

## *China Church Update*

*Prepared by the Tripod Staff*

### *Report on the International Congress on Martino Martini, S.J., the Man and his Work.*

*(The following is a summary of the account of the Proceedings of the International Congress on Martino Martini, S.J., reported by Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti S.D.B.).*

The achievements of the *Generation of Giants* (the late 16th and 17th century Jesuits in China) keep astonishing the world. The latest evidence of this is an International Congress held at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in Beijing, during Easter week, April 5-7, 1994. More than 30 Chinese scholars with scholars from Italy, Germany, Hong Kong and Taiwan met to study the contribution made by Martino Martini, the 17th century Jesuit, to the advancement of culture both in China and in Europe. The Chinese participants were from various Institutes of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences as well as academic institutes from all over China. Other scholars represented cultural groups, libraries and publishing houses.

Italian and German participants came from various European universities. Two Jesuits also took part: Professors Mark Chang, Fujen University, Taipei, and Joseph Shi of the Gregorian University, Rome. Hong Kong was represented by Professor Ma Chujian of the Department of Chinese, Hong Kong University and Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti, S.D.B., of the Holy Spirit Seminary College of Philosophy and Theology.

This is the second international congress dedicated to the person and work of Martino Martini. The first was held in 1981 in Trent, the Jesuit's home city. That first congress *discovered* Martini as a missionary, explorer and scientist of world stature.

The talks at the second congress presented by the Chinese scholars focused on Martini's contribution to cultural exchange between China and Italy, a study of Martini's works, his itineraries, etc.

Non-Chinese scholars focused on Martini's works, on the socio-economic and political background and the religious situation in China during Martini's life.

The dialogue took place in an atmosphere of openness and frankness. The fact that Martini was a Catholic priest and a Jesuit was dealt with in an objective and scholarly way. The terms *Jesuit* and *Catholic priest* were frequently heard in the assembly hall. At one point, one of the Chinese scholars felt the need to remind his colleagues that: "it is inaccurate to suppose that Martino Martini came to China to foster mutual understanding and friendship between China and Europe. He came to China to spread the Gospel. As historians, we must be explicit about this fact. Secondly, it is all too easy to be partial to the Jesuits in the question of Chinese

Rites...Actually the position of the Dominicans and Franciscans was perhaps even more valid....They were closer to the masses. They criticize the superstition prevalent among the Chinese masses....Thirdly, we appreciate highly Martino Martini's achievement. However, we should not forget that behind the achievement of the individual there was a multitude of anonymous Chinese who made possible that achievement...It is good that history be not only history of the elite, but also history of the masses."

There is a Marxist sensitivity behind these observations but the points are well taken. Another Chinese scholar pointed out that historians are more concerned with objective facts than with subjective intentions. Whatever may have been Martini's subjective intention, it is a fact that he contributed greatly to the mutual understanding of East and West. Moreover, there is no denying the uniqueness of his achievement in combining two very different ways of knowledge, namely the Chinese and the European way of looking at history and geography.

The acts of the Congress will be published in Chinese in Beijing and in Italian and English in Italy.

### *Sichuan Seminarians Leave Seminary in Protest*

Forty of the fifty-four seminarians at the regional seminary in Chengdu, Sichuan province left the seminary and returned home in protest. They objected to the Religious Affairs Bureau's nomination of a Communist, non-Catholic cadre as vice-rector of the seminary. The cadre chosen was supposed to replace government approved Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan, auxiliary bishop of Wanxian. Bishop Xu was away from Chengdu at the time. Bishop Xu told a press agency in Hong Kong that the provincial authorities had already tried to relieve him of his post at the seminary in January 1994. According to Bishop John Chen Shizhong, of Yibin, the titular rector of the seminary, and the representative of the Bishops' Administrative Council, the Religious Affairs Bureau of the province maintained that the Church was incapable of operating a seminary. The titular rector responded that if Bishop Xu were relieved of his post, the bishops of the Administrative Council preferred to close the seminary.

