

## *China Church and News Update 1997*

### *A Review*

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The Chinese government this year has again made a number of statements related to religion. The fact that they issued a White Paper dealing exclusively with religion is indicative of the importance religion has in the eyes of the government. Some of these statements were made to counteract accusations against reported harassments and persecutions, as for example, the Human Rights Watch/Asia report (cf. *SCMP*'s write-up for October 22, 1997, and the director of the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau, Ye Xiaomen's speech published in the June 9 *Beijing Review*. Both cited below ).

Other statements were obviously to set the scene for President Jiang Zemin's trip to the United States as for example the White paper on Religious Freedom and another one of Mr. Ye's talks.

China also seemed eager to assure the international community of its political stability, unity and economic progress. These matters were often cited in the *China Daily* and the *Beijing Review*.

#### *Accusations of human rights violations*

Accusations of human rights violations continued to plague China during the course of the year. It was also admitted, however, that progress had been made along certain lines. Human Rights Watch/Asia maintains

- Police routinely harassed members of the underground churches.
- The worst forms of persecution--lengthy imprisonment and physical abuse--seem to have lessened.
- Control now takes the form of a registration process administered by the Religious Affairs Bureau.
- Abuses include destruction of mosques and meeting houses, confiscation of rosaries and Bibles in raids on unlicensed churches,

temporary detention of religious leaders and dismissal of Christians, Muslims Uygurs and members of underground sects from jobs.

The report said that as long as the Government continues to define “legitimate” and illegitimate” organizations in terms of accepting state control, religious persecution will continue. (summarized from the *SCMP* account 22 October, 1997, p. 9)

### ***Ye Xiaowen responds to allegations on religious rights violations***

- Religions are enjoying a “Golden Period”.
- The Government’s crack down on “cults” is to protect the people. (*SCMP*, 14 October, 1997, p. 10)
- “China’s policy of freedom of religious belief has been supported and welcomed by the broad masses of religious people in the country and has been praised by the international community.”
- But in recent years, some Westerners accused the Chinese government of “persecuting religious people” and “intolerance of religion”, citing the government’s crackdown on the activities of a small number of cults threatening social and public interest.
- In truth, since the 1980s, a group of cults has formed in various places around China, and although small in number they greatly harmed Chinese society and instigated hatred from both ordinary and religious people.

As to the religious freedom of Hong Kong residents, Ye said

- His bureau will not send a single employee to Hong Kong or apply mainland religious laws and regulations there;
- Hong Kong’s religious affairs will be managed by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government in accordance with the Basic Law free from central government intervention;
- religious organizations in the HKSAR and other parts of China should abide by the principle of “no subordination, no interference, and mutual respect” in conducting exchanges with each other;

- “We support friendly exchanges between the mainland and Hong Kong on the basis of the above mentioned principles.”
- When conducting religious activities in other parts of the country, Hong Kong residents must follow local laws and regulations; likewise, people from the mainland should respect Hong Kong’s religions and regulations. (Summarized from the *Beijing Review* Vol. 40, No. 26, June 30-July 6, 1997, p. 4)

### ***China reviews its achievements***

The celebration of the 48th birthday of the People’s Republic of China presented the government with the opportunity to comment extensively on China’s present situation and tremendous achievements

- China is enjoying political stability, national unity, and social and economic progress.
- Achievements in macro-economic control show that the government has learned much about the nature of a socialist market economy.

The national birthday, October 1, also provided an occasion to recall some of the year’s joys and sorrows. One of the sorrows was the death of Deng Xiaoping on February 19.

- Deng left a legacy in the Deng Xiaoping Theory of searching for a way to build socialism with Chinese characteristics.
- July 1, China resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong under the “one country, two systems” concept.”
- Hong Kong hosted the World Bank/IMF meetings in September increasing its fame and importance in the economic arena.
- The concept of “one country, two systems” which is being successfully implemented in Hong Kong makes for a belief that it will be instrumental in the reunification of Macao and Taiwan to the mainland.
- The 15th National Party Congress was concluded in September with the resolve to adhere to the Deng Xiaoping Theory. It also set the course for further development into the next century.
- A new definition of public ownership and the affirmation of its diversified forms was a breakthrough.

