

# ***China Church and News Update (December 2007 – December 2008)***

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*Compiled by Sergio Ticozzi, PIME*

## **Ordination of new Bishops**

- 1) Bishop Joseph Gan Junqiu, 43, ordained archbishop of Guangzhou, Guangdong, on December 4, 2007.
- 2) Bishop Joseph Li Jing, 40, ordained coadjutor bishop of Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, on December 21, 2007.

## **Death of Bishops**

- 1) Bishop John Liu Dinghan (1917-2007), retired bishop of Cangzhou (Xianxian), Hebei, died on December 20, 2007.
- 2) Bishop Mathias Chen Xilu (1920-2008), bishop of Hengshui Diocese (Jingxian), Hebei, died on January 16, 2008.
- 3) Bishop James Zhao Ziping (1912-2008), bishop of Jinan Diocese, Shandong, died on May 18, 2008.
- 4) Bishop Joseph Jiang Mingyuan (1931-2008), bishop of Zhaoxian, Hebei, died on July 13, 2008.
- 5) Bishop Joseph Sun Zhibin (1911-2008), bishop of Yidu, Shandong, died on October 23, 2008.

6) Bishop Pius Jin Peixian (1924-2008), retired bishop of Liaoning, died on November 4, 2008.

7) Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan (1916-2008), bishop of Wanzhou Diocese, Chongqing municipality, Sichuan province, died on December 8, 2008.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### December 2007

*December 4:* Episcopal ordination of Bishop Joseph Gan, Junqiu, 43, as archbishop of Guangzhou, Guangdong, approved by both the Holy See and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of China.

*December 7:* 270 Protestant Christians were arrested and 150 detained in Hedeng district, Linyi city, Shandong, for "illegal religious activity."

*December 8:* End of the 2 week visit to Belgium of 5 Catholic young bishops (ordained in 2006 and 2007) and 5 priests in leading Church posts, invited by the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, to "learn about diocesan management, pastoral work and community life" (November 26 - December 8).

*December 14:* Release of Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo, of Zhengding, Hebei, from his second detention of the year (June 5 - 22, and August 23 - December 14).

*December 17-19:* Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPC, opened with a speech by Pres. Hu Jintao on rural issues, corruption and the role of religion. On 18 December the Politburo held a plenary collective study session on religion. During the meeting Hu Jintao, the Party's general secretary, praised the contribution of religion to a "harmonious



society” and called on the party to pay more attention to religion’s positive role. Prof. Mu Zhongjian, an expert on Confucianism from the Central University of Nationalities, and Prof. Zhuo Xinping, a specialist on Christianity from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, gave speeches.

*December 20:* Death of Bishop John Liu Dinghan, 90, retired bishop of Cangzhou (Xianxian), Hebei, after four months of illness.

*December 21:* Episcopal ordination of Bishop Joseph Li Jing, 40, as coadjutor bishop of Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, with the approval of both the Holy See and the Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference. The ceremony was supposed to be held on December 8, but was postponed due to a disagreement about the ordaining bishops.

*December 24:* Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai issued a Pastoral Letter, which dealt with the celebration in 2008 of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Catholic presence in Shanghai. He urged his flock to intensify efforts at evangelization, and to renew themselves spiritually in response to the Holy Father’s call for prayers to Our Lady of Sheshan on May 24.

## **January 2008**

*January 2:* The People’s Daily published a photo of President Hu Jintao shaking hands with Liu Bainian, the vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, during an exchange of good wishes at Chinese New Year.

*January 9:* Bishop Zhan Silu of Mindong Diocese, Fujian, blessed and opened an “Honor Old People’s Center” in Fu’an city.

*January 13:* The Protestant Three Self-Movement assembly ended with a speech by SARA director Xiaowen.

*January 16:* Bishop Matthias Chen Xilu, of Hengshui Diocese, Jingxian District, Hebei Province, died. He was born in 1928, ordained a priest in 1955 and a bishop in 1996, with the approval of both the Holy See and the Chinese authorities. His coadjutor bishop Peter Feng Xinmao, 45, succeeded him as bishop of Hengshui Diocese.

*January 21:* China Central Television broadcast a 15-minute show on the religious life and the activities of Catholic communities in Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing.

## **February 2008**

*February 13-21:* During the celebration of Chinese New Year, two priests of a parish in the diocese of Baotou, Inner Mongolia, organized the first local evangelization congress. Over 1,300 faithful from the area came together in a gesture of communion, in the midst of what had been a difficult and painful history for the local Catholics. They displayed great determination to continue on the path of restored communion, in the light of the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI.