Before leaving the seminary the protesting seminarians set down certain conditions for their return: seminary formation must be founded on spirituality inspired by Christ's teachings; seminarians are to be directed by a bishop and not by the Religious Affairs Bureau or the Catholic Patriotic Association; government agencies must stop interfering in the seminary's administration; spiritual directors are to be priests and all teachers must recognize the authority of the bishop. Bishop Jin Luxian, president of the Bishops' Commission for Seminaries said that negotiations were underway to try to find a resolution. Bp. Zong Huaide, president of the Episcopal College, said that the decision of the Religious Affairs Bureau of Chengdu was "inappropriate."

A later communique reports that negotiations to end government interference with Chengdu seminary management have failed and Bishop Xu, the deputy rector, has returned to his parish in Wanxian city, a gesture akin to joining the seminarians in their walkout. Although the Sichuan provincial officials of the RAB agreed to withdraw the non-Catholic cadre to head the seminary, the bishop maintains that was not enough since the government was keeping the personnel and financial management in their hands.

Catholic sources believe that if the seminary falls under RAB control, priestly formation will be severely hampered. All the seminarians are packed into one room but the government has rejected requests to relocate to a larger site in a rural area. The government has also prohibited professors from overseas to teach in the seminary--the only seminary in China now with that restriction. Respected and qualified Chinese priests were also not approved as lecturers and spiritual directors. According to reliable sources, embezzlement of funds has downgraded the quality of both the food and the facilities. Seminarians, however, have never complained about their poor living conditions taking that in stride as part of their training (*Eglises d'Asie*, No. 176, May 1, 1994; UCAN No. 766/A, May 9-11, 1994).

### *Chinese Priests from the PRC Study in Leuven*

On April 28, 1994, a group of 15 Chinese priests from the PRC arrived at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) for study sessions on Seminary Education. The sessions were held at St. Andrew Benedictine Monastery at Zevenkerke, from April 29 to May 19.

The priests came from seven different major seminaries in China: Beijing Diocesan Seminary - 4, Beijing National Seminary - 3, Shanghai Regional Sheshan Seminary - 2, Shenyang Seminary - 2, Wuhan Regional Seminary - 2, Xi'an Regional Seminary - 1, Chengdu Seminary - 1.

The study sessions was organized by the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation in cooperation with Prof. L. De Fleurquin, Dean of the Faculty of Canon Law of the Catholic University of Leuven and directed by Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM. Courses were taught in (or translated into) Chinese and included a study of church documents, spirituality of the Catholic church, Carmelite Spirituality, Ignatian Spirituality, elements of Eastern Spirituality and spiritual direction in seminary education. Lectures were given on the spirituality and the prayer of the diocesan priest, the evolution of pastoral work since Vatican II, the meaning of "Incardination" and the relation of the Diocesan priest with his bishop according to the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Ninety year old Cardinal J. Suenens--still in excellent health--shared his reminiscences of Fr. Vincent Lebbe, and of Vatican Council II.

One peak moment was the concelebration with old China missionaries in the house of Scheut where they also visited the tomb of Scheut Founder Theophile Verbiest. On Ascension day they partici-

pated in the yearly Holy Blood Procession of Bruges to which thousands of pilgrims come from all over Europe. The same morning the Chinese priests concelebrated High Mass with several bishops and cardinals from European, African and American countries.

On May 15 they participated in an International Congress on Gregorian Chant where 23 "Scholae Gregorianae" came from 13 countries to sing Gregorian Chant.

On May 20 the group went to France by bus, where Fr. J. Charbonnier, MEP, had organized a program for them. They visited Lisieux, Lourdes, Lyon (Seminaire St. Irene), Ars, Taize, the Trappist Monastery at Sept-Fonts, Nevers, Paris. On May 30th the group traveled from Paris to Brussels to take the plane back to Beijing.

On Ascension Day Bishop Van Gheluwe, who had just returned from the African Synod in Rome, had a surprise for them. He handed each priest a rosary which had been given to them personally by the Holy Father.

The young priests expressed deep gratitude for the exceptional opportunity which had been offered to them (Information provided by Prof. Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM).