- Jiang Zemin was reelected and with a more seasoned leadership the country should be able to continue to develop well into the 21st Century and make contributions to world peace and progress. (summarized from the *China Daily*, 1 October, 1997, p. 4)

## ***Church News***

### ***Consecration of Bishops***

**Bishop Fang Xingyao**, only 44, ordained bishop of Linyi Diocese, Shangdong Province on July 27, 1997.

**John Wang Xixian**, 71, ordained Bishop of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, in July 1997

### ***Deaths of Bishops***

**Bishop Louis Liu Huanpo**, 86, died in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, January 19, 1997.

**Bishop Francis Wang Xueming**, 87, Bishop of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia and Vatican appointed, died on February 10, 1997.

**Franciscan Anthony Zhang Gangyi**, who hosted the inaugural meeting of the Underground Bishops' Conference, died in Zhangerce Village, Gaoling, County, Shaanxi Province, March 20, 1997.

**Peter Zhang Jingye, S.J.**, 94, Administrator of the Diocese of Bengbu, Anhui Province, died on May 16, 1997.

**Bishop Joseph Zong Huaide**, 80, of Jinan and Zhoucun, Chairman of both the Bishops Conference and the Patriotic Association of the government-sanctioned Catholic Church in China, died of a heart attack on June 27, 1997.

**Bishop John Cai Tiyan**, 77, bishop of Shantou, Guangdong Province, died suddenly on November 24, 1997.

### ***Arrests/Harassments/Releases***

Shanghai police ransacked the home of **Bishop Joseph Fan Zhongliang**, 79, underground bishop, in Shanghai on March 4, 1997. Security officers seized Bibles, medals, rosaries and 20,000 yuan (US\$2,426.00).

**Father Lu Shiliang**, underground priest, and five seminarians were arrested in Shanghai, on March 4, by Public Security officers.

**Li Lisheng**, officially ordained pastor of the Huizhou Church was detained in Shaanxi in June for preaching outside his own province of Guangdong. Under religious regulations itinerant evangelism is banned, and religious practitioners cannot preach outside their own designated venues without authorization.

**Eight religious leaders from evangelical house churches** were arrested in Henan in March; **Two house church leaders** were arrested in Pingdingshan City, Henan, July 10 while attending a wedding ceremony. Many other house church members were also arrested in Henan Province in 1997.

**Wang Quanjin**, of Baoding Diocese, Hebei Province, was arrested on September 24. There is no news of his release.

**Bishop James Su Zhemín**, 65, underground church, was arrested in Xinji City near Baoding on October 8, 1997. He was later released but remains under surveillance.

**Catholic nuns and lay people** not affiliated with the open church in Shaanxi have complained of harassment by government officials. The complaints came from attacks in Lijiayoufang, Shaheyang, and Zhijiangjiayan on August, 15, Feast of the Assumption. The attacks included alleged beatings, seizure of religious items and the detention of a 13 year old boy. On 5 August, officials broke into the church in Zhangjiayan and evicted the nuns from their convent, making them homeless.

### ***Sino Vatican relations***

On January 7, Mr. Lien, Taiwan's vice-president, visited the Vatican and had an audience with the Pope. Shen Guofang, a Beijing Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said, "The Vatican has expressed its wish to establish diplomatic relations with China, but it must cut its ties with Taiwan. 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)

**Bishops Joseph Zen and John Tong and Vicar-General Dominic Chan** went to Beijing on May 20, 1997 for a two day meeting with state officials and religious representatives.

The purpose of the meeting was to have church representatives 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.

### ***News of Seminaries***

- Seminaries in mainland China, wishing to invite teachers outside of mainland China, including Hong Kong, to teach in their seminaries, must now follow the nation's regulations for all universities and technological institutes and secure permission from the central government.
- Chengdu Seminary, after having been closed for more than two years, reopened in Pixian, a suburb of Chengdu City, in Sichuan Province.
- The Jilin Seminary celebrated its 10th anniversary on September 10. Since its opening the seminary has ordained 24 priests. Currently the seminary has 53 seminarians and two priests studying in Italy.

