

China Church update

Bishop Peter Joseph Fan Xueyan, 1907-1992

Bishop Peter Joseph Fan of Baoding, Hebei province, reportedly died in mid-April 1992. He was 85. Peter Joseph Fan was born on February 11, 1907 in Xiaouanting village, Hebei province, educated at the major seminary in Beijing and at the Pontifical Urban University, Rome. He was ordained a priest in Rome in 1934 and in 1935 returned to China to begin his priestly ministry. Consecrated bishop on June 24, 1951, he is one of the last Rome-appointed bishops.



Because of his opposition to the Catholic Patriotic Association and his loyalty to the Pope, Bishop Fan, in 1958, was sentenced to a labour camp. He successively served his sentence of hard labour in Laisui, Huanghua and Anxin. At the end of 1969 he returned to his home village but remained subject to supervision and reform through labour. Suspected of being counter-revolutionary, the bishop was arrested again on April 15, 1978, released on January 14, 1980 and re-instated as bishop of Baoding. He was re-arrested on April 13, 1982 and sentenced to 10 years in prison, "for colluding with foreign forces to jeopardize the sovereignty and security of the motherland." He was released from the Hebei jail in 1988 but placed under house arrest.

In November 1990, during a government crackdown against the unofficial church, Bishop Fan disappeared from Baoding and was not seen alive again. On the night of April 16, 1992, his body, reportedly bruised, was returned home under heavy police guard.

After having struggled bravely all his life for the Chinese

Church, Bishop Fan died, a long serving prisoner of conscience faithful to his beliefs. Thousands of people cut through the police barriers to pay their respect to this extraordinary figure of strength and faithfulness and uncontested leader of the underground church in China.

Bishop Paul Li Zhenrong, S.J., 1919-1992

The death of 72 year old Jesuit Bishop Paul Li Zhenrong of Xianxian, Hebei, has been confirmed by Chinese Church officials. Reportedly, Bishop Li died of cancer in late April, 1992.

Like Bishop Fan, Bishop Li was a member and officer in the underground episcopal conference inaugurated in Shaanxi province in November 1989.

Born September 24, 1919, of a Catholic family in Hebei, Paul Li joined the Society of Jesus in 1943 and was ordained priest on May 30, 1951. In 1955, his refusal to join the Catholic Patriotic Association led to his detention. In 1957, he was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment for counter-revolutionary activities but was released only in 1968. Arrested once again in 1977, he was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment and released in 1980. He was elected underground bishop of Xianxian in April 1983. When, after the inauguration of the clandestine Bishops' Conference, 1989, all office holders were arrested, Li managed to elude the police until December 1991 when he was discovered and arrested in a hospital in Tianjin. Since his arrest, his whereabouts had been unknown. No information has been given regarding where he died or where he is buried.

Arrests/Releases

On May 22 the Chinese government announced that three elderly Roman Catholic priests had been released from prison: Bishop Peter Liu Guandong, 72, of Yixian Diocese in Hebei Province, President of the clandestine Bishops' Conference; Vicar General Joseph Jin Dechen, 72, administrator of the Zhumadian Diocese in Henan Province and Vicar General Francis Wang Yijun, 75, administrator of the Wenzhou Diocese, Zhejiang Province.

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