

China Church and News Update

Li calls for more religious controls.

During a visit to China's restive Muslim northwest region, Premier Li Peng warned believers not to step out of line and called for tighter controls on religious activities. "Religious activities must take place within legal limits," the *People's Daily* quoted Mr. Li as saying during his visit to Xinjiang region.

"The relevant departments should...step up the control of religious affairs." Mr. Li added that while China upheld freedom of religious belief, religion should serve the aims of socialism.

Xinjiang has been racked in recent months by violent clashes between Muslim separatists wanting to end Chinese rule in the area. Xinjiang officials have warned that separatist and illegal religious activities posed a most serious threat to stability in the region (Reuter, SCMP, Sept. 13, 1996).

Pilgrimage restriction

Christians, seeking to honor Our Lady of China in Donglu through the traditional May pilgrimage, were forbidden to move from one area to another. Families were warned not to give shelter to pilgrims.

Priests were ordered not to leave their homes and not to preach. Because of the restrictions, the pilgrims traveled as far as they could towards the shrine and then prayed facing in that direction (AIF, Aug. 9, 1996).

More arrests of bishops and priests

According to reliable sources, priests and bishops are still under arrest. Below is partial listing.

The following bishops were arrested several months ago and their present whereabouts are unknown

Bishop Francis An Shuxin, Auxiliary of Baoding;

Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang of Yixian;

Bishop Peter Liu Guandong, coadjutor of Yixian;

The following are under strict surveillance:

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhending, isolated in his village;

Bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi, coadjutor of Qiqihar;

Bishop James Su Zhimin, bishop of Baoding, first under strict surveillance and then hidden by his priests.

Bishop John Han Dingxiang of Yongnian.

The following priests have also been detained:

Father Charles Guo Baile, 58, from Shanghai, sentenced to 2 years of hard labor for “illegal religious activity, for having spoken well of the Pope, having damaged the Patriotic Association and spread confusion among the people.”

Fr. Cui Xingang, parish priest of Donglu

Fr. Hu Duo

Fr. Xiao Fengzun

Fr. Wei Laogen

Fr. Shi Xiaosan

Besides these priests, a number of the faithful of the Baoding diocese have also been arrested (AIF, Aug. 9, 1996).

Bishop of Langfang, Paul Song Weili dies at 83

Bishop Paul Song Weili, who administered the church in Langfang, southeast of Beijing, died of cancer on July 20, at the age of 83. He was buried in Xigao village of Bazhou, Hebei Province, on July 25.

The memorial card describes him as “a loyal servant of God and a shepherd of the faithful”.

Bishop Song was born in Anguo diocese, Hebei Province, on May 13, 1913. He entered the diocesan seminary at the age of 15. In 1937, he entered the Jiaxing major seminary in Zhejiang Province. In 1945, He joined the Congregation of the Mission and was ordained a priest. In 1951, Father Song was jailed for “assisting imperialists” and sent to a reform-through-labor farm in Heilongjiang, northeast China. He was released after 28 years in July 1979.

Underground Church leader, Bishop Peter Joseph Fan Xueyan of Baoding ordained him a bishop on February 17, 1982. At Langfang, Bishop Song refused to form the government-approved Catholic Patriotic Association but registered with the government. Open Church authorities considered Bishop Song the auxiliary bishop of Cangzhou. Langfang was not made a diocese (UCA NEWS, No. 886, Aug.26-29, 1996).

Monks subject to re-education campaign

According to accounts of a human rights watchdog, a campaign to “re-educate” Tibetan monks in the principal monasteries of Lhasa is being expanded to include all monasteries in the Himalayan region.

The report alleges that monks who show a “bad attitude” during the campaign would be expelled from their respective monasteries.

The campaign, whose official objective is to educate monks in patriotism, aims to eradicate support for the Tibetan independence movement and

focuses on a controversial demand that monks make a five-point declaration that includes opposition to the exiled Dalai Lama.

Although officials of the Foreign Affairs Bureau in Lhasa have denied that monks face expulsion, an official notice given to monks at Sera monastery suggests otherwise: "Those with a bad attitude to studying and those...deliberately causing obstacles to study will be severely criticized and their right to remain among the number of monks will be struck out." The notice was dated, July 15 (Agence France-Presse, in SCMP, Sept. 9, 1996).

Religions urged to focus on character

At a recent meeting in Beijing, attended by the religious leaders of China's major religions, Wang Zhaoguo, vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and director of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, warned religious organizations to fulfill their targets of "patriotism, loving religion, unity and progress" through character building, and the training of middle aged priests and other religious personnel.

