

China Church and News Update

by Tripod Staff

Catholic hierarchy established 50 years ago

Pope Pius XII established the Chinese hierarchy fifty years ago, on April 11, 1946. The event was commemorated by some Church members through a variety of activities. But, according to Liu Bainian, the official church's bishops' conference had not yet decided to celebrate the anniversary.

In 1946, the Catholic hierarchy of China comprised 79 dioceses and 38 apostolic prefectures grouped into 20 ecclesiastical provinces.

It is the general feeling that "the hierarchy should have been established earlier than 1946. It had been long awaited by the Catholics of China," said Liu Bainian.

In Taiwan the 50th anniversary will be celebrated along with the commemoration of the 70th anniversary in November of Pope Pius XI's ordination of six Chinese bishops in 1926.

A number of bishops added that Sino-Vatican relations are crucial to the Church in China and they hope that bilateral relations can be resolved through

state-level diplomatic negotiations. (*UCAN* No. 868/A April 22-24, 1996).

China keeps eye on underground

While some Christians flocked to state-sanctioned churches to celebrate Easter, many opted to attend underground prayer meetings out of sight of religious authorities.

Despite a series of recent secret diplomatic exchanges between Beijing and the Holy See focusing on bridging differences over the appointment of bishops and the question of Taiwan, China has stepped up its surveillance of believers, especially, those involved in the underground (*SCMP* April 7, 1996).

Hongdong Diocese begins vernacular liturgy

Catholics of Hongdong diocese experienced the liturgy in the vernacular for the first time at Easter, 1996. Hongdong Catholics still use the pre-Vatican Council II Catholic Catechism. The recitation of the rosary is basically the only religious activity in which the people engage.

On Holy Thursday, April 4, the 18 priests of the Hongdong diocese gathered at the cathedral for the Chrism Mass. Of these, however, only eight are young enough to move about the diocese (*UCAN*, No. 868/A April 22-24, 1996).

Open Church publishes English language bulletin

The bishops' conference of the government approved church in China is publishing its first English-language bulletin to increase understanding of the Church in China with the outside world.

The publication is entitled, "China Catholic News". So far, there have been two issues, the first was published last December and the second in March. The aim of the bulletin is to cover China Church news and activities.

According to Liu Banian, the latest bulletin was sent to more than 50 Catholic organizations and individuals outside of China (*UCAN*, No. 869/A April 29-May 1, 1996).

Bishop Jin of Shanghai urges mission to the poor

At the chrism Mass at Xujiahui Cathedral in Shanghai, April 2, Bishop Jin urged the priests and laypeople to bring the Good News to the country's poor and to live simple lives.

In his homily Bishop Jin reminded the congregation of 42 concelebrants, 200 seminarians, 100 nuns and 300 laypeople that their call was to preach to the poor, to lead simple lives and to be poor in spirit thus modeling their lives after Jesus. According to the bishop there are 65 million people in China living in poverty (*UCAN* No. 868/A April 25-26, 1996).

Ancestral reverence celebrated on Holy Thursday

This year the traditional Chinese festival, Qingming, to pay respect to ancestors, fell on April 4, which was also Holy Thursday. Many dioceses chose to celebrate the Easter message of life and resurrection together with this very important Chinese feast. In some places the memorial became an integral part of the Easter liturgy. In other places the people paid their respect to their ancestors and to the deceased priests of the area at the graveyard.

In the memorial Mass one priest said that the church in China is now beginning to stress the importance of incorporating traditional customs and festivals in the liturgy.

A seminar on blending Catholic liturgy and Chinese culture was held on March 23 at the cathedral of Nanjing (*UCAN*, No. 866/B April 11-12, 1996)

Bishop Song Weili gravely ill

Bishop Song Weili, 83, who administers the Church in Langfang, an area Southeast of Beijing, is critically ill with advanced colon cancer.

The priests in Langfang have difficulty raising sufficient funds to care for the bishop, who had to be discharged from the hospital soon after his operation.

The bishop, according to sources was ordained by the late Bishop Peter Joseph Fan Xueyan of Baoding. Authorities of the open church recognize Bishop Song as auxiliary bishop of Cangzhou while some Catholics in Langfang regard him as the bishop of a "newly created diocese" since he "surfaced" to serve in the open Church in 1994.

A informed source said that Government officials kept a close watch on the bishop's condition and official approval was required for him to receive any Church visitors as well as for any medical decisions or discharge plan (*UCAN*, No. 870/B May 9-10, 1996).

French missionary proclaimed saint

On June 2, 1996, Pope John Paul canonized Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, a Vincentian priest, who was martyred in China in 1840. Perboyre worked in the

Yangtze River region for about two years. He was arrested in 1839, tortured and then strangled on a gallows in the shape of a cross in 1840. He was beatified in 1889.

During the Mass to celebrate the canonization, the Pope said he remained close "in spirit and in prayer" to the people of China. "We want to unite in memory of all those who testified in the name of Jesus Christ in China over the past centuries."

Five bishops and 246 others martyred in China between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries have been beatified (SCMP, June 3, 1996).

"Illegal" statue of Buddha demolished

A giant statue of Buddha, costing nearly US \$400,000, was recently demolished in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on orders of government authorities. High level cadres had decided in early April to launch a campaign of repression against the construction of illegal temples, churches and tombs in the province.