*February 19:* During a visit to Georgetown University, in the USA, Ye Xiaowen, the director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, was reported to have said that the Vatican has indicated that diplomatic recognition "was not a difficult issue." He also had a meeting with the Papal Nuncio to USA, with President Bush's ambassador for international religious freedom, John Hanford, and with Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the retired archbishop of Washington.

*February 20:* *L'Osservatorio Romano*, English edition, published

a commentary on the Papal Letter to the Church in China, entitled "A Father's Concern for his Children."

*February 27:* The Xinhua News Agency reported the news of the recent finding of a tombstone of the An family in Luoyang, Henan, which included a text of *Jingjiao* (Eastern Syrian Church) doctrine and history. It was "written by a prelate who lived for a long time in China during the eighth century. Besides the religious activities of the An family, the tombstone also revealed important information on the churches and communities of believers at that time." The Agency compared the new find with the famous *Jingjiao Bei*, the "Nestorian Stele," discovered near Xi'an in 1623.

### **March 2008**

*March 3-14:* 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 2,195 members). Catholic members were: Liu Bainian, Bishop Ma Yinglin, Bishop Fang Xingyao, Fr. Lei Shiyong, and Liu Yuanlong, while Bishop Jin Luxian could not participate due to illness.

Parallel to it, the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress (NPC, 5-15 March) was held, whose Catholic members were Bishop Fang Jianping, Fr. Guo Jincai and Fr. Huang Bingzhang.

In his keynote speech at the opening ceremony, Jia Qinglin, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, urged the implementation of the policy of religious freedom, to maintenance of the regulations on religious affairs, and the full use of the positive role of religion in promoting social harmony.

In an interview reported by the *South China Morning Post* (March 5), Ye Xiaowen, director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, stated that overseas media had inaccurately reported about him during his February visit to the USA, when

they quoted him as that Beijing and the Vatican “are walking towards each other.” “When it comes to improving ties between the two sides, some compromise should be made. But China will never make any concession on issues of principle.”

On March 10, the same Mr. Ye Xiaowen, in an interview with the *Nanfang Weekend* newspaper (published in its issue of March 13) made an unusually strong attack against the Catholic Church and Pope Benedict’s letter to Catholics in China.

*March 4:* The China Daily online published an article by Bao Dazu, entitled “Religion can promote harmony.” The official statistics of religious believers were also given. Religious believers now number over 100 million throughout the whole country. They are mostly Buddhists, Daoists, Protestants, Catholics and Muslims. Among them there are 18 million Muslims, 10 million Protestants and 4 million Catholics (see Statistics).

*March 4:* According to a UCAN report, “a local Chinese government gave, then withdrew permission for Catholics to restore the Marian pilgrimage site” in Tianjiajing, Linzhou district, Anyang Diocese. In May 2006, the government issued a land permit to the diocese, and Catholics began constructing a new church. They even made a new Marian statue for the church. In 2007, however, the government revoked the land permit. Officials told the Catholics that the site is not a government-recognized religious venue and that it is illegal to hold religious services there. On July 4, 2007, the Catholics moved the new statue of the Blessed Mother to the nearby St. Joseph’s Church. The Anyang diocese applied again to rebuild the church. But on November 7, the government reiterated its earlier decision of not allowing the use of the land at Tianjiajing for religious purposes.

*March 31:* A Belgian delegation arrived in Beijing, led by

Cardinal Godfried Danneels, with four bishops and some board members of the Ferdinand Verbiest Institute of the Catholic Leuven University, Belgium. Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) Father Jeroom Heyndrickx, former institute director, was one of the delegates. The Institute for Study of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences invited the group.

### **April 2008**

*April 4:* The *Nanfang Weekly* published an article commemorating the third anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II. The author remembered the Holy Father as a “very beloved” Pope, who “changed the face of the Catholic Church and of the world.”

### **May 2008**

*May 5:* The *Christian Post* reporter, Ethan Cole, published the results of surveys on religion in China, carried out in 2006 by the Pew Global Attitudes Project. About 31 percent of Chinese citizens consider religion to be very or somewhat important in their lives, compared to only 11 percent, who say religion is not at all important (see Statistics).

*May 7:* The Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra performed at the Vatican in the presence of Pope Benedict XVI.

*May 12:* An earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter Scale took place in Sichuan Province. The great disaster and its numerous victims stirred deep compassion and prompted help from many people, both inside and outside the country, including from the Holy Father and Catholics.

*May 17:* The celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of evangelization on Taiwan got underway.

