

China Church and News Update

by Tripod Staff

Protestant Church in China Facing Crises

Police Question Five Christians

Five Christians were detained in their house church for more than four hours by police in Zengcheng City in Guangdong. Bibles and religious material were confiscated. This is the latest incidence of harassment of Christians who refuse to register with the official Three-Self Patriotic Movement in the province. The government has requested that all religious venues be registered with the government and that they could then enjoy some degree of "self management." Sources said police were using different measures to coerce house-churches to register now that it is illegal not to do so. But house churches have reservations over the new legislation and the need to be subjected to the regulations of the localities. "You never know what they are until you register," said Pastor Samuel Lam of Guangzhou's Damazhan house church. According to the Pastor, "Ninety per cent of the Christians have not joined the TSPM and stick with the house churches. They do not want to be involved in politics. They just want to participate in pure religious activities," he said. (*SCMP* Aug. 17, 1994).

Crisis Looms over Succession

A succession crisis is looming in China's official Protestant church following the death of Bishop Shen Yifan, 66, last month, Christian sources say. Bishop Shen was the general-secretary of the Christian Council of China. He died of heart failure in Weihai, Shandong Province. He was widely regarded as the natural successor to the 79 year-old Bishop Ding Guangxun who heads both the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and its twin body, the China Christian Council.

Another crisis plaguing the Protestant Church in China is the fast fading authority of the TSPM (*SCMP*, Sept. 13, 1994).

Property Disputes Leads to Detention

Other crises loom around property disputes. Li Dequan, head of the Gangwashi church committee in Beijing was detained for questioning by Beijing police following a government-church dispute over property. Mr. Li has headed the effort to reclaim a small piece of property taken away from the parish during the Cultural Revolution. Mr. Li was later released but many of the parishioners are still

being kept under surveillance (*SCMP* Sept. 13, 1994).

In another development, Bishop Ding Guangxun, the leading Protestant bishop in China, has failed to secure the release of Gan Liangyi, a pastor of the Dongguan Protestant Church in Shenyang. Pastor Gan has been jailed though he has not been convicted of any crime. Sources maintain that the 38-year old pastor was being held in Shenyang No 2 Detention Centre with murderers and robbers. The Shenyang No 2 Detention Centre and the PSB have denied any knowledge of the arrests. According to a Dongguan Church worker, Gao Liangyi and another pastor, the Rev. Gao Peiman, of the Dongguan Protestant Church, were arrested last April after two senior clergymen, Lu Zhibin and Gu Yaozu, claimed the pair were trying to "seize power" and "create chaos" (*SCMP*, Sept. 7, 1994).

Archbishop of Canterbury in China Calls for More Freedom

In the midst of these difficulties the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey, presently in China to visit the churches, called for greater religious freedom in China. In Hong Kong before going to China, Dr. Carey called for an evangelization that respects the different circumstances of Chinese society (*SCMP*, Sept. 13, 1994).

China Unemployment to Soar by Year 2000

According to the *South China Morning Post*, quoting from China's Ministry of Labour, there will be close to 268 million unemployed Chinese by the year 2000. Assuming that China can keep its population to 1.2 billion by the end of the century, the jobless rate will be 22.33%. Xinhua (the New China News Agency) disclosed that the "floating population" in the cities already numbered 50 to 60 million. It also reported that more than 30 million workers had found jobs in the cities in the past 10 years. The projections also mean that the number of urban jobless, estimated to reach five million by the end of this year, will worsen significantly. The labour experts were not optimistic about future employment opportunities (*SCMP*, Aug. 17, 1994).

Deng Xiaoping Celebrates 90th Birthday

(Quotes from the *South China Morning Post*)

Personality cult surges to new heights just days before the 90th birthday of the "chief architect of reform" (Aug. 20).

Little public fanfare was planned and none of the major Chinese newspapers mentioned Deng's birthday....His last public appearance was on national TV in February 1994 when his emaciated condition sent jitters across the country....While Mr. Deng no longer holds any official post in the Communist party, he wields tremendous influence. Many fear his death will result in a protracted power

struggle among the country's elite (Aug. 22)....

