

China News and Church Update

Optimism best strategy

Bishop Joseph Zen, Coadjutor Bishop of Hong Kong, maintains that optimism is the best strategy for facing possible future difficulties. The Church in Hong Kong should continue doing what it does and even try to improve rather than waste time predicting and preparing for possible trouble. Bishop Zen sees no problem in continuing social services but said the area of education had not been completely clarified.

Church marks end of era with concelebrated Mass

On July 1, Hong Kong's three bishops, Cardinal John B. Wu, Bishop Zen and Bishop John Tong Hon will concelebrate Mass at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral to mark the end of the colonial era and Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty (*UCAN* 920 B Apr. 24, 1997).

Church leaders discuss religion with state officials

On May 20 Bishops Joseph Zen and John Tong and Vicar-General Dominic Chan left for Beijing for a two day meeting with state officials and religious representatives.

In mid-April, with the blessing of Cardinal John Baptist Wu, Hong Kong church leaders approached the New China News Agency (Xinhua) requesting to visit China and meet with Beijing officials. The three church leaders were officially invited by the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council.

The purpose of the meeting was for the church representatives to express their views directly to Beijing officials and ascertain Beijing's position on various matters regarding the Catholic Church in Hong Kong after July 1.

Bishop Zen described the discussions as friendly and frank. "We highly appreciate the leaders' open attitude towards us and thank them for their excellent hospitality....The meeting has strengthened our confidence and we hope that in future, from time to time, we will be able to exchange views with Beijing leaders."

Bishop Zen added, "We are determined to help the Hong Kong Catholic Church grow and we will continue to serve the people of Hong Kong after the handover. We also hope to have a closer relationship with the church on the mainland and will be able to continue to help them when necessary."

Catholic priest house ransacked

According to reports the police in a five-hour raid on Holy Saturday and early Easter morning (March 29-30) ransacked the Shanghai home of an underground Catholic priest and confiscated religious articles, cash, and other articles. A similar incident was reported on 4 March. (Kung Foundation report) (*SCMP*, 3 April, 1997, p. 11)

Europe helps fund Shanghai printing house

Bishop Josef Homeyer of Hildesheim, Germany, chairperson of the Commission of the Episcopates of the European Union, blessed an extension of the diocesan printing house in Shanghai on 6 April. Funds for the printing house came mostly from Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Monsignor Konrad Lachenmayr, of Missio Munich, described the project as a "concrete expression of solidarity" of the universal Church with the Church in China. Sister Pan Xiufang manages the printing house which has set a production target of 1.5 million copies of the Bible, 700,000 copies of the New Testament and 200,000 missals. Two more Sisters will join the press on completion of their training in Germany (*UCAN* 918 B).

New regulations for teaching in China seminaries

Regulations introduced in August 1996 state that mainland seminaries wishing to invite foreign teachers, including Hong Kong residents, must secure permission from the central government. Requests for copies of the regulations have been denied on the grounds that it is an "internal" document for the use of the RAB and mainland institutions only.

According to Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the Patriotic Association, when religious seminaries are inviting persons from abroad to teach, these persons must also follow the nation's regulations for all universities and technological institutes. Liu likewise said that the CCPA and Chinese Catholic Bishop's Conference have requested the central government to take into account the special circumstances of the seminaries. So far there has been no reply (*Sunday Examiner*, Vol. LI, No. 15 April 11th, 1997, p. 1).

Heroic priest dies at 90

Father Anthony Zhang Gangyi, Conventual Franciscan, died March 20 at age 90. Fr. Zhang hosted the inaugural meeting of China's underground bishops' conference in 1989. Zhang is also remembered as an "anti-Fascist hero" in Italy during World War II. In the winter of 1944 he helped inmates escape from a prison where Pope Pius XII had assigned him as chaplain when he heard that they were to be gunned down. In 1945 he narrowly escaped execution and managed to return to Rome where he hid

in the pope's quarters for 3 months. He returned to China in 1947. He spent 20 years in prison from 1959-1979. He returned to Zhangerce, Shaanxi in 1980 where he engaged in pastoral work. (*Sunday Examiner*, Vol. LI, No.16, April 18, p. 8).

Guide to religion

- The May 19, 1997 issue of the South China Morning Post in its *Guide to Religion* contained the following information:
- Ye Xiao-wen, Religious Affairs Bureau director general, in June promised the bureau had no plans to set up an office in Hong Kong.
- 43% of Hong Kong people who claim to participate in religious activities are unlikely to notice any change, at least in the short term.
- In recent years Hong Kong organizations have worked hard to develop close relationships with their counterparts in China. Many expect the handover to encourage further cooperation.
- Article 137 of the Basic Law protects religious teaching in classrooms and the Education Department expects no change to the existing set-up.
- Anglicans have no exclusive religious privilege.
- Who will officiate at the Opening of the Legal year, currently performed alternately by the Anglican and Catholic bishops has not been decided.
- Dropping the Queen's name from the Book of Common Prayer is unlikely. Her position as head of the Church is not being transferred along with sovereignty (*SCMP*, May 19, 1997, p. 3).

Religious leaders arrested

Eight religious leaders from evangelical house churches were arrested in Henan in March. One arrested was Peter Xu Yongze of the New Birth house church in Zhengzhou. Xu has often been criticized for his radical teachings. Dr. Han Wenzao, president of the China Christian Council, denied claims that the Government was tightening up. He said overseas churches should first consult the council before addressing Human Rights issues or questions on Tibet (*Sunday Morning Post* April 27, 1997, p. 6).

Chengdu Seminary reopens

The Chengdu Seminary, after being closed for more than two years, reopened in Pixian in a suburb of Chengdu City, Sichuan Province. Classes were suspended at the seminary in April 1994. The students had walked out after the RAB appointed of a non-Catholic as deputy rector (*UCAN* No. 923/B).

