

China Church and News Update

Eleven Ordained in Jilin

By Peter Barry, M.M.

On September 8, 1999 eleven young men in their 20's were ordained priests for the diocese of Jilin in northeast China. The ordinations took place in the village of Lianhuashen in Gongzhuling City, about a 2 ½ hour bumpy ride over dirt roads west of the Jilin provincial capital of Changchun. The newly constructed church in Lianhuashan was also consecrated on that day. The ordaining prelate was the new bishop of the Jilin Diocese, which comprises the whole of Jilin Province, Bishop Zhang Hanmin. Bishop Zhang, 75 years old, was consecrated bishop on May 9, 1999.

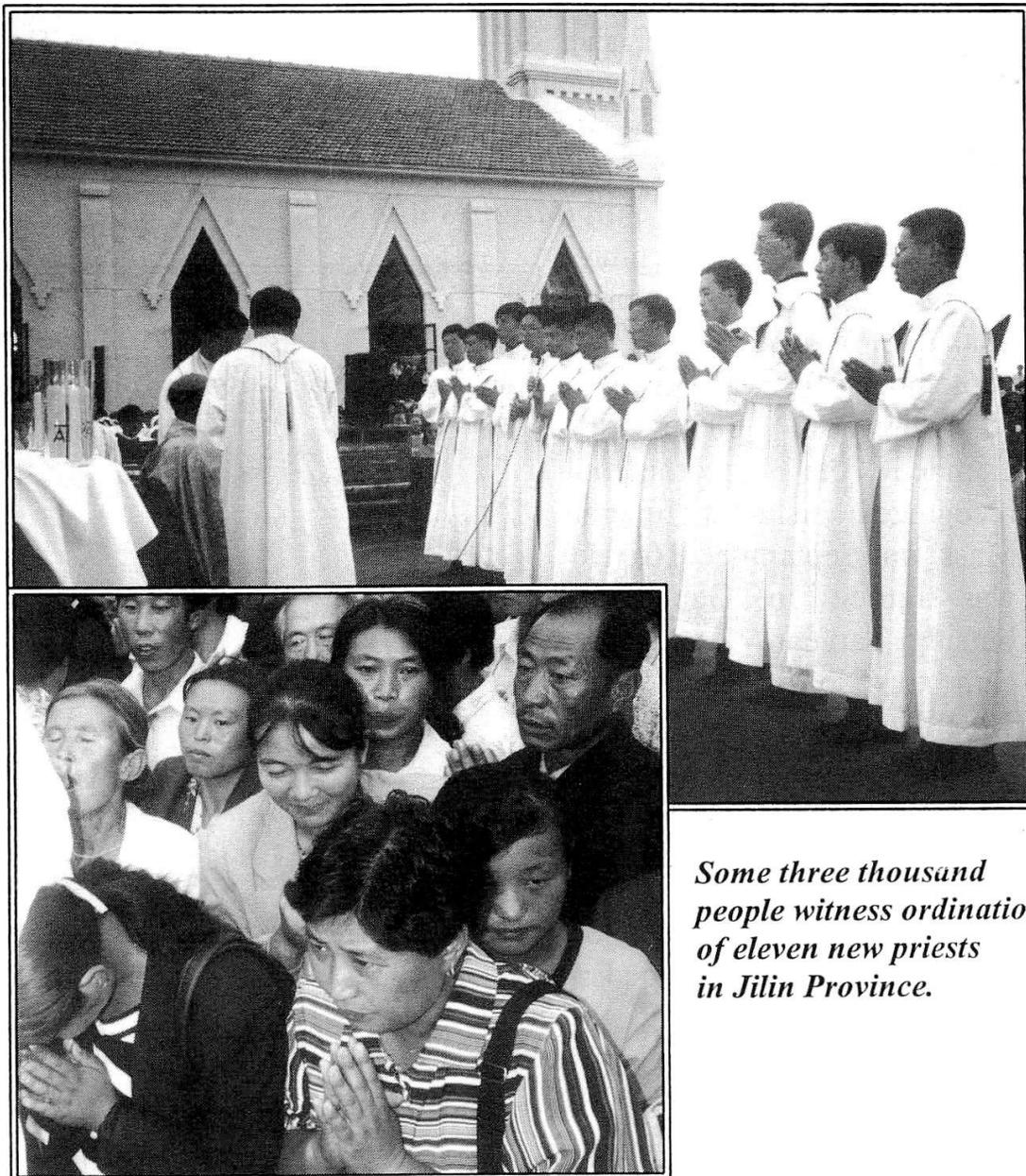
Ten of the newly ordained graduated from the Jilin Seminary in Jilin City in January 1999. The one other candidate, Roger Zhang, the nephew of Bishop Zhang, had graduated from the seminary in 1995, but was deemed too young to be ordained with his classmates in 1997.

