this year at Shenyang (formerly Mukden). Originally, the program asked to be affiliated with Nanjing. After serious discussions, it was felt that the provincial and regional training programs would be better on their own. The Nanjing faculty is cooperating with these programs by giving lectures and supplying lecture notes and other forms of guidance.

As the regional and provincial training centers begin to develop, Nanjing Seminary sees itself as the national training center for the church. It speaks of training leaders for “tomorrow’s” church and having the four or five provincial/regional programs more
focused on training leadership for today. In this way, the provincial/
regional schools will not duplicate the work carried on at Nanjing. The seminary admitted a smaller second class because it expected a number of the students to be trained through the provincial/regional programs.