

China News and Church Update

by Tripod Staff

Pope speaks about China to ROC bishops

John Paul II received the ROC bishops for their "ad limina" visit at his residence at Castel Gandolfo on August 19. He took the opportunity to speak to them not only about Taiwan but about Mainland China as well (For the Pope's Discourse, cf. Editorial and Documentation in this issue of *Tripod*).

Vatican-Beijing relations strengthen

According to a Beijing based ambassador, there are signs that the Vatican and Beijing are in dialogue with the goal of reaching an agreement on open diplomatic relations.

Harvard professor Mary Ann Glendon, head of the delegation of the Holy See to the World Conference on Women, passed on the "cordial and respectful good wishes of Pope John Paul II" to the government.

According to the European ambassador the new talks center on two main issues: Vatican relations with Taiwan and the right of the Holy See to appoint bishops for the church in China.

Talks also addressed certain foreseeable difficulties to be encountered with the Catholic Patriotic Association and the underground church.

As regards Taiwan, the Vatican has already taken steps to downgrade its diplomatic mission bringing it in line with other European nations and the United States. The papal nuncio accredited to Taipei is actually a non-resident diplomat since he now resides in another Asian country.

As to the appointment of bishops, it seems that a compromise could possibly be reached with the Vatican presenting the Chinese government with several candidates each time it wanted to appoint a bishop.

Despite some on-going harassment of the Catholic Church in China, Vatican and China relations seem to be on the mend (*SCMP*, Sept. 30, 1995).

Bishops issue pastoral letter on women

The bishops' conference of the government approved Catholic Church in China has issued its first pastoral letter. The letter addresses specific

problems, needs and the role of women. The letter entitled, *Women's Dignity and Responsibility* was issued on August 28 just before the opening of the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing. To insure that the contents would be in line with the needs of the times, the bishops sought wide consultation within various sectors of the church and society. According to Bishop Zong Huaide, president of the government recognized bishops' conference, the letter took half a year to write and secured the consensus for all its major points from all the bishops of the open church. The bishops hope that their pastoral letter will help improve the status of women and have a positive impact on society.

In their letter the bishops condemned the violation done to women in the abuse of their human rights and issued a call to stop prostitution, trafficking in women as well as other means which reduce women to mere objects. The letter also stresses the value of the family and, in particular, women's role in the family. They called on women to serve the church, to model themselves on Mary. They urged them to sanctifying themselves, help in the process of evangelization and to foster vocations among young people

(*UCAN*, No. 837/A, Sept. 18-29, 1995).

Belgian Cardinal cancels visit to China

Cardinal Godfried Daneels, archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, Belgium, has temporarily canceled a visit to China which had been scheduled for July 26-Aug.6, 1995. In June Liu Shuxiang, vice-director of the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council of China, invited Cardinal Daneels to visit China with a five member delegation. On July 25, the China visa of one of the members, a Scheut priest, had not been issued. The reason for not granting the visa has not been explained (*UCAN* #829B, July 27-28, 1995).

Baoding Diocese installs new bishop

The installation Mass for underground Bishop James Su Zhemin took place on June 13, 1995 at Donglu Marian Shrine, 140 kilometers south of Beijing. Auxiliary Bishop An Shuxin of Baoding and Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang of Yixian officiated.

Bishop Su was ordained a priest on April 4, 1981 and coadjutor bishop of Baoding, May 2, 1993 (*UCAN* 829A July 24-25, 1995).

Death of Bishop Anthony Wang Zizheng

Bishop Anthony Wang Zizheng, 73, bishop of Lixian, Hunan province, died on April 16, 1995. As a seminarian, Anthony Wang Zizheng studied with the Augustinians and was ordained to the priesthood in 1946. He spent the years of the Cultural Revolution working in a factory. He was ordained bishop of Lixian Diocese on April 7, 1985 and was active in the Catholic Patriotic Association (*Catholic Church in China*, 1995, No. 4).

Chapel again destroyed

A Catholic chapel, located about 1,050 kilometers from Beijing, in Jiangsu's Yangcheng fishing village has been burned down by the police for the second time in ten months. The reason given is that the Catholics refuse to join the government-approved open Church (*UCAN*, #827A, July 10-12, 1995).

Christian leaders sent to camps

Several Christian leaders have been sent to labour camps during the last few months. Six recently arrested have been sent to re-education camps in Henan. The six face accusations

that they are members of the Holistic Sect and were scheming, with the help of foreign religious groups, to overthrow the Communist Party. They deny the charges. Three others are still at the Huiyang Detention Centre. They will be sent to labour camps if they fail to pay the designated fine. In one crackdown alone, 68 Christians were taken away by police, 62 of whom were freed after paying fines ranging from 300 to 1,800 yuan (*SCMP* Aug. 31, 1995).

