

China Church and News Update

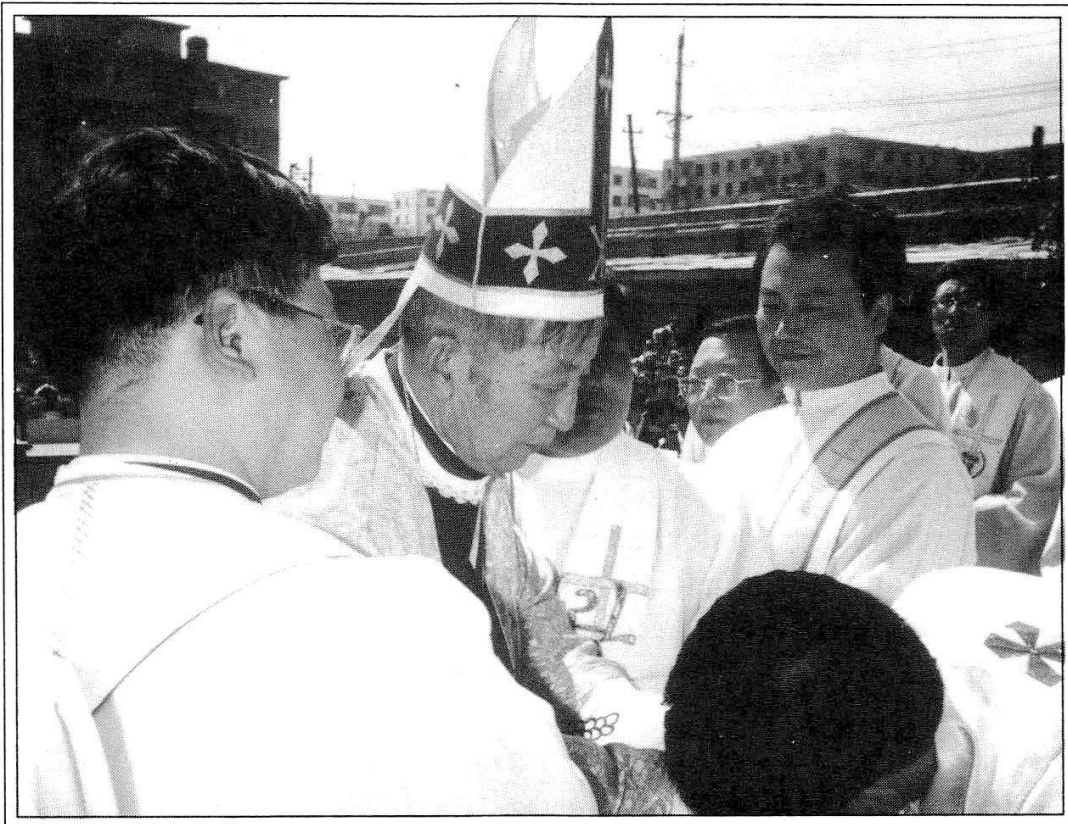
Special Feature

Ordination of Damasus Zhang Hanmin

By Peter Barry, M.M.

The ordination of Father Damasus Zhang Hanmin, 73, as bishop of northeast China's Jilin Diocese took place in Changchun on May 9, 1999. The principal consecrator was Bishop Pius Jin Peixian of the neighboring Liaoning Diocese. The co-consecrators were Bishops Anthony Li Du'an of the Xi'an Diocese in Shaanxi Province and Andreas Zhu Wenyu of the Chifeng Diocese in Inner Mongolia.

The Jilin Diocese, which covers the entire Jilin Province, had been without a bishop since the death of Bishop Li Xuesong in



Bishop Zhang greeting guests after his ordination in Jilin.

May 1994. The new bishop had been serving as the administrator of the diocese for the past four years. Bishop Angelo Kim Namsou, retired bishop of the Suwon Diocese in South Korea and Bishop Wu Shizhen of Nanchang in Jiangxi Province also attended the ceremony and concelebrated the Mass.