Wang also stressed that religious policies must be carried out correctly and religious affairs must be administered in accordance with the law, and fit into the socialist society.

He said that although the overall situation remained stable, new problems had surfaced due to changes at home and abroad "Hostile international forces," he said, "resort to ethnic and religious issues to Westernize and split socialist countries and step up religious infiltration."

He urged officials to stick to "the four safeguards": safeguarding dignity of law, safeguarding people's interests, safeguarding unity of nationalities and safeguarding national unification.

He also urged organizations to improve unity between believers and non-believers, to maintain social stability and help realize the targets of the modernization and socialist construction. (SCMP, Aug. 13, 1996; CD, Aug. 12, 1996).

Bishop Zeng Jingmu in prison, seriously ill

China's failure to provide medical attention for 75 year-old underground Catholic bishop, Zeng Jingmu, is prompting fears that the bishop might not survive the winter in prison.

Zeng, who has already served more than 23 years in prison for his religious beliefs, was sentenced to three years of re-education through labor in March 1996.

The Religious Affairs Bureau has refused to comment on the case.

According to Amnesty International, Zeng initially contracted pneumonia while detained in the city of Fuzhou, Jiangxi Province, by police for 15 days last October.

In June 1958, he was sentenced to 15 years in prison for “counter revolutionary activities”. He was given another 8 years in June 1983.

During his hearing last March, the court accused Zeng of having “contravened regulations” governing the supervision of religious groups.

The bishop has refused to register his underground church and regularly held services in his home attracting hundreds of worshippers (SCMP, Aug. 16, 1996).

Special Zones foster spiritual civilization

“Spiritual civilization” is slated to be a top agenda item at the Sixth Plenum of the Party’s Central Committee in September.

China’s five economic zones have been boasting of their achievements to halt crime and corruption in the run-up to the Party’s annual meeting.

The zones: Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, Shantou and Hainan, have been criticized by Beijing for neglecting to combat crime and corruption in their pursuit of economic prosperity.

Recently, Huang Taihe, a section director of the Special Economic Zones Office said, “While our economic zones have made great achievements in economic construction, they have also attained rather good results in fostering spiritual civilization. He cited as models “clean” and “progressive” cadres or workers who were “produced” in the zones.

Authorities in several of the zones have written “songs” to indoctrinate people about morality (SCMP, Aug. 5, 1996).

Strike Hard campaign extended

Beijing has confirmed that the Strike Hard campaign against crime will be a long-term effort.

A senior official at the Ministry of Public Security told Xinhua (the New China News Agency) that authorities would “continue to deepen the campaign in accordance with the law”.

The Strike Hard campaign has been launched yearly since 1983, but it has lasted no more than a couple months. Because “this year” the social environment was “less satisfactory than before”, the campaign needed to be carried out long-term to ensure the success of the reform and open-door policy.

Last month the Politburo made the decision to continue the campaign indefinitely.

A law officer is being quoted as saying that to eradicate crime the authorities must “mobilize the whole society for the comprehensive management of social security and wage long-term battle against crime.”

According to Agence France Presse, since the Strike Hard campaign began in April 1996, some 1,500 people have already been executed and thousands of others have been sentenced to death or life imprisonment (SCMP, Aug. 23, and Agence France-Presse. Aug. 24, 1996).

China tells South Korea to Stop Sending Missionaries

According to the *South China Morning Post*, the Chinese government is concerned about the large number of South Korean missionaries operating in the country in violation of its religious policy. China prohibits foreigners from participating in any kind of mission work. The report says that missionaries mostly operate in Northeast China, particularly in Liaoning Province, where there is a large Korean minority.

The report maintains that South Korean missionaries are operating under the cover of business people or teachers. It is assumed that since China has mentioned this matter to the South Korean government, it intends to take action (CNCR, Sept. 6, 1996).

Catechist Training in Northeast China

One hundred people, eager to help their few priests and nuns continue the work of faith formation, enlisted in the first systematic training course for catechist in Jilin Province, northeast, China from July 20 to August 10. Most of the participants were in their 30s and 40s; the oldest was 75 and the youngest, 15, said Fr. Zhu, rector of the Jilin Theological and Philosophical Seminary.

Teaching the new catechists was challenging,” he said, “because few of them were familiar with the catechism and some even did not know the basic doctrines.”

The training focused on the Bible, doctrine and ethics. An official from the Religious Affairs Bureau conducted the session on politics. □