

## *China Church and News Update*

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### *Underground Bishop Philip Yang dies*

**Bishop Yang Libo** of Lanzhou, northwestern China, died on February 15. He was 79. About 6000 people attended his funeral.

Bishop Yang was born in 1918 in a poor mountain village in Gulang county, Gansu. He attended the minor seminary in Wuwei and the major seminary in Lanzhou, Gansu Province. He was ordained a priest in 1949 and spent more than 30 years of his nearly 50 years of priestly life in prison. From the early 50s until 1979, Bishop Yang was sent for reform-through labour. In 1981, following his release, he was secretly ordained bishop of Lanzhou. He was again imprisoned in 1983 and released in 1993. Before his death he had ordained 18 priests and received the vows of more than 100 Sisters. In 1995-96, he raised more than 100,000 yuan (US \$12,000) to dig wells in the village of Wuwei. He was eager to help alleviate the harshness of the lives of the people in the desertlike region of northwestern China. (*UCAN*, No. 965/A, 2-4 March, 1998; *Sunday Examiner*, 15 March, 1998).



### *China's First Catholic Retreat House to open on April 15*

The Jinze Retreat House located next to the Shanghai Church of St. John is scheduled to open officially on April 15. The Jinze Retreat House (so named because it is located in the suburb of Jinze) will be used for formation activities and retreats for clergy, Sisters and laity from the Shanghai Diocese and other parts of the country, as well as by overseas visitors. The Jesuits in Europe donated one-third of the 10 million yuan (US\$1.2 million) needed to build the retreat house. Other overseas donations covered the rest.

The three story retreat centre is managed by the Sisters of the Shanghai Diocese. It has 51 double-occupancy rooms, a chapel dedicated to St. Ignatius, prayer rooms, conference rooms and a garden (*UCAN*, No. 965/A, 2-4 March, 1998).

### ***Director of Religious Affairs Bureau refutes US charges***

Ye Xiaowen, director of Religious Affairs Bureau, headed a delegation to America to counter accusations of religious persecution on the mainland. Mr. Ye was invited by evangelist Billy Graham. In Washington Mr. Ye said that the charges made against China regarding religious freedom were totally unjustified. He rejected all allegations made on religious persecution and said the US State Department Human Rights Report was based on rumour, distortion, fabrication and imagination. He said there is no law requiring the registration of religious bodies. As a social body they are registered with civil administration departments. Ye urged the US government not to interfere with China's internal affairs on religious issues. He said there are people who accuse China of religious persecution because they are ignorant of China, and have a "Cold War mentality" (*China Daily*, 9 February, 1998, p. 4; *SCMP* 9 February, 1998; *SCMP* 13 February, 1998, p. 10; Reuter report).

### ***Future mission to China***

Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila in a statement on the church in Asia spoke of his personal concern for the Church in China. Along with the growing materialism and consumerism in China, there is a deeper yearning for the authentic meaning of life, he said. According to China experts the success of mission in China will depend on how we learn to enter into honest, open and constructive dialogue with the authorities as well as with the divided sectors of the Chinese Church. The Cardinal observed that the new modes of evangelization will involve more dialogue, and formation for Christian participation in political life (*Sunday Examiner*, 15 February, 1998).

### ***Spiritual formation top priority***

China's open church five year plan puts the spiritual formation of its priests and Sisters as its top priority. Bishop Joseph Liu Yuanren, President of the Bishops' Conference, said that formation is crucial to the development of future church leaders. The 75 year old bishop said that priests must constantly

upgrade their effectiveness and that the formation of women religious is as important as that of priests.

In commenting on communion with the Pope, Liu said that China is a regional church and everything it does is for the universal church (*Sunday Examiner*, 22 Feb. 1988).

### ***US religious delegation to China***

The three US clerics visiting China, (See editorial, p. 3), are part of an effort by Beijing to shed its reputation for religious persecution. The delegation, whose members were Rabbi Arthur Schneier President of the New York-based Appeal of Conscience Foundation, Archbishop Theodore McCarrick of the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey, and Reverend Don Argue, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, met with President Jiang who urged them to see for themselves what is happening in China, and to listen to the views of the people of all walks of life. Mr. Argue said what they had gained was access. Rabbi Schneier said American public opinion would not move unless there was improvement in human rights and religion (*SCMP*, 14 February, 1998, p. 8).