*May 18:* Bishop James Zhao Ziping (1912-2008), of Jinan, Shandong, died of heart trouble. He was ordained a bishop in 1988 with the approval of the Holy See. The funeral was held on May 22. The coadjutor bishop, Joseph Zhang Xianwang, succeeded him.

*May 24:* In order to prevent pilgrims flocking to the Marian Shrine of Sheshan, soldiers have been since April strictly guarding the whole area.

## **June 2008**

*June 11:* On May 8, Bishop Ambrose Madtha, chargé d'affaires of the Holy See in Taipei, was appointed Apostolic Nuncio to the Ivory Coast. He introduced his successor, US-born Bishop Paul Fitzpatrick Russell, to Taiwan's new president, Ma Ying-Jiu.

*June 14:* The Shanghai Diocese held its first-ever Youth Day, a month before the World Catholic Youth Day in Australia, and with the same theme as the Australian one.

*June 19-24, June 25-July 9:* A Formation Course for about 30 young mainland priests was held in two sections, the first part on the mainland and the second in Macao. It was organized by the Faith Institute of Cultural Studies, in conjunction with Jinde Charities of Shijiazhuang and the Macao Diocese.

*June 27:* The ad limina visits of the bishops of Hong Kong and Macao, Card. Joseph Zen, Bishop John Tong and Bishop Joseph Lai took place in Rome. Pope Benedict XIV encouraged them to 'continue their contribution to the life of the Church in China', and expressed the hope that mainland China bishops could visit Rome too soon.

*June 29:* Bishop Pius Jin Peixian, 84, of Liaoning, retires and is succeeded by his coadjutor bishop Paul Pei Junmin.

### **July 2008**

*July 13:* Death of Bishop Joseph Jiang Mingyuan (1931-2008), bishop of Zhaoxian, Hebei, member of the Congregation of the Disciples of the Lord. He was ordained a priest in 1981 and a bishop in 2000.

*July 31:* The coadjutor bishop of Tangshan, Hebei, Bishop Peter Fang Jianping, a member since last March of the National People's Congress, became the first Catholic bishop to carry the Olympic torch.

### **August 2008**

*August 3:* Pope Benedict XVI, at his midday speech, expressed good wishes for the upcoming Olympic games, and to China, which hosts them.

*August 8:* Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing: the bishop of Macau, Bishop Joseph Lai, and the coadjutor bishop of Hong Kong, Bishop John Tong, were invited to take part.

*August 15:* Despite tight surveillance during the Olympics, and police warnings not to hold large celebrations, more than 1,000 Catholics joined "underground" Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hebei province, to celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, at the cathedral in Wuqiu village, Jin county. In a separate development, several priests of the diocese were "invited" by public security officials to stay for a few days at government-run guesthouses before the Olympics officially opened. On August 24, Public security officers took

Bishop Jia away from his residence. They brought him back on September 18, but he still remains under strict surveillance.

*August 20:* Bishop Li Shan of Beijing said in an interview on Italy's RAI TV that in his view relations with the Vatican are improving, and he hopes Pope Benedict XVI can visit China in the future. On the following day, Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, underlined: "We hope [the Pope] can visit China as soon as possible. That would be good for the Chinese Catholic Church. However, the first step is to establish diplomatic relations."

*August 26:* Several Catholic youth groups across China shared their faith, sang hymns and reflected on a sermon during a special Catholic-run chat room session on the Internet. It was the fourth time the 'Eternal Cross' chat room has hosted such an online gathering for young people. This one was the most ambitious. Organizers invited two youth groups from Beijing and one each from Fuzhou, Handan, Hengshui (Jingxian), Nanjing, Shanghai and Wenzhou dioceses to take part. Members of the eight Catholic youth groups gathered in their parishes or meeting venues for the event, which had the theme 'Growing Up in the Community'. Seated in front of computers and using web cams and microphones, they greeted other groups, and introduced themselves and their activities. The whole show lasted for two hours.

*August 30:* Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai issued a pastoral letter on The Year of St. Paul. In it, he expressed the hope that local Catholics will learn more about St. Paul and model themselves on him. He signed the letter on August 30, noting it was the 70th anniversary of his entrance into the Society of Jesus.



## September 2008

*September 1:* A group of priests from China went to a Benedictine monastery in Bavaria, for study and contemplation, in what has been described as a sign of interest from the open church of China in the monastic life.

*September 19:* The “International Religious Freedom Report”, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the US State Department reports that China, Myanmar (Burma) and North Korea continue to top the list of countries with poor records regarding religious freedom. The Chinese government rejected the criticism.

