

China Church and News Update

Xi'an Bishop's pastoral letter calls for renewal

XI'AN, China (UCAN): To prepare for the Jubilee Year 2000, the bishop of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, has urged Catholics to repent and to reconcile in the Year of God the Father.

Government-recognized Bishop Anthony Li Du'an of Xi'an in northwestern China issued a pastoral letter on November 29, the First Sunday of Advent, titled "Year of God the Holy Father 1999 - Remembering the Love of the Father, Reflect on Oneself, Repent and Renew to Welcome the Great Jubilee Year 2000."

In the letter addressed to all priests, seminarians, nuns and lay people in the diocese, the 71-year-old bishop stressed the importance of reflection and repentance in preparing to welcome the third Christian millennium.

He invited Catholics to purify their conscience by repenting and reconciling with God the Father and with any brothers and sisters that they had hurt.

Explaining that human conscience and all of Creation led people to God, he urged Catholics to experience the peace and love of the Holy Family, and to meditate on church teachings about God the Father. In practice, Bishop Li asked Catholics to live in love and reiterated Pope John Paul II's call to reflect on world history and to acknowledge their responsibility for wrongs committed in the name of the church so as to purify the church prior to the new millennium.

Citing the pope's review of divisions and violence in the name of the church during the past millennium, the bishop urged church members to offer their repentance and unity in the family and in society as gifts for the jubilee year.

He also urged Catholics to recite the Lord's Prayer more often, to glorify the Father and to pray for their own intentions. (13/12/1998)

Bishop Xie of Xichang dies

Bishop Xie Chaogong of Xichang, Sichuan Province, died on January 2, 1999 at the age of 87.

The funeral Mass was celebrated on January 7 and attended by over 300 people.

Bishop Xie was born in 1912 in Liangshan, Sichuan Province and ordained a priest in 1936 after completing his studies in Penang, Malaysia. He spent 28 years of his life in prison for his faith. He was consecrated bishop in 1991 at the age of 79.

Underground Bishop Yang of Hankou dies

(UCAN/SE) Bishop Anthony Yang, 83, Shaohuai of Hankou, Hubei Province, died on December 10, 1998.

In the early 1990s Bishop Yang, who was not recognized by the government-approved church, collaborated with Bishop Bernadine Dong Guangqing of Hankou, in the open church. In 1991, he took up residence at the Hankou Cathedral.

Bishop Yang was born in Xiaogan county, Hubei, in May 1915, and ordained a priest in 1945. He taught in the diocesan seminary, and served as the cathedral parish pastor until he was arrested in 1955. He spent 23 years in prison. He was released in 1983, and returned to his hometown to continue pastoral work. He was ordained secretly in 1984.

Harassment and violence against Baoding underground Catholics

According to reports, harassment and violence against Catholics in Baoding, Hebei Province, would seem to be on the increase.

Reliable sources have maintained that Father Peter Hu Duo was arrested and seriously beaten by officials on December 20, in Xushui county, near Baoding city.

The officials reportedly said that his legs had been broken due to the beating. His present whereabouts are unknown. Father Hu had already done time in a re-education-through-labor camp prior to this new arrest.

Three Catholic lay leaders of Liangzhaung village, Xushui county, were also attacked by a masked mob on December 24. The three were said to have required hospitalization following their beatings with electric batons and other instruments.

In another case, it was reported that a woman and her 16 year-old son also needed to be admitted to hospital after being severely beaten.

On December 25, according to the report, after a door to door search, public security officials found a group of Catholics in a vegetable shed about to celebrate Christmas. They were detained and fined 500 to 1000 *yuan* for illegal assembly.

On Christmas Eve, some 40 public security guards surrounded the home of an elderly woman and forbade Catholics from entering the house that served as a place of worship.

The whereabouts of Bishop James Su Zhimin of Baoding and Auxiliary Bishop An Shuxin, arrested in 1996, are still unknown.

Anthony Liu Bainian, vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Association in Beijing, said that he had no knowledge of these incidents, but all citizens were bound to abide by the law. He added that "Even if they [underground Catholics] have committed any wrong, we request the government to handle them with leniency."

Macau religious delegation to Mainland

(UCAN/SE) A religious delegation made up of four Buddhists, three Catholics, four Protestants and two Toaists went to Beijing from December 15-18, at the invitation of the Religious Affairs Bureau under China's State Council.

According to Catholic Bishop Domingo Lam of Macau, who led the delegation, the visit was meant to increase understanding between religious and government officials in China and the Macau delegates

In Beijing the delegates met Ye Xiaowen, the RAB director, the deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council, Chen Ziyang, and the head of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party.

