

China Church Update

Religious Policy Needs Better Implementation

There have been several appeals lately for a better implementation of the Freedom of Religious Belief policy.

Religious leaders at the 8th Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) held in Beijing from March 14-27 urged the government to enact laws to ensure uniform and nationwide implementation of religious policy. Bp. Ding Guangxun (K.H. Ting) voiced concern about crackdowns without formal charges in some areas, occupying church buildings in the name of city development, and officials who, by regarding themselves as "warriors" against religion only drive it underground. Buddhist Zhao Puchu asked for a religious law to ensure the right of religious freedom, sometimes ignored by Religious Affairs Bureau officials. Of 2093 conference members, 58 were from religious circles.

In its April issue *Tian Feng* magazine faults a county level Religious Affairs Bureau in Jiangsu Province for violating the Party's policy of religious freedom. *Tian Feng* maintains that the RAB has no right to set a limit on the number who may be baptized, and that the Bureau should support, not hinder, normal religious freedom.

In the same issue *Tian Feng* decries the RAB's selling religious ID cards to believers for 2 RMB each. The RAB contends that without a religious ID card, a person is guilty of "illegally believing in religion". According to *Tian Feng* such "management" of religious affairs treats believers as "dangerous elements" who need to be kept under surveillance.

The Public Security Bureau in Fangcheng County, Henan, has been fining people caught attending unregistered churches 800 RMB each (a year's income). Those unable to pay are likely to have their property confiscated. The PSB prefers to fine rather than to send people to prison.

Underground Bp. Liu Died May 2

Paul Liu Shuhe, born in 1919, ordained in 1944 and jailed as a counterrevolutionary from 1958 to 1980, was consecrated on May 18, 1982. In the 1980s and early 90s Bishop Liu was again under detention. In April 1992, he escaped from an "old folks' home". He died on May 2 in Kangzhuang, Yixian county, Hebei, of heart failure. He was 74. His body was taken from a hiding place in his home village and buried on May 10 in a cemetery 120 km southwest of Beijing.

Although he was not among the bishops who attended the November '89 inaugural meeting of the underground Chinese Bishops Conference, he was elected its secretary general. He worked on priestly formation and trained many priests for different dioceses.

Government Approved Bishop of Nanjing dies

Qian Huimin (Joseph) Bishop of Nanjing, 82, died peacefully in a Nanjing hospital after a long illness. Bp. Qian was born in 1911, ordained in 1944 and consecrated bishop of Nanjing on July 24, 1981. He was much beloved by the priests, Sisters and Catholics of his diocese. His body was on view in the cathedral and his funeral was attended by hundreds of people. His ashes were later buried in the Catholic cemetery of Wuxi.

Young Protestant Martyred for his Faith

According to reports, about 30 Christians from the house churches gathered in the village of Taoyuan, Shaanxi Province, to hear three preachers from the neighboring village of Ankang. Ten members of the Public Security Bureau interrupted the meeting and began beating and torturing the participants. Among the most severely treated were the three preachers and two women. Lai Manming, 22, later died from his wounds. In an effort to keep a lid on the affair, about 100 persons with information on the incident have been threatened and arrested.

Bishops Consecrated in "Official" Church

Peter Luo Beizhan, born in 1911 in Tongliang County,

Sichuan and ordained in 1940 was consecrated bishop for the Chongqing diocese on May 14, 1993, in the Chongqing Cathedral. The main consecrator was Bp. Duan Yinming of Wanxian. A zealous evangelizer, Bp. Luo was sent to the countryside in 1959 for reform through labour. He was released only in 1982. From 1986 to 1992, Bp. Luo taught theology and was the spiritual director in the Chongqing seminary.

Bp. Liu Dinghan of the Cangzhou Diocese selected Peter Hou Jingwen, ordained in 1956, as his assistant bishop and consecrated him personally, on March 16, in the Xianxian cathedral. Bp. Peter Hou was born in 1926 in Xianxian. From 1952 to 1956, he studied philosophy and theology in the Xianxian seminary and in the Vincentian seminary in Beijing. The newly consecrated bishop has translated a history of the diocese and many books on spirituality.

Vocations Continue to Flourish

On March 25, seventeen Sisters pronounced their first vows before 800 people at Immaculate Conception Convent in Zhanjiang, Guangdong, (the former Beihai Diocese). Bp Anthony Zhong Quanzhang of Meixian officiated at the ceremony and 11 priests concelebrated.