### *Second Liturgical Course Held in Shanghai*

A second course in liturgy, offered at Sheshan Seminary on the outskirts of Shanghai, provided an opportunity for 24 priests from different provinces to share their experience and difficulties in implementing the Chinese liturgy. The course was held from February 21, to March 6, 1994. The aim was to deepen the liturgical renewal in China and help priests and Catholics to internalize the liturgical spirit.

The training course was conducted by Father Yao Shun of the National Seminary in Beijing with two Hong Kong Priests: Fathers Thomas Law Kwok-fai director of the Hong Kong Diocese Liturgy Commission and Salesian Father Lanfranco Fedrigotti, a lecturer at the Holy Spirit Seminary College, Hong Kong.

On-going formation in liturgy for priests and lay people is crucial to enhance Catholic participation and spiritual nourishment.

Difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Chinese liturgy include: the indifference of some of the elderly priests who find it difficult to adjust to the new liturgy and the inability of the lay people, accustomed to other ways of assisting at Mass, to follow the liturgy. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the new Missal has not yet been published.

To improve and deepen liturgical renewal in China the course stressed the internal meaning and theological basis of the liturgy (UCAN No. 759/A, March 21-23, 1994).

### *Wuhu Catholics Mourn the Death of Their Bishop*

The saintly Bishop of Wuhu, in Anhui province, the Most Rever-

end Francis Zhang Fengzao, fell ill on May 3, 1994 and died in the early morning of May 6. He was 79 years old. Bishop Zhang was dearly loved by the Catholics and priests of his diocese who looked up to him as a real father and a visible sign of Christ's presence among them.

Bishop Zhang was born in 1915 and ordained to the priesthood in 1942. He was consecrated bishop in the official Church on May 27, 1990. Two years ago on June 11, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of his priestly ordination he wrote to a friend: "Today, fifty years ago, was the day of my ordination to the priesthood. As I recall these past fifty years, I feel deeply grateful to the Lord who has protected me from so many terrible dangers. On the day of my ordination, it never occurred to me that I would be called to be a priest in such difficult circumstances. God knows what is best for each one of us and for the Church in China. I have spent twenty-one of these fifty years in prison and another nineteen in hiding as a simple teacher in a public school. What a pity that in my whole life as a priest, I have been free to evangelize only during eleven years. Pray for me that I may be able to do now what I could not do before: to share with my people the treasures of our faith."

### ***Bishop of Jilin Dies at Age 90***

Bishop John Li Xuesong died at age 90 on May 20, 1994, after a long illness. Born in 1904, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1936. He was elected Bishop of Jilin by the CCPA in 1985 and consecrated on September 22, 1985. Bishop Li remained very active in church affairs and until recently, was the rector of Jilin Seminary and pastor of Sacred Heart Church. Bishop Li was dearly loved and respected by the people. Jilin Province has approximately 50,000 Catholics.

### ***Bishop Joseph Hou Jinde of Hebei Dead at 76***

Born in 1918 and ordained to the priesthood in 1945, Father Joseph Hou Jinde was elected bishop of Xingtai, Hebei by the CCPA on May 26, 1989 and consecrated on October 28, 1989. Bishop Hou died on May 20, 1994 at the age of 76. His funeral services were held on May 26. Catholics in Xingtai Diocese number nearly 80,000.

### ***Young Priests Elected to CCPA***

Three young priests have been elected vice-chairmen of the Beijing Catholic Patriotic Association. According to the Religious Affairs Bureau, more and more young men are being trained for the priesthood in Beijing. According to the report 22 graduates from Beijing Seminary have been ordained to the priesthood since 1989. Three seminarians from Beijing have been sent to the United States for further study and two others are scheduled to go to Hong Kong.

The *China Daily* reported further that 18 young Sisters have become leaders in religious affairs (*China Daily*, April 3, 1994).

### ***Hong Kong Priest Named as Adviser to China***

John Baptist Tsang, the pastor of Immaculate Conception Cathedral, Hong Kong, and former vicar-general of the diocese was named by the Chinese government as an adviser to China on Hong Kong affairs. Informed sources consider this nomination as an important step towards better relations between the Catholic community and the Chinese government. Father Tsang states that he would keep the government informed of the concerns of Catholics and religious communities in Hong Kong and will not hesitate to resign if he is not given the opportunity to voice these needs freely.

