

China Church and News Update

Religious news notes

Pope invites Chinese bishops to Asian Synod

At the opening Mass for the Synod of Bishops for Asia, John Paul II revealed that he had invited two bishops from mainland China, Bishop Matthias Duan Yinming of Wanxian and his coadjutor, Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan, to attend the Synod and hoped they would be allowed to come. The announcement was a gesture of friendship towards the Chinese Church and showed that the Pope did not intend to omit China from the agenda of the meetings (cf. Editorial, p.3).

Beijing reacts to invitation

Beijing expressed its regrets that the Vatican had invited Bishop Matthias Duan Yingming and Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan to attend the Asian synod of Bishops. They said, "The Vatican unilaterally and arbitrarily appointed the two persons to be members of the Asian Bishops' Conference" (*SCMP*, 30 April, 1998, p. 1).

Pope appeals to Mainland China

At the close of the Asian Synod the Pope made a special appeal to Mainland China. "We all

hope," he said, "that as the People's Republic of China gradually opens up to the world, the church in China will be permitted more contact with the Universal church." He also added, "The synod fathers from every country in Asia, always considered their Chinese brothers as being here in spirit and they hope that present difficulties may soon be overcome" (*SCMP*, May 15, 1996, p.11).

Bishop Zeng Jingmu freed

According to the *New York Times*, one of China's more prominent religious prisoners has been freed six months early. Catholic Bishop Zeng, 78, was jailed for refusing to cooperate with the government approved church.

Bishop Zeng was arrested in November 1995 and sentenced without trial to "re-education through labour" for holding unauthorized services in a home. He has already spent 23 years in prison for stressing his allegiance to the Pope. Bishop Zeng's plight had been the concern of human rights groups because of his age and for having spent so much of his life in prison.

His release was requested by the US religious leaders who went to the Mainland in February

as guests of the Chinese government (*New York Times*, and *SCMP*, May 11, 1998, p.8).

Haiyi Catholics celebrate opening of new church and shrine

Ethnic Sani Catholics in Haiyi village, 130 km from Kunming welcomed guests to their new Sacred Heart of Jesus Church and shrine to Our Lady on April 19. The ceremony was conducted by Fr. He Dezong (83), administrator of Kunming diocese. Fr. Lawrence Zhang Wenchang, who oversees the Haiyi community and Fr. Jacob Huang were present. The three priests are not members of the CCPA, but they invited the local Religious Affairs Bureau to the blessing. The church is registered with the government. The church and shrine were built by local Catholics themselves on the site of an old church.

Fr. Huang and Bai Catholics from Lefeng village took a 10-hour bus ride to come to sing for the Mass. On April 18, some 40 Catholics from other parts of Yunnan and neighboring provinces came to the celebration and asked for baptism (*UCAN*, April 27-28, No. 973A, p. 10-11).

Sister formation priority for China Church

Improvement in Sister formation is a major concern to many Catholic leaders. Bishop Joseph Liu Yuanren of Nanjing, president of the government-

sanctioned Bishops' Conference noted at the National Catholic Conference in January. Inadequate resources and formation personnel make it difficult to provide adequate formation. In addition the mind-set of many bishops and priests is still pre-Vatican II with regard to the role of nuns in Church matters. In addition to parish duties the Sisters may find it necessary to do self-supporting work. Furthermore, with the banning of foreign religious, the Sisters were left without role models.

As many of the Sisters came from the countryside they had only primary school education and were ignorant in many areas. Many Sisters are frustrated with the ambiguity of their identity in the Church. In districts with more resources some Sisters are given professional training or sent abroad to study.

Xian seminary in Shaanxi offers a one-year theology course for Sisters. Resource persons from Hong Kong are invited to lecture. Fr. Luke Tsui of Catholic Institute for Religion and Society, Hong Kong, has given retreats and lectures in China for nuns and plans on doing more (*UCAN* 971B, April 13-15, 1998).

Arrest of underground priests reported

The US based Cardinal Kung Foundation said Hebei police arrested two underground priests after the visit of the American

religious leaders in February. Local officials denied any knowledge of the arrests.

Fujian priest arrested

A Catholic source from Fu'an diocese reported that Father Miao Shaozeng of Fu'an diocese was arrested by public security officials on May 22 at the Catholic church in Kangcuo, where he is the parish priest.