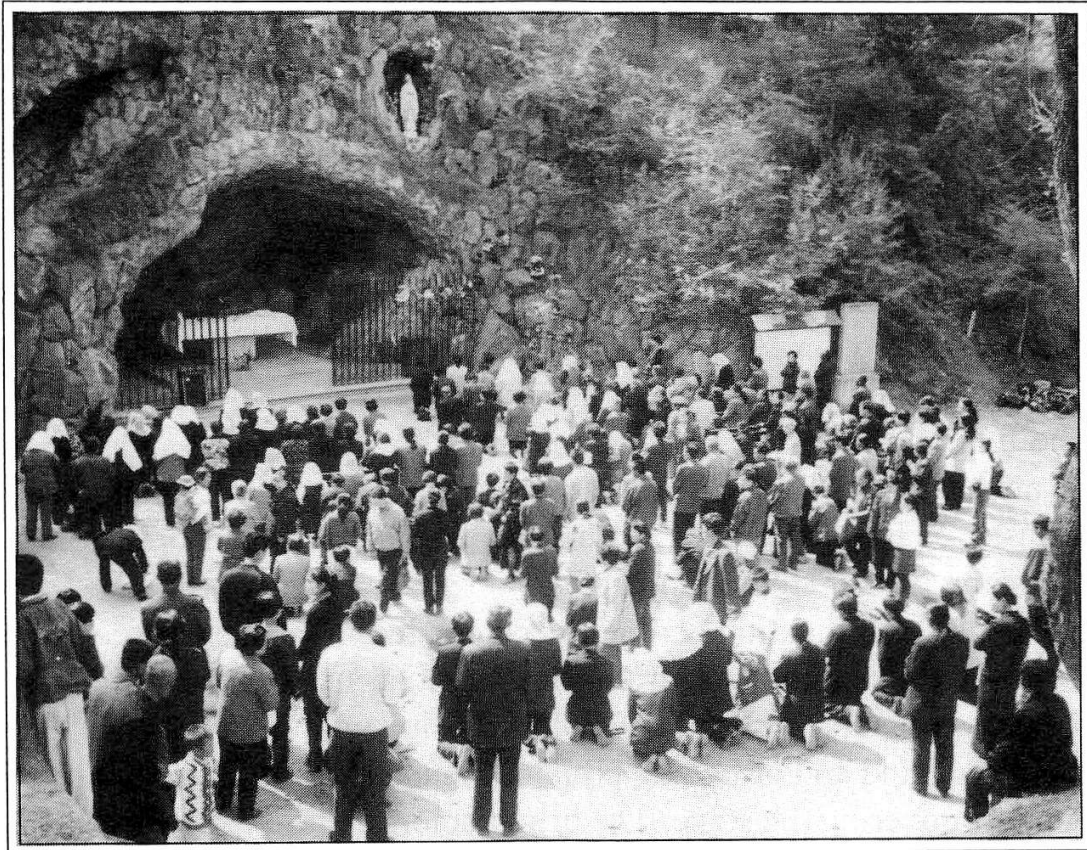
The ordination ceremony took place on an elevated wooden stage erected in the churchyard in front of the former French missionary building, which houses the bishop's residence and the diocesan offices. Some 7000 Catholics, from all over Jilin Province, stood patiently in the bright spring sunshine throughout the two hour ceremony. Also present were several foreign Catholics. About 60 priests concelebrated the Mass, including some from Germany, the United States and South Korea. Besides most of the 34 Jilin diocesan priests participating, other concelebrants came from Liaoning, Inner Mongolia, Hebei and Jiangxi Provinces. Sunday Mass was called off in most of the Jilin Diocese's 20 some parishes, to allow the pastors and people to attend Bishop Zhang's ordination ceremony. Of Jilin's 34 diocesan priests, 29 have been ordained in the last 10 years. Four of these are pursuing further studies abroad.

