

China Church and News Update

Death of Hohhot bishop

Bishop Francis Wang Xueming, 87, of Hohhot, one of the last two Vatican appointed bishops, died in February, 1996. His cremated remains were buried under the altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Hohhot.

Bishop Wang was appointed to the Chinese National People's Congress and was a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in the 1980s. He was elected vice-chairman of the first government approved Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1980. The other Vatican appointed bishop still in China is 89 year old retired Bishop Matthias Duan Yinming of Wanxian, Sichuan Province. (UCAN 912A)

Death of Heilongjiang bishop

Bishop Louis Liu Huanpo of Heilongjiang, 86, died in Harbin on January 19. Bishop Liu's remains were cremated and will be buried in May at the seminary in Jilin. (UCAN 912B)

Tibetan priest ordained

Lawrence Lu Rendi, only Tibetan graduate from the national seminary in Beijing, was ordained by Bishop Li Du'an of Xian, Shaanxi, on November 17. He

has returned to Shangyanjing, southeastern Tibet to the 900 Tibetan Catholics there. There are no statistics regarding the exact number of Catholics in Tibet but the number is known to be minimal. (UCAN 908B)

CIRS plans to continue contacts

The Catholic Institute for Religion and Society (CIRS) will continue to strengthen contacts with the Church in China after Hong Kong reverts to China on July 1, 1997. A collection of research was recently published to mark the institute's 10th anniversary. According to Fr. Luke Tsui Kam-yiu, CIRS director, future research will focus on how Chinese Catholics look at Chinese society today. (UCAN 910A)

Warning from religious leaders

In a joint message to the people of Hong Kong, the religious leaders of the six major religions noted that civilization's spiritual well-being is under threat from prosperity and violence. The leaders said they would keep promoting tolerance and work together to bring about love and stability during the period of Hong

Kong's transition to Chinese sovereignty. (UCAN 909A)

Shanghai prepares to print Catechism

The Catholic printing house in Shanghai is awaiting approval from the Press and Publication Administration to print the Chinese version of the "Catechism of the Catholic Church". All religious publications must be approved by the Religious Affairs Bureau. The Catechism was translated from the French version by theologians in Hong Kong and Taiwan. (UCAN 909A)

Police ransack bishop's home

Shanghai police ransacked the home of Bishop Joseph Fan Zhongliang, underground bishop in Shanghai. Security officers made off with Bibles, medals, rosaries and 20,000 yuan (app. US\$ 2,426.00).

Bishop Joseph Fan is 79 and is the coadjutor bishop of the diocese in the absence of Cardinal Kung.

Bishop Fan spent more than 20 years in prison, re-education and labour camps for his refusal to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. (Agence France-Presse, March 25, 1997).

Prayers offered for Deng Xiaoping

Catholics in Shenzhen offered prayers for Deng Xiaoping at

Sunday Mass on February 23. Catholics in Beijing and other places similarly paid homage to "the respected leader". Shenzhen has profited and grown economically from Deng's market policies. (UCAN 912A)

Women get new role in China church

The first pastoral letter, issued by the BCCC in August 1995, has helped to enhance women's status in the Church. The Bishop's Conference decided that a certain percentage of women should be participants in the Sixth National Congress of Catholic Representatives to be held later this year (1997). The problem remains whether a suitable number of qualified women can be found.

The formation of Sisters only really began to receive attention in the 1990s. While a few nuns have been sent abroad to study and have responsible posts in their dioceses, the majority of Sisters entered the convent with only primary or junior high education. Laywomen, however, are finding new outlets for serving the Church. (UCAN 913B)

Drop in seminarians studying abroad

The number of seminarians going abroad to study has dropped. In 1994, 20 seminarians from Sheshan went to Belgium and the United States compared to 6 this year. Clergy and seminarians who

want to study abroad need the approval of diocesan authorities and the local Religious Affairs Bureau as well as an invitation. There is no guarantee of receiving the RAB approval. With fewer invitations the government is more cautious in granting approval. Choosing the right candidate is important and a crucial criterion for selection is the candidate's willingness to return to serve the Church in China. To date most of those going abroad to study have returned and many now teach in China's seminaries. (UCAN 913A)

Religious leaders content with status quo

According to the New China News Agency, leaders of China's five leading religions said they are content with the current situation for the development of their religions. Han Wenzao, chairman of China Christian Council, said that within the confines of the Constitution they enjoy sufficient religious freedom and rights. There are an estimated 10,000,000 Protestants in China.

According to Zong Huaide, Chairman of the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference, Chinese Catholics can lead a normal, open and pleasant religious life. The number of Catholics is quoted at 4,000,000. [The actual number is closer to 10,000,000].

Shen Xiayi, adviser of the Chinese Islamic Association, said there are 19,000,000 Muslims., and pilgrimages to Mecca have resumed.

Zhang Jiyu, deputy secretary general of the Chinese Taoist Association, said that the essence of Taoism had been completely inherited in China. The five religious leaders are members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. They said the believer should also care about national affairs and try to do good for society.