Father is said not to be affiliated with the official Catholic Patriotic Association. He was charged with disrupting public order, and his residence was ransacked by security officers who confiscated many religious publications.

Christian culture festival

Lay theology students and their teachers organized Beijing's first diocesewide Christian culture festival. Their aim was to familiarise the people with the cultural aspects of the faith. Activities included a quiz competition, essay writing, poetry, singing, calligraphy, drawing, photography and sculpting. The students hope to share their knowledge and help Catholics have a better knowledge of Jesus. The lay theology programme is conducted on Saturdays over a three-year period. It began in 1997 at the request of Catholics and includes courses in theology, scripture, philosophy, Church history and music (*UCAN* No. 971B, April 16-17, 1998, p. 3).

Mainland priests taking Hong Kong program

Eight theology teachers from different Chinese Mainland seminaries are taking a three month long course at the Holy Spirit Seminary College, Hong Kong. The programme is tailored to meet the needs of the mainland priests. Courses include training in writing and editing teaching materials for dogmatic theology, preparation of Christology classes and exchange of spiritual and pastoral experiences. The venue provides the Chinese priests with the opportunity to contact more lecturers than they could contact through Hong Kong professors teaching at Chinese seminaries. They also can exchange experiences, use the seminary's upgraded library, the Ecumenical Information Network, an on-line library database of Catholic and Protestant seminaries in Hong Kong. On weekends with no classes the mainland priests visit parishes and Church institutions for first-hand Hong Kong pastoral experience. Fr. Savio Hon, SDB, is programme organizer (*UCAN* 971A 13 April, 1998, p. 3).

Call for national religious law

Sun Xipei, vice-president of China Christian Council, said a religious law is needed in order to better manage religious affairs. There are laws relating to religion but there is no specific religious law for the whole country. Such a

law should state what activities are legitimate and distinguish between religion and superstition (*China Daily*, 14 March 1998, p. 2).

Buddhist urged to study modern situation

Buddhists and scholars are urging that more attention be paid to Buddhism's modern situation. Buddhism is still attracting a great number of people and is of religious significance. Liu Ji, Vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, suggested the reform of Buddhism to help further the "cultural and ethical civilization". Scholars and monks said that China should do research into Buddhism's modern functions, including diplomatic and commercial possibilities (*China Daily*, 23 April, 1998, p. 2).

Tibetan monks arrested

Fifteen monks in a monastery in a remote area of Tibet were arrested during a recent crackdown. The monks had refused to denounce the Dalai Lama. The monastery had already resisted orders in 1996 to cut the number of monks from 400 to 150 and had disregarded warnings against displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama (*SCMP*, May 18, 1998, p.8, also Agence France).

Chinese Academy establishes Christian Study Centre

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, (CASS) has

established a Centre for the Study of Christianity. The Centre will conduct "comprehensive and systematic" research on the belief and cultural traditions of religions and promote worldwide exchanges.

The Centre is sponsored by the Institute of World Religions.

According to Cass' vice-president, Liu Ji, "The Centre has been granted full freedom to pursue creative academic research and to carry out exchanges with overseas scholars."

According to Liu, Christianity, which includes Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism, are three of China's most influential religions. "It is impossible to know the world and mankind well without studying carefully Christianity," Liu said at the inauguration of the Centre. "Religions are the treasure houses of culture," he said. He also stressed that religions must adapt to national traditions and China's modernization drive in order to prosper (*China Daily*, May 22, 1998, p.2).

Other News

Beijing University and US Jesuit Universities in joint education enterprise

Beijing University and a group of 25 Jesuit universities in the United States have jointly set up the Beijing International Management Center. It will offer a foreign-accredited MBA degree. The course, to begin in May, will

be 14 months long and be conducted by staff from both partners of the agreement. The degree will be recognized in both China and the United States. He Fangchuan, vice president and signatory for Beijing University, said that it would develop world class managers with a global perspective. The program is prepared to accept 60 Chinese students and 30 foreign students. Ernest Scalberg of Fordham University said it was a unique opportunity: "to build bridges while developing international markets" (*UCAN* April 13-15 971A, p. 7).