### ***Auxiliary Bishop Appointed for the Diocese of Yulin (formerly Yan'an).***

Francis Tong Hui, 60, elected auxiliary bishop of Yulin, Jingbian county, Shaanxi on August 22, 1992, was consecrated as auxiliary to China-appointed Joseph Wang Zhenye of Yulin, on March 19, 1994. Bishop Anthony Li Du'an of Xi'an officiated at the ordination Mass which was attended by some 5,000 Catholics.

Bishop Tong was born August 15, 1933, in Lintong, Shaanxi. After his ordination to the priesthood, he served in his home village until 1966 when he was sentenced to ten years of reform-through labor. In 1980 he returned to Lintong to serve the Xi'an diocese. He is now a local deputy of the People's Congress in Xi'an and a member of the people's Political Consultative Conference in Lintong.

The present bishop of Yulin, Bishop Wang, is 81. He is not in good health and often lives at the Xi'an cathedral.

The Yulin cathedral has not yet been constructed.

Yulin diocese has five priests with 60,000 Catholics. The diocese operates a health clinic and plans to expand a primary school funded by the Church. Five of the 17 Yulin diocesan seminarians will be ordained in 1995. The diocese also has 15 Sisters (*UCAN*, April 13, 1994, No. CH779-762).

### ***Bishops Jin Luxian Discusses Ties with Vatican***

According to Bishop Jin Luxian the main obstacle to normalizing Vatican-Chinese relations is not the Vatican's ties with Taiwan, since the Vatican is ready to break those diplomatic ties and the bishops of Taiwan are ready to accept the break, but the appointment of bishops. He feels that the Vatican and China do not understand each other, "The Chinese government thinks of the Vatican like the Vatican of the last century and the Vatican does not understand Chinese Communists, especially when the same word does not have the same meaning in China and in the Roman Curia." As an example he took

the word "independence." In China the word can be interpreted as "autonomy," he said, but in the Vatican it means "no more Roman Catholic Church."

If this issue were settled, the bishop feels that all other issues could be easily resolved. When asked how long normalization might take, the bishop answered that it could be "very quick or as long as a century." He added that he hoped it would happen within the next two years (*Asia Focus*, April 29, 1994).

### ***Open Church Catholics Mistaken for Members of Unregistered House Church***

On April 19, 1994, according to Catholic sources in Sichuan, Public Security officers wrongly identified some Catholics as members of the "Mentuhui" (disciple church) of Fengjie county. The Catholics were handcuffed, detained, beaten and fined 200-300 yuan each (US \$24-36) the equivalent of one month's pay for peasants. All the Catholics belonged to the government-approved Wanxian diocese. After their release, all the detained Catholics had to attend re-education classes ranging from one to five days. The case is now over but the Bishop of Wanxian, Matthias Duan Yinming has asked the authorities for an explanation and an apology saying, "If the authorities have made a mistake, they should rectify it and refund the fines to the Catholics" (*UCAN* No. 766/A May 9-11, 1994).

### ***Bishops and Priests from Non-Official Churches Detained***

Fr. Wei Jingyi, 36, of Qiqihar in Heilongjiang, secretary general of China's underground bishops' conference was under police detention for about three months. Two other clerics were also detained and released during the last month. According to reports Fr. Wei traveled to Hebei Province in January to visit some underground bishops. The priest disappeared on January 20 after visiting Bp. James Su Zhimin of Baoding. Reports say he was ambushed and locked up in the police station over night. An unconfirmed report said he had been released on April 26. Police have denied that Fr. Wei was ever in custody.

Underground bishop John Baptist Liang Xisheng of Kaifeng in Henan province was also placed under house arrest for one day on March 15. The 73 year old bishop was perhaps apprehended for having met with a non-Chinese Catholic visitor. The bishop was detained from March 20 - April 15.

A young priest of Baoding, Fr. Wang Xiucheng was put in police custody on March 30 and released on April 15. Fr. Wang is rector of the seminary in Baoding that is not registered with the government.