Beijing nuns bring hope to the dying

Catholic Sisters in Beijing are bringing God's message of hope to dying patients in the one and only hospice in Beijing. 93% of the patients are atheists but the Sisters say they wish to bring them peace and solace at this most difficult period in their lives.

The privately-run hospice has 160 patients; the oldest is 105 years old and the youngest is nine days. The Sisters eventually hope to have the Beijing diocese provide a similar service. (UCAN No. 921/B).

Religion on the rise

The leftist magazine, *Modern Ideological Trends*, reported recently (May 5) that many workers are losing faith and trust in the Communist Party and in the future of socialism. Large numbers, moreover, are turning to religion.

In 1982, results of a survey by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions revealed that 69 per cent of workers thought realizing communism was their top ideal. In 1996, the same survey revealed that the top priority is family considerations. The magazine stated that "as workers' ideals are diminishing, their belief in religion is rising."

Religion receives little attention in White Paper

China's State Council Information Office issued the third human rights white paper, *Progress in China's Human Rights Case in 1996* on March 31. Mention of religion appears only in passing in the section on ethnic minorities' rights, which reads "ethnic minorities in the autonomous areas are entitled to use and develop their own languages, keep or reform their folk customs, and be free in their religious beliefs." The 1991 and 1995 white papers carried whole sections on religious policies and development (*Sunday Examiner*, Vol. LI, No. 16, Apr. 18, p. 1).

Other news

Congress amends legal code

The Fifth session of the Eighth National People's Congress recast 15 counterrevolutionary crimes in China's Code of Criminal Law under which previously Catholics, dissidents and others could be charged. These offenses usually came under the classification "endangering national security or endangering public security".

Two thousand four hundred and forty-six delegates voted for the amendment, one hundred and twenty-two against. Wang Hanbin, NPC vice-chairman, said there are situations in which crimes endangering

security cannot be considered counterrevolutionary. Lau Yui-siu said the key to the amendment is that China has now adopted commonly used international jargon.

The change makes it harder to prosecute people on “unwarranted charges” and removes the “vague counterrevolutionary concept” (*Sunday Examiner*, Vol. LI, No. 15, 15 Apr. p. 1).

China attends to its orphans

Chinese officials admit that the nation’s orphanages are overflowing and are a serious problem. China has 100,000 orphans but only 84 orphanages and 700 welfare institutions to care for them.

Foreign monitors think the number is much larger as many, mostly new-born girls, are abandoned in villages. The Ministry of Civil Affairs has decided to redevelop 100 welfare institutes throughout the country. The 250 million yuan project should be completed this year. Another 32 billion yuan will be needed in the next 4 years (*SCMP* April 29, 1997, p. 8).

Party elder dies at 95

Communist party elder, Peng Zhen, 95, died on 27 April. The only official report on his death was an obituary released by Xinhua. Flags were not flown at half-mast

The death of Peng Zhen leaves only three of China’s eight “immortals” still alive. Analysts feel former president Yang Shangkun (89) is the only one likely to have strong influence on the political situation at this time. Peng was shunted out of the presidency in 1993. Yang’s bid for back room power depends on his mental agility according to one commentator (*SCMP*, April 28, 1997, p. 8).

Hong Kong News

Influx of illegal mainland children

Tung Chee-hwa, Chief Executive designate for the SAR, met with senior Guangdong provincial officials to discuss the seriousness of the an influx of illegal mainland children to Hong Kong. The specter of settling 35,000 to 70,000 children is overwhelming.

The Basic Law stipulates that mainland children fathered by Hong Kong men have the right of abode. There is no indication that the law will be changed (*SCMP* April 28, 1997, p 18 --editorial).

People’s Liberation Army comes to Hong Kong

The 40-strong advance guard of the People’s Liberation Army led by Major-General Zhou Borong arrived in Hong Kong on 21 April. The

Commander of the British Forces, Major General Bryan Dutton welcomed the troops at the Prince of Wales Barracks, Central, where they will be based.

Both Commanders promised to work for a smooth handover. Commander Dutton said a good relationship between the PLA and the British Garrison is in the long-term interests of Hong Kong. General Zhou said he would make full use of his stay to prepare for the transfer of responsibilities. (*SCMP*, 22 Apr. p. 1).

The two sides have reached agreement on China dispatching two more advanced parties of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) garrison to Hong Kong. The second contingent of 156 men arrived quietly on May 19 and the third arrives on May 30 (*China Daily*, May 15, 1997).

People's Daily to launch new edition

People's Daily, the newspaper of the ruling Communist Party, is planning a South China edition to boost its influence in Hong Kong. The launching date is July 1, 1997

Zhu Xinmin, chief of the *People's Daily* said, "we are obliged to help explain Party policies to Hong Kong." The new edition will cover Hong Kong, Macau, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan. The editorial department will be located in Guangzhou. It will focus largely on economic reconstruction in the region, economics, and cover social political, cultural and sports news. It will also report on activities of local Party leaders.

Mr. Zhu explained the policy of the paper, "We are the mouthpiece of the Communist Party," he said. "We explain accurately Party policies so people will have a good idea of what they are. Our stance is to support government policies. We try to explain what the leaders' views are and we help readers get a better idea of what the government thinks." (*SCMP* Feb. 18, 1997).

Restrictions imposed on travel

Traveling to Hong Kong from 15 June to 15 July will be restricted in order to ensure no disruption during the handover period. Entrance to Shenzhen and Zhuhai will also be restricted. Two-way permits will be suspended and travelers going overseas will not be allowed to stop in Hong Kong (*SCMP* 3 April, 1997, p. 1).