Because of his drastically reduced energy levels, Mr. Deng has reserved his time for "only the most essential subjects" (Aug. 24).

Underground Church Ordains 71 Seminarians

According to reliable sources, the non-government approved Catholic Church has ordained 71 seminarians during the first seven months of 1994. The men, aged 28-45 will serve the church in various locations and especially in the mountain areas of northern China. The ordinations took place in several provinces (*UCAN*, No.781/A).

Underground Bishop and Priest Released

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo and Trappist Father Placidus Pei Ronggui of the underground Catholic Community in Hebei province, northern China, were released on August 6, 1994, after having been detained for almost three months. The two had been confined "to study" in various "hostels" in Hebei. In the past decade, authorities have restricted Bishop Jia for long periods to Wuqui, his home village in Jinzhou, and taken him for weeks on "trips" preventing regular contact with other underground leaders, the source said. Fr. Pei who was also released has been detained twice since placed on parole in March 1993 (*UCAN*, No. 780/B).

Young Priests Given Refresher Course on Homiletics and New Catechism

More than 50 priests took part in an intensive course July 1-20 at Sheshan Regional Seminary in Shanghai. The two topics chosen by seminary lecturers were homiletics and the newly promulgated *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The course, according to Salesian Fr. Joseph Zen of Hong Kong, was open to all Sheshan graduates. Some nuns and priests, graduates from other seminaries, also sat in on the sessions. The course comprising spiritual experience sharing, seminars, meditation and prayer, was guided by Father Zen and Jesuit Joseph Lie Zhexin of Taiwan.

Since the Chinese translation of the Catechism has not yet been published, only the background and main themes of the new Catechism were explained, Father Zen said (*UCAN*, No. 780/B).

Seven Babies Die in Church-run Foundling Home

Seven babies in a church-operated foundling home in Hebei province, died during an epidemic of cholera in July. The home has been set up by the underground church to care for children who are mostly handicapped and abandoned by their parents. It is located in Jinzhou near Shijiazhuang, 240 kilometers southwest of Beijing. All of

the 40 babies in the home were infected. A special committee was set up to determine the cause of the tragedy. One of the main causes was the over-admittance of children without space to care for them. The staff was also inexperienced in taking care of infected children. The home is managed by two Sisters of two different congregations (UCAN, No. 780/A).

Foreigners Vie for Higher Degrees in China

According to the *Beijing Review*, more and more foreign students are trying to earn master's degrees from Chinese universities. Foreign students consider that if they can enroll as graduate students, they will be able to study together with Chinese students and compete with them (*Beijing Review* Aug. 1-8, 1994).

Handling Minority and Religious Affairs

Li Ruihuan, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC, is quoted as saying that nationality and religious affairs must be handled in a very cautious way. In speaking to 30 leading Party officials, Li stressed that such affairs must be implemented in line with specific local conditions. "Problems cropping up in the nationality and religious areas are mostly contradictions within the ranks of the people," he said, "so these problems should be solved through persuasion and by improving our work... We must also emphasize that the interests of various nationalities should coincide with the overall interests of the Chinese nation, and that respect for the characteristics of minority nationalities should coincide with the maintenance of China's unity" (*Beijing Review*, July 18-24, 1994).

"Superstition" on the Rise in China

According to the *People's Daily*, the Communist Party's official communication, superstition is on the rise in China. In decrying this new development, the paper called on local cadres to do more to keep the phenomenon in check. There is a daily increase in the number of geomancers and fortune tellers and people, including Communist cadres consulting *fengshui* experts to find lucky spots to build tombs for their relatives who are still alive. One of the most bizarre aspects of this development is the growing number of people who are now worshipping Mao Zedong as a god who can offer protection, good health and fortune to those who pray to him. Taxicab drivers around China have taken to hanging a picture of the Great Helmsman from their rear view mirrors as protection against accidents. They believe the bigger the picture of Mao the better the protection (*CNCR* Sept. 9, 1994).