Six men were ordained priests in Beijing on Sunday April 26. The ordination received a fair amount of coverage in the secular press.

Although Trinity (Shengsan) Village has no Catholic church and the 900 Catholics there see a priest only four times a year, vocations are flourishing. Eight young women from the village recently entered the nearby Zhanjiang Convent as aspirants. This village for 35 years was labeled "counterrevolutionary" for mistaking the PLA for robbers in late 1949.

Ethnic Minorities Studying for the Priesthood

Young men in Yunnan who want to become priests encounter a number of difficulties. Because they are often from one of the 25 ethnic minorities in the region, their first language is not Mandarin and their general education often deficient. Many

wishing to study for the priesthood had their studies interrupted by the Cultural Revolution. Before going to the seminary in Chengdu or Beijing, they must attend a one-year preparatory course in Kunming and pass the entrance examination. Studies include basic catechism, English, Chinese, geography and social and political subjects. The third preparatory class began in August 1992 with 10 students: 7 minority (Miao and Yi) and 3 Han.

Shenyang Seminary Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

May 11-14 marked the 10th anniversary of the Shenyang, Liaoning, regional seminary. Of the 70 men who have graduated from the seminary since its inception, 53 have been ordained to the priesthood. Forty priests returned to their alma mater for the anniversary celebration. Until Jilin opened its own seminary in 1987, Shenyang seminary served the whole Northeast. It now serves only Heilongjiang and Liaoning provinces.

In 1984, 15 of the 50 students came from Hebei, which then had no seminary. Currently all 24 seminarians, aged 18-25, were recommended by their bishops and are high school graduates. The rector, Fr. Anthony Du Shicai, hopes for an enrollment of 40 students in September. Younger priests to serve on the faculty is one of the seminary's urgent needs.

Releases

Underground priest Placidus Pei Ronggui, age 60, was released on parole on Mar 31, 1993. After police injured 350 Catholics in a raid on Youtong Village near Shijiazhuang in Hebei on April 18, 1989, Fr. Pei, a Trappist, went into hiding but was arrested on September 3, 1989 and was sentenced for five years for "disturbing the social order".

Bp. Wang Milu (underground) was released from the Dashaping labour camp on April 14, a year before his sentence was due to expire. Bp. Wang, who was born in 1939, was ordained a priest in 1980, even before he had completed the normal course of seminary formation. Six months later he was secretly consecrated a bishop. Since then he has ordained a number of priests and consecrated many bishops.

Church Petitions for Retention of Property

Since the Cultural Revolution the church in Yiliang, Shaotong Diocese, Yunnan, has been used for secular purposes. For two years Church authorities and the 6000 Catholics in the area have been petitioning the government to return the property, which is a historical monument, to the Church so that it can once again be used for worship. Since the property, located in the downtown area, is very valuable, the county government wants to demolish the church and develop the land. Bp. Chen Mushun, 91, refuses to accept any compensation. He is adamant that the church should remain where it is.

Vernacular Used for Liturgy

Although the use of the vernacular for the liturgy was only formally approved in September, 1992, at the National Catholic Representatives' Conference, the Mass in the vernacular was celebrated in Zhanjiang, Guangzhou Diocese as early as 1984 when the church reopened. In the Stone Church cathedral in Guangzhou, Bp. James Lin Bingliang and his clergy first used the Chinese Mass on April 10, 1993, this year's Easter Vigil.

Liturgical Training Initiated in Beijing

Preceded by a retreat day on May 8, the first Liturgical Training Class of the Catholic Church in China was initiated in Beijing, May 10-25. One deacon and 30 priests from all the provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions attended.

The faculty included Frs. Liu Guozhi, executive secretary of the liturgical commission, two priests, Yao Shun and Xing Wenzhi, who spent 3 months in Manila in 1991 studying the Vatican II liturgy, Thomas Law Kwok-fai and Anselm Lam Wing-kwan of Hong Kong. A similar course will be offered in Shanghai in the future. In June, Shanghai will print a Chinese missal for priests and one for the general public. It is still permissible, however, to celebrate the Tridentine Mass in China.