*September 22:* A fatal car crash in Xuanhua, near Zhangjiakou city, Hebei province, northern China, killed a priest, Fr John Wei Mingyue 37, and a Catholic couple, Paul Wang Zhanbao and Maria Cai Chunlin. Father Joseph Cai Guixi, the driver, sustained serious injuries.

## October 2008

*October 2:* A former Communist Party official and convert to Christianity, Zhao Xiao, wrote in the *Economist*, that he thinks there are up to 130 million Christians in China now (see Statistics).

*October 5:* Pope Benedict XVI opened the Synod on “The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church”, with 253 bishops from around the world, including 41 from Asia. However, no bishops from mainland China attended, since no agreement between the Holy See and Beijing on mainland participants could be reached. At the closing ceremony on October 26, Pope Benedict XVI regretted the absence of bishops from China.

*October 9-12:* The CCP Central Committee held its yearly meeting, and approved a new rural growth policy and new land management system.

*October 15-17:* An International Symposium on “Religions in Contemporary World”, organized by the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences together with the University of Macerata and the Sacred Heart Catholic University of Milan, Italy, was held in Beijing.

*October 17-19:* An International Symposium on “Westerners and the Qing Imperial Court” was held at Renmin University in Beijing. It was co-sponsored by the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History at the University of San Francisco, the Qing History Institute of Renmin University, and The Beijing Center for Chinese Studies.

*October 23:* The death of Bishop Joseph Sun Zhibin (1911-2008), bishop of Yidu, Shandong. He was approved by both the Holy See and the Chinese authorities. He was ordained a priest in 1939, and a bishop on April 24, 1988.

## **November 2008**

*November 4:* The death of the retired archbishop of Liaoning, Bishop Pius Jin Peixian of kidney cancer. He was born into a Catholic family in 1924. He was ordained a priest in Shanghai in 1951. In 1957 he was accused of ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’ and sentenced to 10 years in prison. In 1968 he was sent to work on a farm for “reform-through-labor”. In 1980 he returned to Fushun parish. He was ordained bishop of Liaoning on May 21, 1998. On June 29, 2008, he resigned as ordinary, and passed his duties as bishop to his coadjutor, Bishop Paul Pei Junmin.

*November 4:* The Chinese Government announced the drafting of a “human rights action plan” in order to improve citizens’ rights over the next two years. It will include proposals to “expand democracy and strengthen rule of law.”

*November 4-8:* Five photos from the May 1 blessing of the Nanning bishop's house were selected for a recent government-sponsored cultural exhibition entitled “Giving thanks for the Past 30 Years.” The Nov. 4-8 exhibit at the Nanning city library showcased economic and social changes in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region since 1978.

*November 16:* A Chinese priest, Father Paul Wu Jianchao, 39, and 2 lay women Catherine Yang Shuangtao, 68, and Elizabeth Wang Jine, 79, from Tianshui diocese, Gansu province, were killed by a truck, as they walked from their village church to one of the laywomen’s home after Mass. All three died on the spot.

*November 21:* According to the Fides News Agency, the Catholic community of the Xi Kai Cathedral in Tianjin placed the following advertisement in the leading publications of the city during the past summer: “Would you like to learn about the Catholic Church? You are invited to the Xi Kai cathedral, etc. Beginning from August, the parish received at least 20 phone calls per day requesting further information. Priests, religious and lay volunteers stay at the church to welcome any and all visitors.

## **December 2008**

*December 6:* Closing ceremony of the celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Catholic Church in Shanghai, with the ordination of two new priests. Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Xing Wenzhi of Shanghai ordained Fathers Joseph Li Gangyao and Joseph Xu Ruhao at St. Ignatius Cathedral, Xujiahui, with the participation of about 2,000 Catholics and 87 priests.

*December 8:* The death of Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan (1916-2008), of Wanzhou Diocese, Chongqing municipality, Sichuan province, from multiple organ failure. He was succeeded by Auxiliary Bishop He Zeqing, 40.

*December 8:* 303 academics, lawyers and other activists sign Charter 08, a document advocating greater human rights and democracy in China. Since then, over 8,000 other scholars and intellectuals have signed the document.

*December 12:* Benedict XVI received the bishops of the Taiwanese Episcopal Conference at their *ad limina* visit. The Pope encouraged them to show “loving care for the Catholics on the mainland, whom I constantly hold in prayer.”

*December 19:* Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first self-elected and self-ordained bishops in the Catholic Church of China. 45 bishops and about 200 Catholic priests, sisters and lay leaders took part in the celebration. Du Qinglin, director of the United Front Department and Ye Xiaowen, director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs were also present. Bishop Ma Yinglin, secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference, a Protestant pastor, four Catholic bishops, a priest, a nun and a lay representative all gave speeches.