The ordination ceremony, celebrated in Chinese (except for some parts in Latin) according to the ritual used in the Universal Church, was both solemn and colorful. The gold vestments worn by both ordained and ordaining prelates blended well with the deep red carpets covering the stage. The bright colors guaranteed that all eyes of the 7000 strong congregation were attentively glued to the liturgical movements taking place before them. The choir was made up of the 49 seminarians (including 10 who graduated in January and are now gaining practical pastoral experience working in parishes) and some of the 88 novices and Sisters of the Jilin Diocese's Holy Family Congregation (73 young Sisters and 15 elderly ones). The choir, situated on the ground to the right of the stage, was ably directed by young Father Zhang Yingzhong of the Jilin Seminary faculty, who was suitably decked out in black tails, white shirt, black bow tie, and white gloves. An ordinary dining room chair was pressed into service as his podium.

The singers, both solo and congregational, sang with much feeling. To give the choir a breather, as well as to add instrumental music to the solemnity of the occasion, a 20-piece brass band, re-

splendent in white uniforms, stood in front of the stage and struck up lively church music at appropriate times during the ceremony.

For the reception of Holy Communion, a dozen priests carrying large ciboria of hosts went out into the midst of the congregation. Again, as in the case of the choir director, dining room chairs served



Pilgrims gather regularly at the Lourdes grotto on the grounds of the Jilin seminary to honor our Lady.

the purpose. The priests stood on these as they distributed communion to the faithful approaching them from all sides. The logistics of distributing communion out in the open to such a large crowd took place without incident, and is an example of the dignity and solemnity with which the liturgy was carried out.

The new bishop was born in Bajia village, which is located about 50 kilometers north of Chungchun, and established as a parish in 1844. It is considered the cradle of the Jilin Diocese. Of the 3000 villagers there, about 95% are Catholic. Many vocations to the priesthood and sisterhood have come from this Catholic village. Bishop Zhang began his studies for the priesthood in 1949, at Beijing's fa-

mous Chala Seminary, run by the French Vincentians. His studies were interrupted by the closure of the seminary in 1954. Bishop Zhang taught foreign languages, like Latin, English and French, at the secondary school level until the early 1980s. Preserving his vocation for nearly 30 years, Bishop Zhang was finally ordained a priest by Bishop Zong Huaide, president of the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference, in 1983. Bishop Zhang served in many parishes in the Jilin Diocese before being chosen as diocesan administrator in 1995.

UCA News, in its May story about the ordination of Bishop Zhang, gives the figure of 100,000 as the number of Catholics in the Jilin Diocese, divided into 70,000 in the “open” church and 30,000 in the “unofficial” church. Hopefully, reconciliation can take place soon among all the Catholics of the Jilin Diocese.

Before 1949, four foreign missionary congregations worked in what is now the Jilin Diocese: the Paris Foreign Mission Society in Jilin City, the German Benedictines in Yanji, the Quebec Foreign Mission Society in Xiping and the U.S. based Maryknoll Fathers and Sisters congregations in the part of the former Fushun Diocese now located in Jilin Province. It is now gratifying that many priests and Sisters are taking up positions of responsibility throughout the diocese. In fact, Jilin’s Holy Family Congregation have just elected a new superior. She is Sister Theresa Qi, in her 30s who returned earlier this year from three years of study in Germany

The prayer of Catholics in the universal church is that the Holy Spirit descend upon the new shepherd of the Jilin Diocese, that he have the grace to guide the young priests and religious, as well as all the Catholics of the diocese, in building up the Body of Christ which exists in the local church of Jilin.



Underground bishop joins government-approved church

Bishop Nicolas Shi Jingxian, 79, an Augustinian, formerly with the “underground” church, was installed as a bishop in the government-approved church on May 13, Ascension Thursday, in the cathedral of Shangqiu City, Henan Province, in Central China.

Bishop Pius Jin Peixian of Liaoning accepted Bishop Shi as a member of the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference.

