



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### NEWS ABOUT RECENT EVENTS IN HEBEI PROVINCE

Within the past year, a series of events in Hebei Province has caused Catholics living there a great deal of suffering and anguish. Two of their bishops died, while two more were arrested; an 'unofficial' seminary was raided by the police, who placed under detention and tortured five of the seminarians; the most appalling incident occurred in a traditionally Catholic village, which was attacked by a large force of police and plain-clothesmen, who littered the village streets with the dead and wounded. All these incidents were reported in some detail by Hong Kong's UCAN news agency during the past five months.

At the end of last year, Bishop Liu Shuhe of Yixian, Hebei was arrested in Beijing after meeting with a priest from the Philippines, who was visiting China. Bishop Liu, who is seventy years old, was finally released after two-and-a-half months in detention.

When Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Zhu Yousan of Baoding died last December, his funeral was attended by over 30 priests and 7,000 Catholics. The ceremony went off without incident. This was not the case when Bishop Francis Zhou Shanfu of Yixian died a few days later. Three days before his burial in Chunmuyu village, which is only 35 kilometers from Baoding, public security forces suspended bus services and closed off the two roads leading to the village. Many Catholic groups enroute to the funeral were turned back and some were detained by the Baoding authorities. Eventually, over 5,500 Catholics did make their way to the funeral, but only after the Bishop's relatives and local Catholics changed the place of burial.

A more serious incident occurred when Qingyuan county public security officers arrested 5 members of a seminary that was operating outside the auspices of the government approved Chinese Catholic Church in December. The seminarians came from Nanmanyang village. After their release, three of the five were re-arrested in early January. While under detention, the seminarians were stripped naked, beaten and forced to lie on a cold cement floor. They were also burned with lighted cigarettes. One of the seminarians said that their torture was ordered by two police officers, who have become notorious for their ill treatment of Catholics and for their abuses of power over the past two years. Superiors, however, continue to retain them in positions of authority.

On Christmas Eve, another Hebei priest was arrested while on a visit to Shandong province. There has been no news of Fr. Hu Duo since his arrest. On April 7th, Bp. Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding was arrested by police in Beijing and has yet to be tried or released. Bp. Jia was consecrated bishop in 1981, the first of several priests consecrated secretly during the 1980's, without government approval and having no affiliation with the government approved Chinese Catholic Church.

The most shocking event by far occurred in the village of Youtong, Luancheng county, on April 18th. Youtong lies about 30 kilometers south of Shijiazhuang. The police attack on this village, which numbers about 3,400 people, over half of whom are Catholics, left ten people dead, according to one report, 88 seriously wounded, and 236 injured. Another 32 villagers were arrested; their fate still remains unknown.

This tragedy was the culmination of events that began a month previous to the vicious attack. Of the 1,700 Catholic villagers, only 200 belong to the government sponsored Catholic Patriotic Association. The rest are known as 'loyal Catholics', which means that they are not members of the government approved church and practise their faith privately. After repeated attempts to secure the return of their church property (their church was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution) through petitions to local government officials and district leaders proved fruitless, the Catholics erected a large temporary tent-church on the former church property on March 17th. Government officials came several times to the site during the following weeks, demanding that the structure be demolished and forbidding the villagers to pray there.

On the morning of April 18th, 270 military vehicles, whose license plates were covered over, brought about 5,000 policemen, who surrounded the village and blocked all exits with trucks equipped with water cannons. After the crowds of people frustrated attempts to arrest the village priest and tear down the tent-church, the order was given at 4 in the afternoon for thousands of uniformed policemen, wearing riot helmets and armed with clubs, electric rods and bricks, to raid the village. The police attacked in force, filling the streets and swarming over the roof tops, clubbing the villagers indiscriminately, men and women, old and young. Even a crippled beggar did not escape their attention. The beatings lasted for two hours. After the carnage, the authorities prevented the injured and near-dead from receiving any kind of medical attention. Local hospitals were given strict orders not to accept any of the wounded. Two children died later from their injuries, and one sister had her eyes torn out.