(Report from *Xinhua*. CD, March 10, 1997, p. 4)

Religious leaders urge ethnic unity

Zhao Puchu, vice-chairman of NCCPCC and chairman of Subcommittee on Nationalities and Religion, called on ethnic and religious figures to assist central authorities in safe-guarding stability and unity. Zhao, also president of the Chinese Buddhist Association, said freedom of religion for all ethnic groups should be respected and protected even during separatist activities. Work with nationalities and religions is important to the reunification and development of minority regions. (*Xinhua*, March 7, 1997 p. 2)

Vatican Radio reports Deng's death

Vatican Radio in a special broadcast reported the news of Deng Xiaoping's death, describing him as "the patriarch of the Chinese Communist regime." Giancarlo Politi, PIME, head of the magazine *World and Mission*, said that when Deng replaced Mao Zedong, "Religions were tolerated, but always within the ideological framework of the party which has always viewed--and continues to view--religion not only as useless, but dangerous to Chinese society." (*Osservatore Romano* and *SCMP*, Feb. 22 1997, p. 6).

Survey targets paranormal attitudes

The results of the first public survey of Chinese attitudes towards the paranormal have been released. The China Association of Science and Technology received 2,595 answers to 5,000 questionnaires. The survey showed 4.4 % believed fortune-tellers had "special talent" while 50 % did not believe in fortune-telling. 28% consulted fortune tellers for fun while 20% did consult them for advice. Palm reading and character reading were not considered effective methods to tell one's future. One-third considered the paranormal talents of *Qi* masters to be magic tricks and/or deceptive sorcery.

However, many believed in traditional practices as *fung shui* and more than half said it would be wise to consult the *fung shui* expert before opening a business or moving house. Nearly two-thirds did not object to such practices. Most of the respondents toed the official line regarding the question. (*SCMP*, March 10, 1997, p. 7)

Sensitive files go to Amsterdam

The Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China will send microfilmed copies of its documentary files to the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. These include news reports on June 4, and files on the democratic movement and dissidents. The original copies will be kept in Hong Kong and the files made open to the public. Cheung Man-kwong, group member and Democratic Party Legislator said the move was being made to ensure all documents are kept safe and the files are in good condition. (*SMP*, March 23, 1997, p. 4)

Students opt to stay on

A survey made by David Zweig, of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, finds Chinese scholars opt to remain abroad because of better opportunities, living conditions and job prospects. Since 1978, 270,000 students have gone

abroad, 40% to the United States, to study. With China's stabilizing politically and economically since 1991, more than 30,000 have chosen to return. The survey showed that, from 1978 to mid 1980's, most returned home.

From mid-1980's, with the fall of Hu Yaobang and the Tiananmen crackdown, most scholars opted for a US green card and work permit. Since 1991, 30,000 scholars, many with green cards, have returned to China to work. In 1993 the survey showed 8% had definite plans to return to China while 66% would return but did not know when; 42% decided to remain abroad for better career opportunities, children's education and modern research facilities. Political stability was of concern to 30% and about 6% were afraid they would not be allowed to leave China later. The answers to the survey showed that China's political instability between 1987-1991 was a factor in remaining abroad. Another reason was that the US granted residency permits to 53,000 Chinese students after the Tiananmen incident. China accused the US of causing a brain drain. (*SCMP*, March 8, 1997, p. 10)

China concludes national meeting

China has concluded the Fifth Session of the 89th National People's Congress, (NPC) and the

Fifth Plenary Session of the People's Political Consultation Conference (PPCC) during which the groups discussed important issues and made important decisions. This year, 1997, is of special importance to China. It is marked by two historic events: the death of Deng Xiaoping on February 19 and China's resumption of sovereignty of Hong Kong on July 1.

The sessions affirmed that the death of paramount leader Deng Xiaoping will have not effect on his reforms and opening. The guidelines and foreign policy he set in placed will not change. China's aim remains the same, to build "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

In discussing the return of Hong Kong to the Motherland, the participants expressed confidence in China's ability to ensure a smooth transition of powers while maintaining Hong Kong's stability and prosperity. The participants underlined the need to succeed in the application of the principals of "one country two systems" and "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong" in view eventually of effecting national reunification.

The NPC session passed important new laws. Among them the revision of the criminal code and the Law of the People of the Republic of China on National Defence.

So far the NPC and its Standing Committee have

approved 101 laws and legal provisions in an effort to strengthen the country's legal system.

Another significant resolution taken was making Chongqing, China's fourth municipality directly under the central government. This is in view of stimulating development in the underdeveloped Central and Western regions.

In general, the participants characterized the atmosphere of the meeting as democratic, unifying and trusting (*CD*, March 15, 1997; *SCMP* March 1, 13, 15).

Chief speaks of dangers of reform

Li Ruihuan, head of the CPPCC, admitted the transformation to a market economy had caused some unsound, negative and decadent phenomena. He called for unity and hard work. Mr. Li said "Our country is undergoing profound changes...we may encounter various problems and make mistakes in our work. They cause difficulty for some people and can lead to psychological imbalance and ill temper." He asked his colleagues to do their utmost to solve problems and to be patient and do painstaking ideological work. Delegates to the conference denied that there was disunity in society. (*SCMP*, March 13, 1997, p. 10)

China plans nutrition program for children

China aims to reduce malnutrition among its children by the year 2000. The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with 10 other ministries, commissions and non-governmental organizations, will launch a national campaign this year to upgrade the physical fitness of Chinese people. The action is a response to the United Nations' call for an improvement in global nutrition. The latest national survey showed that about 35 percent of Chinese children below the age of 5 have failed to reach national indexes for physical development; the rate was as high as 50 per cent in some poor areas. The malnutrition rate for adults is 9 per cent in cities and 8 per cent in the countryside.

By the year 2000, 88 percent of the foods sold in markets must meet the national standard on food hygiene and at least 80 percent of students eating at school will be provided with healthy lunches. (*CD*, March 20, 1997) □