Christmas Celebration Among the Jingpo Minority

Five hundred persons attended Fr. Hong Minghua's Christ-

mas Mass celebrated among the Jingpo minority near the Burmese border. Fr. Hong is from the diocese of Kunming, Yunnan, and is perhaps the first Chinese priest to visit the mountain area since 1949. Shi Mazhao, the only Jingpo seminarian, is finishing his studies in Chengdu, Sichuan, and will be ordained later in 1993.

Diocese Petitions to Function Independently

Underground Bp. Song Weili, 80, is the leader of the Langfang diocese in Hebei. Some 80 percent of Hebei's 1,000,000 Catholics reportedly refuse to join the official church. In Langfang there are 75,000 Catholics, 3 priests, 9 major seminarians, 11 minor seminarians, 22 Sisters and 20 novices. The Catholics are seeking permission from the local government to function independently of the Catholic Patriotic Association. Permission has not yet been granted. Bp. Song was secretly consecrated bishop in 1981 by the late Bp. Fan Xueyan of Baoding and has been arrested several times.

Bibles Sold on Black Market

Bibles and religious literature, in short supply in China, are being sold on the black market at exorbitant prices. Presumably, these are being smuggled into China.

Witch Doctors Exceed Number of Regular Practitioners

According to Shaanxi Ribao, a Chinese newspaper, there are presently 1.8 million witch doctors in China, a number that exceeds the number of regular practitioners. Those findings are the result of a ten-year survey conducted by the director of the Mental Health Research Institute in Xia City, Hubei Province,

Regular English Mass in Shanghai

Christ the King church, conveniently located in downtown Shanghai on the site of the Catholic Intellectuals' Friendship Association headquarters, was consecrated in May 1993. The Mass schedule now includes one English and one Chinese Mass every Sunday. This is the first time, since the restoration of

Catholic activities in China in 1979, that Mass in English has been regularly scheduled.

Latest Statistics from the Shanghai Church

Shanghai now has 5 deaneries, with 60 churches, 40 young priests, 60+ Sisters, and 140,000 Catholics.

Priest in Zhejiang Rejected by Underground Catholics

Fr. Francis Wang Yijun, 75, appointed vicar general of the Wenzhou Diocese in the early 1950s, and imprisoned three times for his faith, was finally released in May 1992. Because Fr. Wang went to St. Paul's Church, the cathedral church of Wenzhou City, to say Mass after his release, a group of irate underground Catholics disrupted his liturgy. Fr. Wang has now moved 53 km south to Cangnan County.

Movie on Matteo Ricci

During his visit to Taiwan in May 1993, Ying Ruocheng, former vice-chairman of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, announced that he will soon begin filming a movie about Matteo Ricci with an Italian co-director. During the 1980's, Ying worked for the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the State Council. In recent years, he has scripted and directed many Chinese and foreign dramas. Ying Qianli, who went to Taiwan mainly to visit the grave of his father, sang the Hail Mary in Latin at the tomb. Ying Ruocheng was born into a Catholic family, and his grandfather, Ying Lianzhi, was one of the founders of Catholic Furen University.

China Relaxes Regulation on Studying Abroad

In mid-May the Chinese government announced that it was relaxing its prohibition on college graduates leaving China within five years of graduation. This prohibition started after June 4, 1989. In lieu of 5 years of in-country service, the new regulation allows students to repay their country for their tuition. Every student planning to leave China within five years of graduation must pay 2500 RMB, equivalent to five year's wages

for an average worker.

Also, beginning in September 1993, the government will abolish the one year military training requirement for incoming students at Beida (Beijing University).

North Korean Catholics visit Sichuan and Hubei

A four member delegation of North Korean Catholics visited the cities of Chengdu and Chongqing in Sichuan, and Wuchang in Hubei from Dec. 4 to 10, 1992. They exchanged views on education at the Chengdu seminary and at the Central and Southern seminary in Wuhan.

China Denies Status of World's Third Largest Economy

The International Monetary Fund in mid-May announced that a study using a new way of calculating the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the world's nations reveals that China's total production has moved up from #14 to #3, behind the U.S. and Japan. According to the new way of calculating, China's 1992 GDP increased from \$430,000,000,000 US to \$1,660,000,000,000 US, or from \$370 US to \$1450 US per capita.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry on May 24 said that the IMF's estimate of the Chinese economy was too high. The speaker said that China is still one of the developing countries, and still requires a long period of strenuous effort before it can enter the ranks of middle-income nations.