Two of the newly ordained, Fathers Philip Lian and Peter Yin, belong to the Korean ethnic minority, who number over two million in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region in eastern Jilin Province. There are now three ethnic Korean priests among the nearly forty-two priests of the Jilin Diocese. The other is Father Abraham Yan Taijun, ordained in 1989. The newly ordained, are now serving with Father Abraham in Yanbian.

Three of the new Fathers have returned to the seminary to serve on the faculty, and the rest are assigned as curates in the 20-some parishes of Jilin Diocese.

The ordination ceremony was a replica of the episcopal consecration ceremony in Changchun in May, in the sense that it took place on a platform erected on the ground next to the church, and with the same choir made up of seminarians and Sisters. The choir gave its usual admirable performance under the capable baton of Father Zhang Zhongying. To show support for the two Korean ethnic priests, over twenty Catholics came from South Korea to attend the ceremony. Six Catholics also came from Japan, because Father Peter

Yin had spent over a year studying in a seminary in Japan. With the Korean ladies dressed in their traditional colorful gowns, one got the impression that the ordination was a celebration, not only of the Chinese Church, but of the whole Catholic Church in Asia. Neighboring dioceses in China were represented by Bishop Liu Jinghe of the Tangshan Diocese in Hebei Province, who attended along with four of his priests. They were concelebrants at the ordination Mass, as were some Western priests. It is estimated that about 3,000 Catholics attended the ceremony. No doubt their faith received a great boost by the new blood added to the ranks of the clergy of their diocese!



Some three thousand people witness ordination of eleven new priests in Jilin Province.

John Baptist Wang Jin ordained Bishop of Yuci

John Baptist Wang Jin was consecrated Bishop of Yuci, Shanxi Province, on September 14, 1999.

John Baptist Wang Jin was born on April 22, 1924 in Xi-jianhe Village in Taiyuan city. He graduated from Taiyuan Regional Seminary and was ordained a priest on June 9, 1951 by Bishop Lucas Capozzi in the Cathedral of Taiyuan. He served as acting parish priest of the Fangzhu Church and the Lintoucun Church, Lintou Village, both in Yushi County. More recently he was parish priest of Wumeizhuang in Taigu County.

The consecration took place in the Yuci Church and the chief consecrator was Bishop Sylvester Li Jiantang of Taiyuan. The other two consecrating bishops were John Huo Cheng of Fenyang and Bonaventure Luo Juan, of Shouzhou, also Shanxi Province.

Franciscan Bishop of Taiyuan dies at 88

Bishop Bonaventure Zhang Xin of Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, died on September 10, at the age of 88. More than 4,000 people attended the government-recognized bishop's funeral Mass on September 16. He was buried in Geliaogou, outside Taiyuan. Zhang became bishop of Taiyuan in 1981. He was born in Taiyuan in 1911 and entered the local minor seminary when he was 14 in 1925. He joined the Franciscan Order while studying in the major seminary. He was ordained a priest in 1937 and later studied at Fu Jen University, in Beijing.



Bishop Zhang was jailed for 15 years during the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (UCAN Daily Service, September 20, 1999).

China and freedom of religious belief

A report from the US State Department on the international situation for religious freedom speaks of new crackdowns and widespread persecution in Mainland China.

Foreign Ministry spokesman, Sun Yuxi, said, "Nobody has been arrested or detained because of religious belief but rather for breaking the law." Following the Falun Gong demonstrations, the government increased control over syncretic sects.

The report stated that "in the area of religious freedom in China serious problems continued in violation of internationally recognized norms" (SCMP, September 11, 1999).

Bishop and priests detained

Bishop Lin Xili, 81, underground, of Wenzhou was arrested on September 7. Three priests were also arrested in September. The whereabouts of these men are unknown (SCMP, September 15, 1999).

Underground Christians detained

Thirty-one underground Christians have been detained in Henan Province after attending an evangelical meeting in a house west of Tanghe in the southwest region of Henan. The group is scheduled to be tried at the Fangzheng County court and were told to expect substantial prison terms of as much as ten years. (SCMP, September 10, 1999).

Sino-Vatican relations back in the news

Sources from both the "open" and "underground" Church communities in China have heard from official and unofficial sources that Beijing and the Vatican might establish diplomatic relations before the year's end. Even personnel from the Religious Affairs Bureau have admitted that they heard of this possibility as far back as August. "It's an open secret," said Bishop Pius Jin Peixian of Liaoning, "All government officials know about it, only the Church people are left in the dark" (UCAN Daily Service, September 27, 1999).