

China Church and News Update

by Tripod Staff

China/Vatican discuss ties

China has taken the first steps in re-establishing diplomatic ties with the Vatican, suspended since the 1950s. The last talks broke down following the 1989 Tiananamen Square Incident.

The initiative was conveyed to the Holy See through Archbishop Claudio Celli, a papal representative, who met with officials in Beijing in January.

Liu Bainian, a vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association said, "From the Church's point of view, we hope the Vatican will restore relations with China because it will be significant not just to Catholics here, but also to the universal church."

Beijing is still demanding that the Holy See sever its ties with Taipei before restoration of relations can go ahead. Other obstacles include Beijing's appointment of Chinese bishops and the question of the underground church. It is China's unilateral appointment of bishops in the 1950s that first broke official ties (*SCMP* Feb. 28, 1996).

Government teams attempt to register Catholics

A Catholic source in Hong Kong reported that Government teams were dispatched to northern China in January to "register" Catholics and Catholic premises not affiliated with the government-sanctioned Catholic Church. About 30 to 40 local Religious Affairs Bureau and Public Security Bureau officials were sent to Anguo, Baoding, Langfang, Xianxian, and Xingtai dioceses and areas of Hebei province. Before they left the areas on February 24, officials claimed that they had completed their task of registering religious premises.

Clergy and religious, however, maintained that none of the bishops, priests, seminarians or nuns had filled in any registration forms.

The clergy were told they were not to leave the areas where they reside, nor be visited by any foreign Church people and to report to the local PSB daily (*UCAN*, No. 869/B Feb. 29-March 1, 1996).

China official stresses importance of national unity

To greet the Lunar New Year, Li Ruihuan, senior China government official, met with China's religious leaders and stressed the importance of maintaining the unity of the nation and its various ethnic groups.

Bishop Joseph Zong Huaide said that the religious leaders met with government officials on February 13, to discuss religious and national issues.

The official Xinhua News Agency reported that Li told the gathering that national unity is "the basic requirement of the CPC and Chinese government," and the code of conduct of all religious leaders and believers. Li stressed that religious

groups should help promote unity between religious believers and non-believers, and lead religious believers in contributing to reforms, the opening to the outside world and to modernization.

Besides Bishop Zong Huaide, the Catholics were represented by Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing, Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai and Anthony Liu Bainian, vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (*UCAN* No. 859/B, Feb. 22-23, 1996).

House Churches Raided

Police raided two house church meetings points in Shenzhen on the weekend of February 17-18. Both meeting points have now been effectively closed down. After questioning the Christians attending the meeting, the police released them. The Christians were asked about other people suspected of house church involvement. Names of several foreigners appear on the list. The PSB is particularly interested in these foreigners and Christians were warned not to have foreigners in their meetings. These events are part of the current nationwide tightening up on unregistered house churches (*CNCR* March 8, 1996).

Tibetan nuns in jeopardy

According to the London-based Tibet Information Network, Chinese authorities have closed down a nunnery and a monastery in western Tibet.

Ismail Amat, the state councilor in charge of religious and nationalities affairs, is reported to have said that those who used religion to split the country or interfere with administrative or judicial affairs would be "severely cracked down upon." All nuns were ordered to return to their home and were forbidden from joining any other nunnery. The ten monks of the nearby monastery of Doglho were also ordered to return home. (*SCMP* March 6, 1996).

Congress on World Evangelization

An official spokesman from Xinhua, the New China News Agency, informed the Hong Kong government that because the Lutheran World Federation International Assembly was slated to be held after the handover that "no decision could be made in this matter without first consulting China." After considerable political brouhaha, and a sharp outcry from just about every quarter in Hong Kong, China agreed that no permission was actually needed and relented.

The Lutheran World Federation will be holding its 5th Chinese Congress on World Evangelization in Hong Kong, July 10-16, 1997, as previously sheculed. Once every five years since 1976, the Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelization (CCCOWE) sponsors a Chinese Congress on World Evangelization for Chinese churches from all over the world. To encourage Chinese believers to face the historical moment of the Third Millennium and to express the Chinese Churches' desire for world evangelization. The Coordination Centre chose, *Lord of History - Light of the World* as the theme for the Congress.

Emphasis on spiritual civilization

The NPC's announced that during the sixth plenum of the Communist Party's 14th Central Committee, later this year, it would concentrate on the construction of

spiritual civilization and direct the party to put new effort into ideological and cultural development to remedy malpractice and corruption throughout the country.

Li Peng called on government at all levels to incorporate ideological construction into their overall planning for socio-economic development. A balance between economy and ideology has to be achieved, Li said. Jiang Zemin, party General Secretary, has asked leading cadres to "talk about politics" to resist temptations of money, power, fame and sex. He also called for improvement in ideological education, control on news and publications, guidance in social activities and development in science and technology (*SCMP* Feb. 28, 1996).

Foreign experts welcome

China will continue to encourage the recruitment of overseas personnel and expand personnel exchanges and cooperation with the rest of the world, Vice-Premier Zhu Rongji, said at a meeting with foreign experts in China.

On behalf of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, Zhu extended his regards to and thanked all those experts working in China for their contribution to the victory of the Chinese revolution and to China's economic construction.

"Chinese people will not forget those who have made outstanding contributions to China in all historical periods," Zhu said, "they are friends and comrades of the Chinese people."

More than 520,000 foreign experts have worked in China since 1949. About 490,000 came to China in the past 17 years. (*China Daily* Feb. 16, 1996).

Family planing research

During the next five years, the State Family Planning Commission is setting its priority on research into vaccine contraceptives and new types of intrauterine devices. It also intends to conduct national education campaigns, especially among rural and transient populations to spread knowledge and technology for more healthy births and more effective child rearing.

Each year, more than 1 million babies are born with defects caused by hereditary problems, congenital diseases or improper practices of mid-wives.

Between 1990-95, the central government allocated 9 million yuan (\$1.1million) to subsidize some key research in the field.

There are now over 300,000 researchers in the area of family planning science and technology in China and 2,300 family planning service centres at the county level in China (*China Daily*, March 18, 1996).

Amity TV Documentary

Heihu (Unregistered Family), a TV documentary co-produced by the Amity Foundation about abandoned children, is the story of a couple, Mr. Zhang Hongbin and Ms. Liu Xiaoying who, without a job or a unit to care for them, have rescued more than 20 babies abandoned in garbage heaps, ditches, etc. and welcomed them into their poor dilapidated home. The couple manage to eke out a living for themselves and these children mostly by collecting garbage and selling what can be used (*China Talk*, Dec. 1995).