Jesuits initiate China program for undergraduates

In August the first group of undergraduates from US Jesuit universities will go to China for one to two semester of studies in Chinese culture. They will live at the Beijing Center, opening this summer on the campus of Beijing University of Physical Education. Trips to other parts of China, one for one week, one for two to three weeks, will be a part of the program. A scholar in residence will lead the longer trips.

This program is separate from the groundbreaking international master in business administration program conducted jointly by 25 US Jesuit universities and Beijing University that was announced earlier (*CNS*, 4 May, 1998).

Arabic and Islamic Institute opens in China

The United Arab Emirates have donated 12 million yuan (HK\$11.2 million) for a series of projects to teach Arabic language and culture in China. The first Arabic and Islamic institute in China was opened on 16 April. The Islamic UAE Centre in Beijing will be attached to the Foreign Language Studies University. More than 150 students have enrolled to study Arabic (*SCMP*, 17 April, 1998, p. 12).

Beijing University celebrates 100th anniversary

In a keynote address to 8,000 invited guests at a ceremony celebrating the centenary of Beijing University President Jiang Zemin told students that if they did not have the correct ideology and good moral character, it would be impossible for them to contribute their learning to the motherland and people. Without these they could not play an important role in society. While he praised the university's role in the 1919 anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism demonstrations, he made no mention of the 1989 democracy protests.

Sources said Jiang declined an honorary doctorate to avoid political attacks.

He urged the younger generation to carry on Beida's tradition of patriotism, progress, democracy and science. The modernization of China must be

centered on economic reform and the revitalization of science and education, he said.

Chen Jia'er, President of Beijing University, was encouraged by the speech and noted that "Beida will go all out to become a world-class university in the next century."

Present for the celebration were 80 representatives from overseas universities, Nobel Prize laureates and international corporate heads, along with many older alumni (*SCMP*, 5 May, 1998, p. 7; *China Daily*, 5 May, 1998, p. 1).

China set literacy goal for 2000

Education departments across China have been urged to reduce the illiteracy rate of young and middle-aged people to below 2 per cent by the year 2000. To do this 3.5 million persons must learn to read and write each year for the next three years (*China Daily*, 18 April, 1998, p. 2).

Wan Li criticises Mao

Wan Li, former chairman of the National People's Congress, in an interview with the *China Economic Times* said Chairman Mao made three mistakes: the anti-rightist campaign, the three red banners and the Cultural Revolution. The article celebrates 20 years of reform and prepares the way for more market reform measures. Mr. Wan went further in his criticisms of Maoism than

any previous leader (*SCMP* 1 May, 1998, p. 10.)

Traditional family values intact

In a report released by Xinhua surveys showed that traditional Chinese family values still remain intact. The survey also showed that for parents the education of their children is a main concern. 48.4 % of the respondents preferred a family of three: parents and one child. The same survey said that 42.6% included the elderly parents living with them as part of an ideal family. Only 6.1% said they did not wish any children, saying it was too hard to raise a child; they were too busy with their work, and lacked knowledge on parenting (*China Daily*, 31 March, 1998, p. 13).

Birth control policy unchanged and unchanging

China's birth control policy will remain unchanged for the next 30 to 50 years. The population experts maintain China must continue implementing its birth-control policy in accordance with its economy and resources (*China Daily*, 16 March, 1998, p. 4).

Community Centres for the elderly

China plans to set up 260,000 community service centres with 85% equipped with houses for the elderly. Enterprises, charity

organizations, volunteer agencies and individuals formerly assumed responsibility for the care of the elderly. It is necessary now for the whole of society to shoulder this responsibility. The changes in society, the decline of the extended family, the increase of the “vacuum family”, a term used to describe elderly people living alone, have altered the pattern of care. More and more elderly are choosing to stay in houses provided for them rather than remain with their families (*China Daily*, 18 March, 1998, p. 3).

China to upgrade internet services

Services for the Internet are expected to improve with the

Ministry of Information and Industry covering the entire information industry. Participants in a forum agreed that to upgrade the Internet services, the ministry should adopt an open manner. They said they hoped the government would refrain from meddling in major projects and concentrate on the administrative side of the trade. Gong Yuguo, from China Byte, a major Internet content provider, said that they are looking forward to the release of a comprehensive legal document on pricing, consumer supervision and copyright regulations (*China Daily*, 25 March, 1998, p. 5).