## STATISTICS ON RELIGIONS

### The official figures

On March 4, 2008, the China Daily published an article by Bao Dazu on how religion “can promote harmony.” It contained the following information and statistics:

The number of Buddhists, Daoists and Christians has been increasing in recent years, and the central government has been encouraging religious communities to play a role in

promoting social development. Figures from the State Administration for Religious Affairs suggest that there are over 100 million believers in the country. They are mostly Buddhists, Daoists, Protestants, Catholics and Muslims.

The article mentioned that recent official statistics about the number of Christians show that they have increased by 50 percent from 14 million to 21 million in less than 10 years (between 1997 to 2006). During this period, Protestants increased from 10 million to 16 million, or by 60 percent, while Catholics increased from 4 million to 5.3 million, or by 25 percent.

### **Other estimates**

According to the May 2008 issue of *National Geographic* magazine, the Chinese population is made up of: 41.5% Non-religious people, 27.5 % Chinese folk believers, 8.5% Buddhists, 8.4% Christians, 8.2% Atheists. 4.3% Animists, 1.5% Muslims, 0.05% other faiths.

According to a 2006 survey carried out by the Pew Global Attitudes Project: about 31 percent of Chinese citizens consider religion to be very or somewhat important in their lives, compared to only 11 percent, who say that religion is not at all important.

Thirty-three percent of Communist Party officials and government employees are very or somewhat interested in having media access to information on the topic of religion. This makes them the most interested group among the 11 occupational categories reported. This group is followed by teachers or professors as the second most interested occupational group in the topic of religion (24 percent), the third being that of retired citizens (24 percent) and service workers (23 percent). The occupational groups least interested in religion were professionals (16 percent) and housewives (17 percent).

As regards religious affiliation, surveys conducted by the Horizon Research Consultancy Group in 2005, 2006 and 2007 showed that only about one-in-five Chinese adults (from 14 to 18 percent) claimed adherence to a particular religion. According to the results, between 11 (2005 survey) and 16 percent (2006 survey) of the adult population are Buddhists, while less than four percent of the adult population identifies themselves as Christian.

The World Christian Database estimates that there are about 70 million Chinese associated with more than 300 Protestant house church networks among the Han majority population. Regarding underground Catholics, it is generally estimated that there are at least 12 million Catholics in China, or 7 million more than acknowledged by the government.

Other findings in a 2005 InterMedia survey include the nearly equal interest in the topic of religion between men (21 percent) and women (22 percent). Another unique feature about China's religious population is that people of higher education (university or higher) are most interested in the topic of religion (26 percent) among the educational levels. The people with the least interest in religion are those who attended vocational college (18 percent). There is also about the same level of interest in the topic of religion across age groups, ranging from 20 to 23 percent for those aged 15 to over 60 years old. Also unlike other countries, urban dwellers are more interested in religion (24 percent) than rural residents (18 percent).

A former Communist Party official and convert to Christianity, Zhao Xiao, wrote in the *Economist* (October 2, 2008), that he thinks there are up to 130 millions Christians in China. This is far larger than previous estimates. The government says there are 21m (16m Protestants, 5m Catholics). Unofficial figures, such as those given by the Centre for the Study of Global Christianity in Massachusetts, put the number at about 70 million.

**STATISTICS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA**  
*Estimates made by the Holy Spirit Study Centre*

<i>Number of Catholics:</i> According to Government statistics According to HSSC estimation:	5,300,000 ca. 12 million
<i>Number of churches and chapel:</i>	more than 6,000
<i>Dioceses or ecclesiastical territories:</i> Traditional number: Official number:	138 (116 active, 22 inactive) 97 (following the rearrangement of civil boundaries in recent years)
<i>Number of Bishops:</i> Official bishops: Unofficial bishops:	100 58 42
<i>Number of priests:</i> Official priests: Unofficial priests:	ca. 3,010 50 (old), 1,800 (young) 60 (old), 1,100 (young)
<i>Number of Sisters:</i> In the open Church: In the underground Church:	4,750 3,500 1,250
<i>Number of Seminaries:</i> Major Seminaries: Minor Seminaries: Underground Seminaries:	12, with 610 seminarians 22, with 550 seminarians 10, with ca. 350 seminarians
<i>Number of Sisters' Novitiates:</i> Open Church: Underground Church:	ca. 60 40, with 200 in formation 20, with 200 in formation