They also met with Bishop Liu Yuanren of Nanjing, President of the government approved bishops' conference and Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan, chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

Beijing officials reassured the religious leaders that the principles of self-administration, self-support and self-propagation that apply to Christian churches in the Mainland, will not be applicable to Macau and Hong Kong. (10/1/99)

China plans to standardize the liturgy

(UCAN/SE) Liturgy officials of the government-approved church met in December to begin the standardization of liturgical practice throughout China, one in line with the universal church.

They will use the Hong Kong and Taiwan models of church practice as their reference.

The reform is expected to take a few years since the commission will publish a trial edition before printing any final edition.

The delay in the implementation of Vatican Council II's liturgical reforms is due to the fact that the China Church was not present at the Council (1962-1965). In China, reforms could only begin in the late 1980s.

Bishop Anthony Li Du'an of Xi'an is head of the Liturgical Commission. (20/12/98)

Chinese made nuncio

(UCAN/SE) Pope John Paul II has appointed Father Thomas Yeh Shengnan of Tainan diocese in southern Taiwan as apostolic nuncio to Sri Lanka. Archbishop-elect Yeh is the first Chinese to be an ambassador of the Holy See. He is also the first Chinese to receive training at the Vatican Diplomatic Academy. He has been named archbishop of Leptis Magna in North Africa. (6/12/98)

Four popular Church operated communications focussing on China end publication

The popular *Bridge, Church Life in China Today*, published by the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, stopped publication with its December 1997 issue.

Areopagus, A Living Encounter with Today's Religious World, the beautiful magazine published by Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre, Hong Kong, also stopped publication at the end of 1997.

China News Analysis, the scholarly Jesuit research bulletin, published by the Socio-Cultural Research Centre at Fu Jen University, Taiwan, which started publication in January 1984, ceased publication with its No. 1624 issue on December 15, 1998.

CNRC China News and Church Report, a publication of China Ministries International, published its last issue on December 21, 1998.

Other China News

China cleans up its act

(CD/FEER) China is planning to phase out the use of polystyrene food boxes in 1999 as part of a programme to clean up the environment. China disposes of ten billion polystyrene food boxes each year, polluting major cities and tourist sites. (24/12/98)

1991: Make or break year for the Communist Party

(Fides) Growing discontent in rural and city areas over corruption and unemployment, is pushing the Communist Party to take severe measures against organizations outside government control. Some members of the Security Bureau foresee 1999 as a “make or break” year for the Party.

A security source in Beijing reported that during internal summit meetings on how to prevent disorder and promote stability in China, President Jiang Zemin said, “The Party’s political fortune in the 21st century may well depend on whether we can maintain stability in 1999.”

To stem discontent with unemployment, peasant uprisings and to be vigilant on corruption, the government has ordered another anti-corruption campaign. In a television address on January 15, President Jiang Zemin said, “We will severely punish violations of Party discipline...Party members at all levels must handle conflicts with the public carefully to ensure social stability.”(22/1/99)

China pledges to send many more students to study abroad

(CD) The China Scholarship Council (CSC) is stepping up its efforts to provide scholarships for Chinese students and scholars to study abroad and for foreign students to study in China.

A total of 1,700 scholars have been selected to go abroad in 1999.

According to the Department for International Cooperation and Exchange of the Ministry of Education, China has sent more than 200,000 students and scholars to over 100 countries since the opening of China in 1978.

More than 90,000 of the 140,000 scholars (as opposed to regular students) sent abroad have returned home and are playing an important role in various economic and social sectors.

Selected applicants are required to sign contracts with the CSC and return at the designated time. They must reimburse any money received if they breach their contract.

The CSC was set up in 1996 to administer the implementation of this policy and broaden exchange programs with foreign counterparts. (9/12/1998)

Media ordered to step back into line

(SCMP) The Communist Party has called on the media to drop its agenda and get back into line to maintain social stability.

“The media must adopt a correct attitude and uphold party and ethnic unity to pave the way for the 50th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China and Macau’s handover in 1999,” party propaganda chief, Ding Guangen, told a national conference in Beijing for the nation’s publicity chiefs. “The media must give the party’s image greater priority,” Mr. Ding said.

The National Publicity Heads Conference, originally scheduled for January, was brought forward following concerns that some forms of media had gone beyond the line of official tolerance and warnings had to be issued.

Books dealing with political change, social problems and the liberalization of thought have been banned by the Propaganda Department.

The party leaders are concerned with the increasing numbers of memoirs by retired senior cadres reflecting on the Cultural Revolution and anti-rightist movements, such as *My Experience in Political Movements* by Siao Ke and Li Rui.

In a bid to maintain political harmony, leaders have urged newspapers not to mention any of these publications.

“A correct media orientation must be maintained to ensure social stability ushers in the 21st century,” said Mr. Ding. He added that “ideological officials should arm the people with scientific theories and introduce positive commentary works to instill inspiration. Clean government and hard work to overcome the present [economic] situation should be stressed,” he said. (28/11/ 98)