About 300 Catholics attended the installation ceremony which was followed by a Mass concelebrated by the two bishops, and 18 priests from different dioceses in Henan.

Shangqiu is 630 kilometers south of Beijing. It currently has only two churches with three elderly priests, a seminarian and eight Sisters to serve some 20,000 Catholics.

Bishop Shi was ordained a priest in 1948 and secretly ordained a bishop in 1991 (UCAN, June 1, 1999).

First association of major superiors set up in Hebei

Nine diocesan women's congregations in Hebei Province have set up the first association of superiors of women religious in the Church in China.

The aim of the association is to strengthen Sisters' vocations. The first meeting of the preparatory group was held at the office of the provincial Catholic Church Administrative Commission and the Catholic Patriotic Association in Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei, on April 12, 1999.

Sister Zhang, superior of the Sisters of St. Teresa in Xingtai Diocese, drafted an agenda for the association for the second half of the year. The agenda, pending the bishops' approval, includes an administration class for superiors and exchange visits among congregations within Hebei Province. On the agenda for next year is also a formation class for the Sisters.

Improving the quality of nuns' formation was among the top priorities formulated during the Sixth National Congress of Catholic Representatives held in January 1998 in Beijing (UCAN, May 31, 1999).

Members of China's five approved religions join protest

Followers of all five government-recognized religions in China joined in demonstrations in Beijing, against NATO and the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. About 70 seminarians and lecturers from the National Seminary and Beijing Seminary, and a number of Sisters, priests and laity of the Beijing Diocese joined in the government-sanctioned march on May 10.

They joined Buddhists, Daoists, Muslims and Protestants in mourning the dead and expressing a wish for world peace. The reli-

gious sector protesters did not throw stones at the U.S. Embassy, nor did they use any violence. The demonstration lasted for about one hour.

In the dioceses of Guangzhou and Xiamen in southern China, as well as in other areas of China, the leaders of the five religions held meetings for their respective religions at which they condemned NATO that caused the casualties.

Birthday wishes for the Pope

Bishop Matthew Duan Yinming sent birthday wishes to the Pope by phone via Fides, saying, "Many happy returns of the day, congratulations, congratulations, Holy Father. I am very happy to congratulate the Holy Father." Bishop Duan told Fides, "I pray God almighty to bless Pope John Paul II, and to grant him health, long life and wisdom as he guides the universal Church. I would ask the Holy Father to pray for the Chinese Church. I wish to thank him once again for the invitation last year. Every day we pray for him and for his mission. For our part, we hope that the Holy See and China will soon reach an agreement to establish diplomatic relations. But at the moment China and the Vatican have two different ways of looking at certain problems. We hope they will soon find a common vision."

Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan also sent birthday greetings to Pope John Paul. Regarding diplomatic relations between China and the Holy See, the Bishop said, "We are not too concerned: God has his own times and his own plans" (Fides, May 18, 1999).

Bei Tang slated for monument

In Beijing the whole district around the Bei Tang (North Church or Holy Savior Cathedral) is being transformed into a area of high-rise buildings, offices, shopping malls, and luxurious apartments.

People who have lived near the cathedral for years, mostly Catholics of several generations, have been forced to move to the northern suburbs, beyond Haidian. One man commented, "This means that the cathedral will become nothing more than a monument and who knows if the Catholics will ever get permission to build another cathedral in the new district" (Fides, May 26, 99).

Underground churches in Fujian demolished

Chinese sources report that thirteen churches built by underground Catholics without government permission in Fuzhou Diocese, Fujian Province, have been leveled to the ground. One of these churches cost more than 2 million yuan.

A priest from the open church commented that officials from the construction department acted within their legal rights since the Catholics were acting against the law (SE April 25, 1999).

Fa Lun Gong stages surprise demonstration

The Fa Lun Gong sect pulled off the largest demonstration in Beijing since the June 4, 1989. On Sunday, April 25, some 15,000 members staged a peaceful sit-in at Zhongnanhai, the leadership headquarters near the Forbidden City. They demanded freedom to carry out their exercises without interference or prejudice.

