

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## WCRP Conference Held in Beijing



Archbp. Fernandez

The International Council of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) held a meeting in Beijing June 26-30, 1986. 140 delegates from 30 countries took part, including three Roman Catholic Bishops: Archbishop Angelo Fernandez of Delhi, India, Bishop Quinn of Sacramento, California, USA and Bishop Remi Deroo of Canada. In an interview with Tripod on July 2, Archbishop Fernandez, who is president emeritus of WCRP, said that the purpose of the conference was to study ways to prevent nuclear war.

In his speech to conference delegates, Archbishop Fernandez pointed out that global military expenditure which amounts to over 3 billion dollars per day, or one thousand billion dollars per year, is greater than the total annual income of the poorer half of humanity. As for the contributions of religion to peace-making, Archbishop Fernandez felt that meditation and religious experience can serve as springboards for a new humanism and generate the ethico-moral energy necessary to continue the struggle for peace with justice.

The Archbishop advocated the use of daily meditation throughout the conference, which he himself coordinated. These meditations focused on mutual trust and acceptance. According to the Archbishop, meditation helps us to discover the true worth of the human person. Meditation allows one to achieve a stillness in the depth of one's being and to

plunge further into the Ultimate Ground of all existence.

The host organization for the conference was the CPPCC sub-committee on Religion, which includes believers from China's five major religions. CPPCC members attended all the dinners, so there was ample time for informal contact between them and the WCRP delegates. The three Catholic bishops attended a Benediction service at the invitation of Bishop Zong Huaide, Chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and Archbishop Fernandez, speaking at the service, made the point that it is better to start with informal people-to-people contacts with overseas Catholic organizations, rather than waiting for formal resumption of relations on the highest levels. When asked if he had any message from the Vatican for the Chinese Catholic Church, Archbishop Fernandez replied that he had not come as a representative of the Vatican but of the Catholics of India. The conference took place in Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

### New Priests ordained in China

The most recent issue of The Catholic Church in China (#15), which is published jointly by the Church Administrative Commission and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, carries news of recent priestly ordinations in China.

On November 21, 1985, seven deacons all recent graduates of Sheshan seminary which was re-opened in October 1982, were ordained to the priesthood in Shanghai's Xujiahui Cathedral by auxiliary Bishop Jin Luxian. The seven new priests had all been seminarians prior to the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and had persevered in their resolve to become priests throughout those years when the seminaries of China were closed. Two of the new priests were ordained for the Shanghai diocese and the others for dioceses in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shandong provinces.

On December 3, 1985, Bishop Liu Jinghe of the Tangshan diocese, Rector of Hebei's Shijiazhuang seminary, ordained Deacon Chen Huanzhang to the priesthood in the Shijiazhuang Catholic Church. Before the Cultural Revolution Chen Huanzhang had studied in Tangshan seminary. After the ordina-

tion ceremony, Bishop Liu announced that three other recent graduates of Shijiazhuang seminary would be ordained in their home dioceses: two for the Cangzhou diocese and one for the Hengshui diocese.

On December 8, 1985, Bishop Fan Wenxing of Hebei's Hengshui diocese ordained seminarian Fan Bingyi to the priesthood at the Jing Xian Cathedral. The new priest, aged 57, had been a student at Shanghai's Xujiahui seminary before Liberation. Having persevered in his vocation these many years, he finally completed his studies at the Shijiazhuang seminary last year.

On November 17, 1985, Bishop Li Xiting of the Chengdu diocese (Sichuan Province) ordained two seminarians, Ying Fujuan and Ni Zongwen, to the priesthood at Chengdu's Peace Bridge Cathedral. The two new priests had been seminarians before Liberation and had maintained their vocational aspirations for over 30 years.

On March 17, 1986, Bishop Fan Daojiang of the Nanchong diocese (Sichuan) ordained Zhang Shunyao as a priest of the Nanchong diocese.

### Religion as "Opium of the People" Revived

The most comprehensive statement to date of China's new religious policy has been Document 19 (The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period") issued by the Central Committee in March 1982. At the time of its publication, religious believers, both in China and abroad, were gratified to note the absence of any reference to religion as "the opium of the people" in this document. In the May 1 issue of the Red Flag, however, the phrase has once again appeared in an official Party organ in an article by Jiang Ping. Jiang is currently the deputy director of the CPC's United Front, and he reasserts "religion is the opium of the people" as central to and the foundation stone of the Marxist view of religion. He warns comrades who deny the narcotic effect of religion on the masses merely because the expression did not originate with Marx are offering an incomplete version of Marxist doctrine. While acknowledging that religious believers should not be pressured into accepting

such a view, he does not agree with those who view this key concept as a thing of the past.

According to the Academy of Social Sciences' magazine Studies on World Religious, #4, 1985, the question of religion as an opiate was also raised during the 4th Annual Conference of the Chinese Atheism Association, which was held in Chengdu in October of last year. Some participants felt that for the sake of unity among the people and to avoid offending the sensibilities of religious believers, the word "opium" should seldom, if ever, be used in reference to religion. However, it was also pointed out that this does not indicate any change in religion or its narcotic effect during this socialist period. On the other hand, a certain number of delegates felt that religion during the socialist period had undergone fundamental changes, and these believe that religion does have some positive effects. They have some good impressions of religious believers themselves. The report is quick to add, of course, that the positive effect of religion is to be found only within a particular framework and with limitations.

Jiang Ping's reassertion of "religion as opium" is no doubt a response to those intellectuals, such as those in attendance at the Atheists' Conference and Zhao Fusan at the April, 1985 CPPCC conference, who have a somewhat more positive view of religion or who feel that religion makes some positive contributions to society. At the CPPCC conference last year Zhao Fusan had stated that to view religion merely as "opium" is not completely scientific.