

China Church and News Update

Religious News Notes

Underground leaders invited to class

From June 23-July 4, thirty-two Catholic leaders in the northwest province of Gansu, most of whom are not with the open church, were "invited" to attend a class at the Gansu Socialist Academy in Lanzhou, the provincial capital. The class sessions were organized by the Gansu Religious Affairs Bureau and the United Front Department.

According to the report, the participants deepened their knowledge of China's religious policies and regulations. The participants agreed "to maintain the leadership of the Communist Party, insisted on following the road of socialism and love for the country and religion."

It was also reported that the participants had pledged that Catholic affairs would not be interfered with by government administration, the judiciary or social affairs, and that religious affairs should safeguard the law, the people's interest and national unity.

Speeches were given by high-ranking government and Catholic Church officials including Jiang Zemin and Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing (*UCAN* and *Sunday Examiner*, Sept. 6, 1998).

Young priests encourage Bible reading

Young priests in China are encouraging the laity to read the Bible. More people are literate today, and Guangqi Press in Shanghai has distributed 350,000 copies of Bible extracts, Gospels and the New Testament in the past decade (*UCAN*, CH0322/98).*

Chinese Catholic Observers

According to Catholic sources, there is an increase in police action against believers of the unofficial church with arrests in Hebei, Jiangxi, Fujian and Liaoning.

Bishop Zhang Weizhu of Xianxian was arrested on May 31; Father Miao Shaozeng was arrested by security forces on May 22 in Kangzuo, Fujian; a church in Luoyang (Fujian) was raised to the ground, and other buildings are threatened with the same fate. In Liaoning a number of underground communities have been dispersed (*Fides*, June 12, '98).

Bishops detained during Clinton visit

Before President Clinton arrived in China on June 25, underground Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo, 63, of Zhengding, Hebei Province, was taken into custody on June 16. He is now free at home but under daily surveillance.

The bishop, with the help of local women religious, runs an orphanage for about 100 boys and girls with severe mental or physical handicaps (*Fides*, Aug.28, '98).

In Shanghai, Bishop Joseph Fan Zhongliang, S.J., 80+, was told to stay away from his home during the daytime, on June 30 and July 1, when Clinton was in Shanghai, although he could return at night (*UCAN*0398/98).

Catholics in Tibet

Father Lawrence Lu Rendi, 28, is the only Tibetan priest in China. The last missionary in the area died in 1949. In 1986 a church was reopened in Yanjing for some 5000 Catholics. Today, there are over 6500 Tibetan Catholics in Yanjing and another 3000 in the Tibetan autonomous prefectures in Yunnan. Catholics meet mostly in private homes. Father Lu spends much time traveling over poor roads, and instructing Catholics in the faith after every Mass as the laity have had little instruction thus far. (*UCAN*0488/93).

Young priest works with Tibetans in Sichuan

Father Li Lun, age 30, was ordained in 1994 for the Diocese of Kangding in the Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, on the Tibetan border. His mother is Tibetan and his father is Han. Most of the 2000 Catholics in the area are Tibetan. 600 of them joined Bishop Matthew Luo Duxi, 81, of Leshan, at the

opening of a church in Kangding on June 21 (*UCAN* CH0500/984).

New Centre for study of religions

Beijing has a new centre for the study of Christian religions. The purpose of the new centre is to coordinate the work of local and overseas institutes and academics in the field of religious studies. It is affiliated with the Institute of Research on World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences which has eight research offices for the study of the major religions of the world.

The Centre's director, Zhuo Xinping said he considered the Institute's research work as having no direct relationship with the government's religious policy. But since its research reflects people's understanding of religion and Christianity, it might affect government policy indirectly (*Fides* July 24, '98).

Sheshan alumni gather for refresher course

100 alumni of Sheshan Seminary gathered at the Guangqi Formation Center of the Diocese of Shanghai from July 7-21 for a refresher course.

Priests working in 33 dioceses had a reunion, shared pastoral experience and problems, and heard 3 guest lecturers from H.K., Taiwan and the USA. It was the third such refresher course in the history of Sheshan Seminary. The next one will be held in 2000 (*UCAN* CH0594/986).

Bishop Li of Changzhi dies

Bishop Li Weidao of Changzhi (Lu'an) in Shanxi Province, died of leukemia at age 79 on July 21. He had been ill for a year.

He was born in 1919, ordained in 1946, secretly ordained underground Bishop of Lu'an in 1982, and officially installed as the government-recognized Bishop of Changzhi in 1992 without joining the CCPA (*UCAN* CH0675/988)

Shenzhen set to build new church

At least 9000 Catholics attended the ceremony of laying the foundation stone for St. Anthony's Church in Futian district, Shenzhen. Bishop Jin Luxian of Shanghai was the main celebrant and Bishop Lin Bingliang of Guangzhou blessed the foundation stone (*Yi*, No. 4 April 1998, pp. 9-11).