### ***Cathedral in process of renovation***

The Sofia cathedral in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, is being renovated with the help of donations from local residents. The cathedral, built by Russian troops in 1903, is located in a major business district and had fallen into disuse.

### ***Cardinal Kim in China***

Cardinal Stephen Kim of Seoul, South Korea, paid an official visit to China August 12-21. The Cardinal visited with government and church officials and with Korean Chinese Catholics in northeast China.

### ***Bishop Duan's triple celebration***

Bishop Matthias Duan Yinming Bishop of Wanxian, Sichuan, left the hospital on October 18 to attend a triple celebration: his 90 years of life, his 60 years of priesthood and 48 years of episcopacy, ( for longer report see pp.63-65 of this issue of *Tripod*)

### ***China publishes White Paper on Freedom of Religion***

China's White paper on religious freedom, published on October 16, got mixed reactions. (See pp. 37-59 for complete document)

### ***Mainland Sisters attend course in formation in Hong Kong***

From November 5 to 27, eighteen mainland Sisters from eight different provinces attended a course on Religious Life sponsored by the Catholic Institute for Religion and Society (CIRS), in Hong Kong. CIRS hopes, in this way, to help in the formation of the Sisters and extend their knowledge of the universal church.

### ***Documentation dealing with religion***

- **White Paper, Progress in China's Human Rights in 1996**, March 31, 1997
- **"Concerning the Implementation of the Special Struggle against Illegal Activities in Catholicism and Protestantism according to Law"**, issued by the Municipal Public Security Bureau and the Municipal United Front Work Department, transmitted by the Offices of the Municipal Party Committee and the Municipal Government, Tongxiang, Zhejiang, February 27, 1997.
- **Procedures to Legally Implement the Eradication of Illegal Activities of the Underground Catholic Church**, Tongxiang, Zhejiang, March 4, 1997
- **White paper on Religious Freedom in China**, October 16, 1997.
- **Guangzhou City Religious Affairs Administrative Regulations** (*Draft in process, no date given for implementation*)

### ***China News***

- February 19: Death of Deng Xiaoping. Prayers were offered for him at Sunday Mass on February 23 in Beijing. Vatican Radio in a special broadcast reported the news describing Deng as "the patriarch of the Chinese Communist regime."
- China holds Fifth Session of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Fifth Plenary Session of the People's Political Consultation Conference (PPCC). Among important changes: revisions in the criminal code and in national defence.

- April 21: A contingent, 40 strong advance guard of the People's Liberation Army led by Major-General Li Borong arrived in Hong Kong.
- April 27: The death of Communist Party elder, Peng Zhen, 95. leaves only three of China's "eight immortals" still alive.
- July 1: China resumes sovereignty over Hong Kong under "one country, two systems" concept.
- July 24: National anti-pornography Conference held in Beijing deals with pornography and other illegal publications. Participants included the Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Radio, Film and Television and the Press and Publications Administration.
- September 12-19 The 15th National Party Congress was attended by 2,048 delegates, elected from 500,000 candidates.
- October 23:, One thousand four hundred and eighty-three of the 2,079 staff members of Beijing University sent abroad to study in the past decade have returned to be part of the "backbone of the staff". New faculty is vital to the growth of the university. The returnees armed with modern concepts, fresh knowledge and updated information have raised the educational level of the university.
- October 29: President Jiang Zemin and President Bill Clinton held summit meeting in Washington, D.C.
- November 19: Wei Jingsheng, China's most famous dissident, is set free and exiled to the United States.

***Sources of information:***

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Beijing Review	Fides Information Service
Bridge	Oral sources and Personal observations
China Daily	Mondo e Missione
China Perspectives	South China Morning Post
China Study Journal	Sunday Examiner
CNRC China News and Church Report	Tripod
Eglises d'Asie	UCAN News