The statue was made without the permission of the Buddhist Patriotic Association.

Li Zemin, secretary of the Zhejiang Communist Party, said that such "illegal" constructions denote "a spiritual poverty, ignorance and a backwardness

which must be urgently remedied. Ideological education for the masses is necessary to win their support.” (EDA No. 221, 16 May, 1996).

Charismatics in China

Thousands of Catholics are taking part in charismatic Prayer meetings in Northern China. The first charismatic prayer meeting was held in Hebei two years ago and attracted more than 4,000 Catholics.

One of the local Catholic leaders said that Chinese Christians feel a great need for the spiritual healing that the charismatic prayer groups provide. Books on the charismatic renewal are now also in great demand among Catholics (Correspondence. No. 69, 3/96).

Monks arrested in Tibet

Monks in the Garden mountain-top monastery, 40 kilometers east of Lhasa staged a demonstration against Chinese rule earlier this month. The monastery was sealed off to visitors as a result of the demonstrations and at least three monks were shot in the process.

The demonstration erupted after officials tried to impose new regulations banning the display of photographs of the exiled Dalai Lama. Officials maintain the monastery has been

closed for restoration (SCMP May, 19, 20, 1996).

Protestant held after crackdown

Five Christians were detained in Xinjiang after police raided their church. Armed police stormed the church in western Xinjiang in mid-March. Several were severely beaten and repeatedly slapped by police.

This March raid was the latest in a series of crackdowns on underground Christians in recent months in Xinjiang. With the increasing numbers of Christians in the area, the number of crackdowns have become more and more frequent (SCMP May 19, 1996).

Protestants under fire

Official documents are putting greater emphasis on control over religion, wiping out heresies and preventing foreign infiltration.

An internal document issued by the Ministry of Public Security singled out Protestants as “enemy forces” and warned that Christianity had become a threat to the Communist Party.

An article published in the magazine, *The Questions of Religion in the World today*, written by two religious officials from Liaoning province quoted Mr. Ye, Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau, as saying that

officials and religious workers must give top priority to social stability and guard against "foreign enemy forces which have never given up their strategy to carry peaceful evolution" in China. They must also "adopt proper political understanding and attitude" towards religion. Meanwhile, two independent sources have confirmed that the Ministry of Public Security has issued an internal document calling for a renewed struggle against religions, Christianity in particular (SCMP, June 4, 1996).

Fourth Session of Eighth NPC

The Fourth session of the Eighth National People's Congress (NPC) closed in Beijing on March 17, after only twelve days of meetings. These meetings were almost completely eclipsed by China's showdown with Taiwan.

The focus of the debates were on Li Peng's Report on the "Ninth Five-Year Plan and the Long Terms Objectives for the Year 2010."

The *Administrative Penalty Law* and *Criminal Procedural Law* were passed by over 90 per cent of the delegates. Legislative powers were also granted to the special economic zones.

The NPC chairman, Qiao Shi, stressed the importance of the rule of law criticizing the Cultural Revolution during which time the country was lawless. There was also an exhortation urging all party members, especially leading cadres to abide by and protect the Constitutions and laws (CNA, No. 1557).

Stress Ideology and Politics

Marxist ideology will be given more authority in China's schools, factories and farms. According to Xinhua, Party authorities have revived the system of the resident Party committee being the highest authority of an institute of higher education. Since President Jiang Zemin introduced the edict "talk more about politics" last winter, the official media have been filled with exhortations to Party members and citizens to take Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping as guides. According to reports, the Party must ensure that education serves the goals of socialism and is "combined with production and labour." The Party's organization department has resumed the practice of appointing the Party secretaries and senior

managers of large state enterprises (*SCMP*, April 16, 1996).

Chinese Poet Dies

Ai Qing, "prince of Chinese poets" died at age 86, on May 5, 1996, in Peking Union Medical College Hospital. He is famous for his poems in praise of the Chinese revolution. He wrote 20 long lyrics and narrative poems, 1,000 poems of fewer than 100 lines and 200 essays on art and literature, as well as novels and other prose (*CD*, May 6, 1996).

Wild Swans Banned in China

Jung Chang's book, *Wild Swans*, about the struggles of three generations of women, now translated in 29 languages, has been banned in China. The author hopes that soon political and intellectual freedoms will keep pace with economic growth (*SCMP*, May 3, 1996).

Movie Censorship

Among the foreign motion pictures Chinese audience will be allowed to see this year are: *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Outbreak*, *A Walk in the Clouds*, *Toy Story* and *Waterworld*.

Among those they will not see are *Babe*, *Apollo 13*, and *Goldeneye*. Chinese officials could not be reached for comment to discover why *Babe*, the barnyard tale of a pig that wants to be a sheepdog, had been given the chop (*SCMP*, April 8, 1996).

China appeals to students to return home

China has launched a national appeal to its brightest studying abroad to come home and take part in China's economic growth. They are being lured back with promises of good jobs, better pay, and choice housing.

China estimates that of 220,000 students sent abroad since 1979, only one-third have returned. Canada and the United States are the top destinations for Chinese students. After graduation it is easy for them to find good paying jobs in these countries. There are signs at the moment that China is managing to stem the outward flow of talent. This year only 5,000 students will take the TOFEL test. This is a 28 per cent decline from last year (*SCMP*, April 8, 1996).