Protestant minister detained

Rev. Yuan Xiangchen is under virtual house arrest for defying authorities and baptising 350 worshippers this month. Yuan, 85, was prevented from leaving his home by five officers, his wife said. Yuan refuses to register his parish with authorities. Police remain outside his door (*SCMP* Aug. 29, 1998).

Bishop Tong meets with Chinese priests in the USA

From August 15-31, Bishop John Tong, Auxiliary Bishop of Hong Kong, led a seven-day retreat for young priests from China currently studying in the United States, and visited with the Chinese community in

Transfiguration Parish, New York City where he spoke about the Church in China to over 100 parishioners.

Passing on the faith in China

Parents in the countryside throughout China still recite night prayers and sing with their young children, thus passing on the faith to another generation.

Shanghai has a Little Angels Choir for children and grand children, 4-12, of the Catholic Intelligentsia Association.

Three old laymen in Taiyuan hand copy Bible quotes and Catholic teachings to mail to every parish in their diocese for others to read (*UCAN* CH0321/982).

European Ecumenical Conference

The Third European Ecumenical Conference for Dialogue with China was held in Stavanger, Norway. The title of the Conference was "Religion and Hope - Viewpoints from China and from Europe."

Catholics from various countries of Europe attended as well as a Chinese delegation of Catholics and Protestants from the People's Republic of China. The Conference closed on Sunday, June 21, with an ecumenical service in the Catholic Church in Stavanger (*Fides*, June 19, '98).

China priests study in Hong Kong

Eight young priests who teach at eight major seminaries in China were

in H.K. for a course that ran from March 25-June 20. They were at the Holy Spirit Seminary to hear 16 professors lecture on how to organize seminary courses. This is to help standardize the teaching materials used in dogmatic theology in all Chinese seminaries (*UCAN* HK0415/982).

Bishop Jin meets with American visitors

Pres. Clinton and his wife, Hilary, met Bishop Jin Luxian in the Shanghai library on June 30 to discuss human rights and religious freedom.

On July 1, Bishop Jin, plus 4 other religious leaders (1 Protestant, 1 Buddhist, 1 Taoist and 1 Muslim) met U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in the Yuyuan Garden. She asked about registration of places of worship and contact with foreign religious believers. Hillary, Albright and Rabbi Schneier attended the rededication of a Jewish synagogue on July 1. The restored synagogue is open but lacks a congregation (*UCAN* CH0439/983).

UN Commissioner for Human Rights in China

Mary Robinson, the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, visited Beijing, Shanghai and Tibet from September 5-15. She termed her visit a success although some dissidents were not satisfied complaining that she had not been forceful enough not met with political prisoners.

Mrs. Robinson did, however, obtain China's promise to sign the United

Nations' Convention for Civil and Political rights in October.

The Commissioner discussed delicate matters with President Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Qian Qichen: the revision of the judgment on the Tiananmen incident; the liberation of the young Panchen Lama, the elimination of discrimination against working women. Mrs. Robinson was also asked to investigate into the death of 10 political prisoners in Xinzhou prison (Hubei) which the authorities call "suicide" (*Fides*, Sept. 18, 1998).

Other News

Women are suffering more than men in the latest round of radical reforms, but President Jiang Zemin has assured women that "The Communist Party always pays attention to women's work and safeguards and protects their interests by ensuring they enjoy equal status with men." However, according to the *China Daily*, 71% of managers would not hire a woman even if she was more suited to the job than a man.

In addition the one-child policy has exaggerated the mainland's traditional preference for baby boys, creating a strong gender bias with about 118 male births for every 104 female births.

Within the government, few women hold high-level posts. There are no women in the 19 member Politburo (*Agence France-Presse*, Sept. 12, 1998).

Floods in China

By August 18, Hong Kong had raised HK\$ 150 million for flood victims in China. The Hong Kong Diocese and Caritas raised more than HK\$ 500,000 alone. The worst hit of all provinces was Hubei where Bishop Petrus Zhang Boren, 85, of Hanyang, visited and comforted Catholic peasants suffering from China's worst flood since 1954.

Floods in China this summer affected more than 240 million people which is roughly one-fifth of China's total population at the cost of billions of dollars.

The army sent emergency contingents to the provinces of Jiangxi, Fujian, Hunan, Hubei and Guangxi, to evacuate the population with boats and helicopters. Unofficial reports say that hundreds of people have been swept away in the floods.

It is the first time that China has asked for international aid and relief (*Fides*, Aug. 7/14, 1998; *UCAN* CH00716/988)

*The *UCAN* numbers are taken from *UCAN* News on the Internet.

