

China Church Update

Bishop Han Tingbi of Hongdong Diocese, 1908-1991

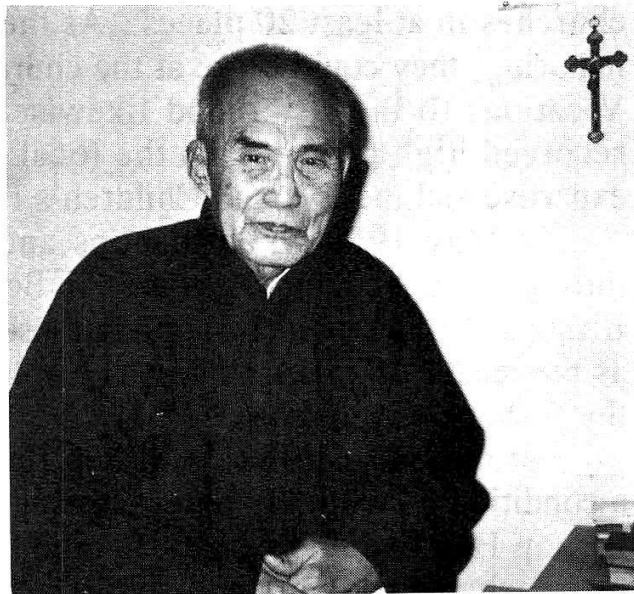
*by Anthony Lam
translated by Peter Barry, M.M.*

After several decades of a life firmly committed to serving God and other people, Bishop Han Tingbi, 83, of the Hongdong Diocese, Shanxi Province, died on December 21, 1991. The funeral was held on December 28.

Originally from Shandong Province Bishop Han's family has been Catholic for many generations. In 1900 the family moved to Shanxi Province to avoid the persecutions of the Boxer Uprising. Bishop Han was born there on February 2, 1908 in the village of Jiucun in Zhangzi County. His baptismal name was Francis. The bishop studied at Taiyuan Seminary and was ordained a priest on July 22, 1934, by Bishop Agapitus Fiorentini of Taiyuan.

After ordination, Father Han served as the rector of the minor seminary in Hongdong and as Prefect Apostolic of the Hongdong Prefecture. On April 18, 1950 Pope Pius XII raised the Hongdong Prefecture to the status of a diocese and appointed Father Han its first bishop. On June 25th that year, in Shanghai, Father Han was consecrated a bishop by the Apostolic Delegate, Antonio Riberi.

In the early 1950's the Xuanhua major seminary in Hebei Province was moved to Hongdong and together with the Taiyuan major seminary formed the Hongdong United Semi-



nary. Bishop Han was placed in charge. From 1950 to 1958 many priests from Hebei and Shanxi provinces were ordained by Bishop Han.

In 1958 when the Anti-Rightist Campaign intensified, Bishop Han was arrested and sent to feed pigs on a farm in Beiguanzhuang. Bishop Han worked at the pig farm for 20 years.

In 1979, the government released Bishop Han and he returned to his diocese. In spite of his advanced age Bishop Han gathered the priests and the Sisters together and for the next 12 years industriously set about opening churches, a minor seminary and a convent. He renovated or built new churches in at least 20 places. As the young seminarians were maturing, they could serve at the churches in their own diocese. Vocations to the sisterhood likewise flourished. The Sisters received high praise from the local people for their medical expertise and the Eye and Children's Hospitals they ran.

In May 1980 when bishops and diocesan leaders from throughout the country gathered in Beijing to set up the Chinese Bishops' Conference, Bishop Han also attended, convinced that as the leader of a diocese it was his duty to attend a meeting of the Bishops' Conference.

For more than 40 years Bishop Han had been in poor health, a condition he willingly bore referring to it as a grace from God. Bishop Han had many beautiful and lovable qualities. He was approachable, humble and self-effacing. He was unassuming and tireless in pursuing spiritual works. He had a gift for moving people and the ability to explain the most profound doctrines of the faith in simple language. In his personal spiritual life he considered prayer as his most important duty and set time aside monthly for a day's retreat. The priests of Shanxi Province considered him a role model. In February, 1991 Bishop Han provided for the consecration of his auxiliary bishop and thereby for a smooth transition of Hongdong diocesan affairs.

The steady development of the church in each diocese of Shanxi Province and the mutual respect and harmonious relations which exist between the open church and the church of silence is due in large part to the good example of Bishop Han. During his lifetime many people considered Bishop Han a saint; it is an honor he richly deserved.