### ***Vatican seeks friendlier relations***

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican's Secretary of State, has proposed sending a papal envoy to China to help improve relations between Beijing and the Vatican. The Cardinal said that we [Vatican] would like to hope that Chinese Catholics would have a chance to live their faith freely. His comments echoed an earlier appeal of the Pope for the establishment of friendlier relations.

### ***Bishop Lin sends open letter***

Bishop James Lin Xili of Wenzhou, Xhejiang Province, who has been in hiding for months, has sent an open letter urging Catholics to "remember the greatness of the Holy Spirit who leads the Church" in the Year of the Holy Spirit. He implored priests and laity who had been inactive to resume Church work. Bishop Lin specified four goals for the year: to enable those who have not received Confirmation to prepare for the Sacrament; to strengthen faith, hope and love through works of charity; to attain communion among Christians in the Holy Spirit; and to seek and proclaim the Kingdom of God. He noted that the aim of evangelization is to spread the faith among those who do not know God, not to bring division. He urged Catholics to pray to the Holy Spirit and to

say the prayer written by the Pope for the Year of Christ, as they now have a translated version (*UCAN* 3 February, 1998, p. 7-8).

### ***Religion and the rule of law***

Zhao Puchu, head of the Buddhist Association of China, said that China is pursuing a rule of law in its focus on religious issues. China's religions flourish through a policy of freedom of belief. That principle, according to Zhao, will remain unchanged.

Fu Tieshan, head of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association and bishop of Beijing, said that to manage religious affairs according to law is good for religious freedom. He noted that religious bodies are social organizations and should be put into the frame work of the legal system (*China Daily*, 11 March, 1998, p. 2).

### ***The Ninth National People's Congress***

On February 6, 1998, the Deputies Qualifications Examination Committee of the NPC Standing Committee approved all 2,980 deputies elected locally to represent provinces, municipalities, autonomous regions, the Hong Kong SAR and the People's Liberation Army at the Ninth National People's Congress to take place in March.

Beijing invited the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, to the opening and closing sessions of the National People's Congress, on March 5 and 19. Hong Kong's Chief Executive took his seat among China's senior leaders (*FEER*, 5 March, 1998).

The 11 day meeting of the Ninth National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference which took place prior to the NPC meeting was a venue to advance solidarity and unity among the various forces and thus serve reforms, economic development, improve socialist democracy and the legal system and contribute to reunification.

The Ninth National People's Congress opened on 5 March, 1998. It voted to restructure the State Council by axing 11 government ministries and commissions and cutting the number of government officials in half. The reduction should be completed by the end of the year. The institutional reform aims at setting up a highly efficient, well coordinated, standardized administrative system and curbing overstaffing, bureaucracy and corruption.

The institutional restructuring is a "revolution" and shows the nation's determination to push forward reforms needed in its economic and political

structure to establish the socialist market economy (*China Daily Commentaries China Daily*, March 5, 11, 1998, ).

### ***China's human rights***

The European Union will not attack China's human rights record in Geneva at the United Nations Human Rights meeting this year.

The China Society for Human Rights Studies in Beijing said the US State Department report on Human Rights in China was filled with fabrication and distortion. The Society said that maintaining human rights according to US logic would require defying the legitimate Government of China and the status of the Communist Party. It urged the US to return to the correct route of dialogue (Xinhua report, *China Daily*, 3 March, 1998, p 1).

### ***Alarming suicide rates***

According to *China News Digest*, *Time* magazine reported a high suicide rate in China, 560 persons committing suicide each day [204,400 per year]. The *Youth Daily* of China reported that one-third of world suicides are in China. It is reported in a study by the World Bank, WHO and Harvard University that 30.3 out of 100,000 Chinese commit suicide. The world average is 10.7 per 100,000; 55.8% of all women who commit suicide are Chinese.

The factors causing these high rates has not been determined. The World Bank predicts that the number of suicides will rise by a factor of 2.5 in the next 22 years with 534,000 Chinese suicides by 2020 (CNCR 2622).