Fa Lun Gong is more than a sect, it is a movement of Buddhist inspiration which seeks through a combination of qi gong gymnastics, breathing and meditation to incapsulate cosmic energy for the psychic and physical wellbeing, and moral and spiritual harmony of its members.

It was started in the 1990s by Li Hongzhi, 48, a qi gong master, who emigrated to the United States in 1998.

The demonstration was peacefully dispersed the same evening with the help of some of the members themselves. (Fides May 7, 1999).

Christians fend off police in Xi'an

Some 500 Christians in Xi'an, eager not to have their church demolished, fended off 30 policemen who tried to clear the church of protesters. No one was injured or arrested in the incident.

The Protestant church, built in 1916, is the oldest and largest in the city and had been attracting thousands of worshippers on Sunday, which had the city authorities worried. A few months ago, the government controlled management committee sold the church property to a developer and set aside a remote piece of land in the suburbs for a new church (HKS Tigernet, May 24, 99).

Macau Watch

Mainland religious delegation visits Macau

A 20 member Beijing delegation, led by Catholic Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing, met with local religious leaders in Macau to foster relationships before the Portuguese enclave reverts to Chinese sovereignty on December 20, 1999.

On April 28, the delegation visited Macau's Catholic Cathedral, Bishop Domingos Lam, the new St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church, and a Catholic school. The delegation also visited the Macau Evangelical Church, the largest Protestant community in Macau, and the Buddhist communities there.

There is no Taoist Association in Macau and the number of Muslims is very small. These two religions, both approved by China, were not slated for a visit by the delegation (SE, May 9, 1999).

Macau governor meets with the Pope

Genjeral Vasco Joaquim Rocha Vieira, governor of Macau and a Catholic, offered his invitation and that of Bishop Domingos Lam of Macau during an audience on May 17.

The Pope appeared interested in the invitation and asked many questions about Macau and the local Catholic Church.

A papal visit to Macau would require delicate diplomatic work since Macau is a Chinese territory under Portuguese administration, and there are no diplomatic ties between China and the Holy See.

Macau has about 25,000 Catholics, which is 6 per cent of the enclave's 430,000 population (UCAN, May 19, 1999).

June Missionary Prayer intention

The missionary prayer intention for the month of June is:

That the Church in Macau may intensify her missionary service to the Chinese people.

Macau dedicates first new church built in 20th century

Over 500 Catholics joined Bishop Domingos Lam of Macau and some 40 priests for the inauguration Mass for St. Joseph the Worker Church, the last church built in the diocese under Portuguese rule and the first totally new church built in Macau in this century.

The dedication was held on May 1, 1999 although the church was blessed and opened last November to serve the increasing number of migrants from Mainland China.

The church has about 100 parishioners but it is expected to build up quickly.

Major churches in the diocese were mostly built in the 16th century and rebuilt or renovated in the 18th or in recent times. The last to be thus renovated is Our Lady of Fatima Church whose origin goes back to 1565 and was then known as St. Antonio Church (UCAN, May 5, 1999).

Macau elects first chief executive.

Edmund Hau-wah, 44, won over his sole contender Stanley Au Chong-kit on May 15 with a vote of 163 to 34 in the 199-person Beijing-appointed Selection Committee to become the first chief executive of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR).

The Macau-born Ho, will be the first Chinese leader in Macau in more than four centuries. He will assume his position when the Portuguese colonial enclave reverts to Chinese sovereignty December 20, this year.

When Ho, currently vice-president of the Legislative Assembly and a banker, announced in mid-April that he would run for the election, he told the press that he could not exclude the possibility of having business with triad members, but he denied any links with them. He told the press that he would form a government that will have no links with triad crime gangs, and it will be immune from corruption.

Ho's nomination and election came as no surprise to many Macau people, who are concerned more about his ability to put society into right order as organized crime in Macau seems to be out of hand.