Religious Affairs Bureau publishes religion quarterly

The first issue of the quarterly, *Religion in China*, was published by the Religious Affairs Bureau in July. The new quarterly focuses on propagating religious policy, rules and regulations, and also on the government's religion-related work. The magazine aims to present the situation of religions in China, to provide information on religions, religious art and culture.

The magazine is published by the RAB's propaganda and education unit.

The first issue contains the text of a speech by CPPCC chairman Li Ruihuan, a member of the Communist Party's central politburo, on

problems of nationality and religious work in the new era. It also contains an article on the situation of China's religious policy and religion-related work. It also features columns on major religious organizations, on culture and history. (*UCAN* # 830/A, July 31-Aug. 2, 1995).

China, Hong Kong theologians exchange views

The first exchange meeting on seminary education among teaching theologians from Mainland China and Hong Kong took place at Sheshan Regional Seminary in Shanghai, from July 6-20. The meeting had the approval of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council. Participants included 41 mainland theology teachers, seven Hong Kong theologians and sixteen others which included Sisters teaching in Mainland convents (*UCAN*, August 14-16, 1995 #832/A).

Party members join the churches

According to the Chinese newspaper, *Ming Pao*, (31 August, 1995) the number of Communist Party members joining the Christian churches is increasing steadily. It is estimated that in 1991 only 150 Party members were Christians.

Today their number exceeds 2000. This seems to be a country wide trend which is prevalent not only with young cadres but among older cadres as well. According to Party regulations, members who engage in religious activities are to be encouraged to leave the Party; members who actually join a religious organization are, "without exception" to be expelled from the Party (*CNCR*, 8 September 1995).

Christians and Muslims meet

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and three international Islamic organizations met on June 23 at the Islamic Center in Rome to exchange views on the place of women in society. The meeting was in preparation for the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women. The groups expressed the necessity to recognize the dignity, role and rights of women in society and to take adequate measures towards their realization. They were apprehensive about the Conference's Draft Document which ignores the positive role of religion in this process (*Catholic International*, Sept. 1995).

Increase in number of women leaders

By the end of 1995, all of

China's counties and 50% of its townships will have women among the local leadership. This will achieve a goal, set five years ago in Changchun, Jilin Province, at a national conference on the promotion of women.

By the end of 1994, there were 12 million women government officials, about 32.59% of the nation's total.

In the last five years, 51 chairwomen of provincial women's federations have been appointed to leading posts. However, few high-profile positions belong to women. Their titles usually include "vice" or "deputy" (*China Daily*, July 26, 1995).

Scientists fight against superstition

A group of scientists have put forward a proposal to fight against feudalism and superstition saying that, "It is high time to declare war on the rising popularity of superstitious activities. They maintain that fortune telling has actually become a profitable industry, that too much money is being spent on the construction of temples, that some graves of famous people have been transformed into "Ghost Cities" to attract tourists.

Scientists allege that this kind of faith poses a danger to

social stability and development. They claim that some authorities themselves do not distinguish between superstition and religion and therefore, they have not curbed superstitious activities effectively. They maintain further that some local government officials even encourage these activities since they provide a means of helping the local economy (*China Daily*, June 27, 1995).

China tightens birth control regulations

According to the 18-article regulation published in the *Beijing Daily*, and effective on July 15, women of child-bearing age must prove their marital status and number of children when they apply for a temporary resident permit in Beijing. They must also have a certificate permitting them to find employment and rent local housing.

The certificates provide them with free birth control pills and contraceptives from the local family planning organizations.

According to a family planning official, the regulation is to prevent the capital from becoming a harbour for women violating the country's birth control policy.

Anyone caught hiring or renting housing to migrant

labourers without certification on marital status and children will be severely punished.

Women who get pregnant or give birth in violation of the local birth-control policy will be fined or ordered to leave Beijing. It is estimated that one in five women living in the city is an outsider and nearly half of them are aged between 20 and 29 (*Xinhua-China Daily*, July 7, 1995).

Drop in population growth rate in 1994

Figures issued by China's State Statistical Bureau showed that China's population growth rate is the lowest since 1949. The birth rate stands at 17.7 per thousand; the death rate at 6.49 per thousand. The natural increase rate stands at 11.21 per thousand. That is a decrease of 0.24 per thousand with 220,000 fewer births than in 1993.

According to the State Statistical Bureau, the slow growth in the 1994 population was due to the following factors:

1) fewer fertile women; 2) later marriages; delay in having children; 3) fewer children--the number of women who have several children has fallen below 10% as compared with 49% in 1990.

In 1990, the proportion of one-child couples was 49%; in 1994, it has risen to 63% (*Beijing Review*, July 3-9, 1995).

China to pass environment law

China expects to pass an ambitious national environmental protection law at the end of 1995. The plan will require provinces and cities to gather data on local environmental problems and submit them to the central government for information and action (*UCAN* #830B, Aug. 3-4, 1995).