Some members of the CCPA afterwards denied any bloodshed had taken place, but a Catholic source from the Shijiazhuang Public Security

Bureau reported that over ten people died, another dozen were arrested and over 300 were severely injured. Villagers themselves claimed that both aims of the assault -- to seize Father Pei, the village priest, and dismantle the tent-church -- failed. The priest was hidden by the villagers, and the tent-church remained standing after the attack. The villagers also reported the arrest of two sisters and the disappearance of 30 villagers.

The villagers also reported that three days after the clash, the police returned in force, and again on April 25th they conducted a midnight raid, in which at least two more villagers were hurt.

### A REFLECTION

The incident of armed suppression of Christians in Youtong village has spread great alarm among Christians and non-Christians alike. However, the Catholic Patriotic Association spokesman in Beijing said that the cause of the incident was "illegal activities on the part of the Catholics." Worshipping the Lord in prayer, breaking bread in the Christian community and offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass are the normal religious activities of the Catholic Church, which ought to be protected by the government, not suppressed by violent attacks of the security forces. Even if these activities were seen as "illegal," why should such severe measures be used in dealing with them? It is sincerely hoped that in the future the government will use more restraint when dealing with similar events.

The dead rest in peace, the wounded cry out in pain, and families mourn and grieve. How can those of us who are members of the same Body of Christ not likewise feel saddened? As St. Paul has written: "If one member of the body suffers, all other members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). We, too, should pray for the dead and wounded, feel with them in their sufferings, and continue to uphold the faith as they did. In this way we, too, "make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ" (Col. 1:24).

The glory of the Lord's passion penetrates the hearts of the faithful making them aware of the true meaning of Christ's suffering. Jesus endured an unjust trial, faced insult and ridicule, underwent the most terrible agony, and yet there was not found the least trace of hatred or anger in his heart; nor did he utter a word of complaint. As death drew near, he was only heard to say: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34) as he calmly commended his soul into the hands of his Father (Lk 23:46).

The mystery of the Cross reveals to us a new way, namely, to replace violence with love. Angrily laying blame on others and

attacking them for their unreasonable actions will certainly block all paths to dialogue and reconciliation. The mystery of Christ's incarnation and redemption have already paved the way for dialogue among men. Even now the Risen Lord still reveals his love for man through his church, and searches out all possibilities for dialogue.

Our hearts are pained and saddened by the Youtong tragedy. We pray for the dead and wounded. But rooted in the love of Christ, we pray also for God's mercy on those who persecute and oppress their fellow-man. For only in this way can we empty ourselves as Christ did of all tendencies towards violence and anger, and thus create the conditions in which a true dialogue and reconciliation can take place.

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#### **Meeting of Chinese Catholic Church in Beijing**

Bishops, priests and lay persons, including chairmen of the provincial branches of the Catholic Patriotic Association, met to discuss church affairs in Beijing from April 24 to 28. Attending the meeting were 52 bishops (8 asked to be excused due to ill health) and 15 priests and lay Catholics. The most important items covered were: 1. the content of Document #3, entitled "Strengthening Catholic Church Work in the New Circumstances", which is concerned with the implementation of the policy regarding Catholic Church property; 2. a re-ordering of work responsibility and relationships among the three Catholic organizations: the Bishops Conference, the Church Administrative Commission and the Catholic Patriotic Association; and 3. relations between China and the Vatican. The permanent diaconate was also discussed.

#### **Archbishop of Tokyo Leads Pilgrimage to China**

At the beginning of April Archbishop Peter Shirayanagi of Tokyo led a group of 25 Japanese priests and lay people on a pilgrimage to Our Lady's Basilica in Sheshan near Shanghai and to the shrine of St. Francis Xavier on Guangdong's Shangchuan Island.

#### **Bishop Lam of Macau Visits China**

During the first week of May, Bishop Domingos Lam of Macau, on his way to Beijing to attend a meeting of the Macau Basic Law Drafting Committee, stopped in Zhongshan, Guangzhou and Shanghai.

#### **TWO CHINA-APPOINTED BISHOPS ELECTED**

Fr. Zhong Quanzhang was elected Bishop of Meixian, Guangdong Province, last year and was consecrated by Bishop Zong Huaide on May 7, 1989. Fr. Jiang Taoran of Zhengding in Hebei Province was elected bishop in March this year and is to be consecrated on May 21, 1989.