

China Church and News Update

Religion and Church News

China Church celebrates handover

On the Sunday prior to the reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, Catholics in China came together for special Masses of thanksgiving and other activities to mark the historic event.

Responding to a call from the government-recognized Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China, parishes throughout the mainland offered Masses of thanksgiving June 29 to welcome Hong Kong's return to China two days later.

One such parish answering the call was the cathedral in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province in South China, 120 kilometers northwest of Hong Kong.

A banner hanging at the entrance of the cathedral on June 29 proclaimed, "Warmly welcome Hong Kong's return to the motherland."
(UCAN 930/A June 30, 1997)

Bishop Zen comments on political statements

In an interview given to Jonathan Braude, Bishop Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun, recently appointed coadjutor Bishop of Hong Kong, said he may ask the foreign priests working for the diocese to be low-keyed and leave any statements on politics and human rights to the Chinese clergy. In response to a suggestion put forth by Fides, an unofficial Catholic news agency, he said that, if anything is to be said critical of Chinese policies, he should be told and he will speak out. There are cases when we cannot keep silent, even though they say "You are interfering". We are one church, whatever happens to the church in China affects us for we are brothers.

Tung Chee-hwa at Lutheran Federation

Tung Chee-hwa, speaking at the Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, said worshipping and other religious activities will not be curbed unless the law is violated. The Government would not "interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of Hong Kong." He gave assurance that religious organizations could continue to run seminaries, schools, hospitals and welfare institutions and could maintain

relationships with other religious groups and individuals. (SCMP, 10 July, 1997, p. 8)

Hong Kong priest allays Vatican fears

The Vatican expressed fears over the status of Catholicism in Hong Kong, after the handover on 1 July. It said the new law prohibiting acceptance of foreign funds would jeopardize the Church and organizations receiving financial support from the Vatican. A director of a Catholic lay formation centre [Fr. Ferdinand Lok] said the Vatican should understand that the religious future of Hong Kong would not be affected by the handover. (SCMP, 18 June, 1997, p. 3)

RAB head comments on religion in Hong Kong

The State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau director general, Ye Xiaowen, said the Bureau would not send any employees or apply Mainland religious laws in Hong Kong. Matters would be handled by the HKSAR. He said under the Basic Law religious organizations in the SAR and elsewhere should abide by the principles of no subordination, no interference and mutual respect. (China Daily, 11 June, 1997, p. 2)

China defends accusations

China defended itself against accusations of religious persecution saying critics look at China through the wrong end of the telescope. Ye Xiaowen, Director of the State Religious Affairs Bureau cited two cases: Wu Yangmin, executed on criminal charges and Yu Yongze, stressing that Yu's radical preaching had driven his followers "insane". Ye made his remarks as American Christian groups and the powerful Christian Coalition lobbied against renewal of MFN for China. (SCMP, June 10, 1997, p. 8)

Vatican-appointed bishops dies and Successor consecrated

Six bishops attended the Episcopal ordination of the new bishop of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, in northern China. Four months after the death of the late Vatican-appointed Bishop Franciscus Wang Xueming (1910-1997), Hohhot diocese elected Father John Wang Xixian, 71, to head the vacant see. Bishop Li Duan of Xian was the main consecrator. (UCAN 932/B July 17, 1997)

Diocesan administrator dies

Peter Zhang Jingye, SJ, 94, Administrator of the Diocese of Bengbu, Anhui Province, died on 16 May, 1997. (Christian Life Weekly, Taipei, 22 June, 1997, p. 7)

Curb on religious activities

Efforts to prevent infiltration by foreign religious activists are being stepped up. Police are worried that radical groups might cause trouble in the summer and in the run up to the 15th Communist Party Congress in October. A document issued in Tongxiang City, Zhejiang, outlined in detail three stages to be followed in the struggle against illegal activities of Christians, including Catholics. (SCMP, 17 June, 1997, p. 9)

Party members order exorcism

According to Guangzhou's *Yangcheng Evening News*, a factory dormitory built on a former graveyard site was exorcised for ghosts. A number of workers had suffered accidents and these were blamed on ghosts. Officials of the No. 2 Light Industry Group announced the decision to invite exorcists at a meeting last month. Each household had to contribute 150 yuan, about a third of each worker's monthly salary toward the expense, whether they believed in ghosts or not. The exercise was "shocking" as it was ordered by officials, who are Communist Party members. Party members are forbidden to engage in superstitious acts. (SCMP, 8 July, 1997, p. 9)

Three-self chairman happy with situation

Luo Gunzong, chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee stated in a press conference that the country enjoyed religious freedom. He stated that China published more bibles than any other country. He estimated that there were about 10,000,000 Protestants and 12,000 churches, 17 seminaries with 1,296 students in the country. The largest membership group is under 40. There are foreign missionaries in China but he did not know how many as proselytizing is prohibited. He singled out Koreans in his message. He urged missionaries to cooperate with the Three-self Patriotic Movement. He rejected allegations of the closing of 300 "house churches" in Shanghai but accepted discrimination in Henan province. He said policies were not applied "evenly everywhere" but there was no general persecution. (SCMP, 8 July, 1997, p. 9)

Surveillance stepped up in villages

According to Xinhua cadres in Zhejiang were told to pay equal attention to religious and economic work. Religions should be regulated and "practitioners" must support socialism and abide by the law. It is said that the cadres' fear of losing control of the villages is the cause of the increasing surveillance of religious activities. (SCMP, 16 June, 1997, p. 9)

Other News Update

Thirteen Chinese universities, including Beijing, Qinghua, Fudan, will recruit 100 outstanding students in Macao. They will not be required to pass the entrance examination. The Chinese Education Association in Macao said they must be healthy and have a good character. Academic qualifications were not mentioned. (China Today, 5 May, 1997, p. 62)

The Xinhua News Agency reports that “Cultivating Patriotic Feelings and Encouraging Dedication to the Motherland” is a major project of the 100 patriotic education bases set up by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee. According to the commentary, “an education in patriotism can improve the overall quality of the nation and promote socialist cultural and ethical progress.” (China Daily, 12 June, 1997, p. 4)

On May 29, the China Foundation for Human Rights Development (CFHRD) held its first council meeting in the Great Hall of the People. Huang Hua, honorary chairman, Lu Dong, chairman and Zhu Muzi, adviser stressed that the right to subsistence and development constitute the fundamental contents of human rights. China will carry on the development of human rights while safeguarding national dignity “The struggles of the Chinese people during the last century and half is in fact the process of striving for national sovereignty and human rights development” said Zhu Muzhi. (China Daily, May 30, 1997, p. 1)

Guangdong’s 70 millionth person was born on 29 May. The province vows to hold its population to 73.7 million by 2000. Family planning officials worry that the rapid increase in population will challenge its ambitious plan to increase its GDP eight fold. The province predicts 900,000 births annually in the next three years due to the large number of women in childbearing age in Guangdong. (China Daily, May 31, 1997, p. 2)

Beijing defended its one-child policy, stating that there is no choice but to retain family control to avoid a population disaster. Official statistics put China’s population at 1.22 billion at the end of 1996. The birthrate was 17 per 1000. “China cannot afford losses stemming from improper population policies any more” “China will continue to carry out its family planning policy.” Existing policy is in urban areas one-child per family, in most rural areas two is allowed. Penalties for violation of directive are now mostly financial. (SCMP 12 July, 1997, p. 9)