

China Church and News Update

by Tripod Staff

Message to China

On the feast of St. Francis Xavier, December 3, and an anniversary marking the 70th anniversary of the ordination of the first Chinese bishops in Rome in 1926 and the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy in China in 1946, the Pope, in a Vatican Radio address, issued a special appeal to China.

(Vatican Press releases Dec. 3, 1996). *For the entire address and responses from around the world, see p.31 of this issue of Tripod.*

Lien Chan visits Holy Father

Mr. Lien, Taiwan's highest ranking official to visit the Vatican, was granted a papal audience on Tuesday, January 7, 1997.

The Vatican is one of 30 states that recognises Taiwan. Mr. Lien wanted to visit the Pope to express his support for his latest world peace message which appealed to nations and groups to forgive past injuries to facilitate peace.

During the visit the official invited the Holy Father to visit Taiwan.

Through the Foreign Ministry spokesman, Shen Guofang, Beijing responded by saying, "The Vatican has expressed its wish to establish diplomatic relations with China, but it must cut its ties with Taiwan." He went on to comment that missionary work and the appointment of bishops were Beijing's prerogative. "We would hope to have no interference in our religious affairs, and when we talk about interference the scope is very wide, not only including missionary work but also the appointment of bishops." (SCMP, Jan 10, 1997).

Underground church again under fire

Officials in Central China are again trying to stamp out worship by the underground Catholics.

The Communist Party in Jiangsi Province has issued a document warning against infiltration by overseas religious forces and threats to political stability. The seven-point plan entitled *Procedures to Legally Implement the Eradication of Illegal Activities of the Underground Catholic Church* spells out the action to be taken.

Measures include registration and setting up a file for each believer and forcing them to write letters denying their faith and to join the official church. The document maintains that underground believers “used religion to commit criminal activities. This, seriously disturbs the social order and affects political stability.” It urges local authorities to use “resolute, decisive and organized” measures to stamp out the church, and “to destroy the church’s illegal places of assembly.” The authorities view underground congregations as a threat to Party rule. They particularly fear large assemblies as happens around the major church feast days. (*SCMP* Jan. 12, 1997).

Call to purge monasteries

Beijing has intensified its crackdown on Tibet’s independence movement. Communist Party regional secretary, Guo Jinlong, told officials to step up their work to eliminate the influence of the Dalai Lama in the Buddhist region. Guo called on legal officials to redouble their struggle against infiltration and advocated an intensification of patriotic instruction in Tibet’s monasteries and temples (*SCMP* Jan. 28, 1997).

Missionaries arrested

Four South Korean missionaries were arrested in northeast China in December and kept in custody for one week before being released. The Chinese government had previously expressed concern about the activities of Korean missionaries in the area, but no arrests had been made before (*CNRC* 2560, 31 Jan. 1997).

Religion Department opens at Beijing University

One of China’s top universities, Beijing University (Beida) has opened the first academic department of religion in the country.

Professor Tang Yijie of Beida’s Department of Philosophy said that “people’s interest in religion is due to confusion following the Cultural Revolution.” He said Buddhism and Taoism attract peasants, Christianity attracts the more educated people and those in coastal regions.

“Strike Hard” Campaign to include illegal religious activities

In a speech given by Li Ximing, Vice-chairman of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee (*Renmin Ribao* 29 Dec. 1996) said that the “Strike hard” anti-crime campaign in effect since April 1996, should pay more attention to separatists and religious activity.

According to Li Ximing, the campaign was successful in political and administrative areas, but needed to make progress in other areas.

Separatist and religious activities are among China's main concerns: the situation in Xinjiang where the Muslim Uygur are openly active and Tibet where a bomb was placed at the gate of a district government office in Lhasa on Christmas Day. In the realm of religion authorities are finding it more and more difficult to exercise control, especially in rural areas.

Non-Christian groups are not exempt. The governments' greatest area of concern is the proliferation of Daoist secret societies in the countryside (CNCR 2556, 17 Jan. 1997 and SCMP Feb. 11, 1997).

China's Top 10 domestic news stories

The editorial board of the *China Daily*, (Dec. 31, 1996) selected the top 10 domestic news stories for 1996. Following is a listing:

1. The Central Committee's endorsement of the Communist Party's decision to promote Socialist Ethical and Cultural Progress.
2. The Chinese economy's successful "soft landing", thanks to the effective macro control efforts of the government.
3. Chinese Premier Li Peng's December 10, signing of a decree to appoint Tung Chee-hwa the first chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
4. The People's Liberation Army's missile-launching training sessions, April 26, in the East and South China seas and military exercises in the Taiwan Straits, demonstrating the country's determination to safeguard territorial integrity and foil any attempt to split the motherland.
5. China's signing of border agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to build confidence in the military field.

The agreement will have a positive impact on peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and the world.

6. The country's crackdown on corruption which netted a number of corrupt officials.
7. China's expected record of at least 480 million tons of grain in 1996, about 13.5 million tons more than in 1995.
8. The floods during spring and summer which killed 3,000 people and caused a record of 220 billion yuan in damages.
9. Chinese athletes' winning 16 gold, 22 silver and 12 bronze medals, at the 26th Olympic Games in Atlanta, ranking fourth both in the number of gold medals and on the overall medal tally among delegations from 197 countries and regions.
10. The opening of the 2,553 kilometer Beijing-Kowloon railway line, the longest in China, on September 1.