

## EDITORIAL

**O**n the evening of November 23, several religious Sisters were beaten up on the compound of the Catholic Cathedral in Xi'an. The incident apparently arose from a property dispute between the Catholic Church and the local government.

After the Revolution, the government took over the school, which the Church had run on the property. About two years ago, the school moved to new premises. The Church asked if the former school building could be returned to them. But without consulting the Church, the government apparently sold the property to a developer. In the 1980's the government had ruled that unused former church properties should be returned to the Church. About a year ago the Church initiated legal proceedings to get back the building. The decision of the court was due to be announced on November 25.

However, three days before the court decision, on the evening of November 22, approximately 30 young men carrying sticks arrived at the place and set up guard around it. About 8 PM a large excavator entered the property and began demolishing the building. People from the church went to exhort them to stop the demolition but in vain. That night much of the building was demolished, and the wall between the church and the school building torn down. The electrical power to the church compound was also cut off.

On the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the gang of youths returned to the demolition site. Apparently a shouting match developed between the youth and the Sisters at the church, which turned into open conflict. Brandishing their sticks, more than 40 youths surrounded the Sisters and began to attack them. When the police arrived, the gang of youth ran off, but the demolition of the building continued. The demolition stopped only after the Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau arrived and called for a meeting of all parties involved in the dispute.

Seventeen Sisters were injured during the melee, five so seriously that they had to be hospitalized. One of the Sisters may lose the sight of one eye, while another may suffer paralysis. The government paid Rmb 3,000 towards the medical bills for each

Sister in the hospital, and Rmb 30,000 for an operation needed by one of the more seriously injured Sisters.

After two days of negotiations (November 27-28) between only two persons from the Church's side, Coadjutor Bishop Dang Mingyan (the ordinary of the diocese, Bishop Li Du'an, was in hospital) and Secretary of the Patriotic Association, Mr. Li Boyi, and over 30 officials representing various government departments, it was announced that an agreement had been reached, that the disputed property would be returned to the Church if it paid the government a sum of 6.5 million Yuan (US\$ 803,000)!

Let's get this straight: 17 defenseless Catholic Sisters were beaten up by an armed gang, and the government, in what appears to be unseemly haste, presents an astronomical bill to the Church! What is going on here? Shouldn't the first concern be capturing the armed gang who beat up the Sisters? Who were they? Who hired them? Have any of them been caught? Why did the demolition take place just three days before the result of the judicial review was to be announced? Why did the government sell the church property to a developer without consulting the Church? Why is the Church asked to fork over such a large amount of money for property, which was theirs in the first place? There are a lot of strange things about this case, which call for further explanation!

In this issue, Gianni Criveller has an article on the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our centre. This is followed by two articles, which appeared in Chinese in our Autumn 2005 issue: "An Analytical View of China's Religious Laws and Regulations" by Prof. Ying Fuk-tsang, and "Procedures for the Establishment and Registration of Venues for Religious Activity."

In order to know the most recent thinking of the authorities regarding the Catholic Church, we have translated the speech of Mr. Ye Xiaowen, Director of the State Administration on Religious Affairs, given at the 7<sup>th</sup> Chinese Catholic Representatives Assembly in July 2004. This is followed by a chronology of major events in the Chinese Catholic Church for the last 25 years, compiled by Sister Betty Ann Maheu. We conclude with a page of the most recent statistics for the Chinese Catholic Church. Finally, we want to wish all our readers a very Merry Christmas and the happiest of New Years! (PJB)