

News Update on Religion and Church in China January 1 – June 8, 2011

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January 1, 2011:

Taiwan: temple and church bells mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the State

At precisely 10.00 a.m. on New Year's Day, 1,752 Buddhist temples and more than a hundred Catholic churches throughout Taiwan sounded their temple bells and drums and their church bells in honor of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China. For those churches that didn't have their own bell, the Catholic Bishops' Conference provided recordings of ringing church bells. On the Protestant side, a number of congregations invited others to common worship services to mark the occasion. The Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior had called upon all religions to offer public prayers of blessing for Taiwan.

An uprising in Wuchang on October 10, 1911 unleashed the Xinhai Revolution, which toppled the Emperor's rule and led to the founding of the Republic of China on December 1, 1912. The People's Republic of China is also celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution as well as the 90th anniversary of the founding of China's Communist Party (*UCAN* Dec. 31, 2010; see also entry of May 30, 2011).

January 8–15, 2011:

Official religious delegation from mainland China visits Taiwan

The ten religious representatives belonged to the China Committee on Religion and Peace which is under the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and is affiliated with the World Conference "Religions for Peace." Dao Shuren, Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Daoist Association, led the delegation, in which Liu Yuanlong, Secretary General of the Patriotic Association of the Chinese Catholic Church, also took part. The group had meetings with, among others, Archbishop Hong Shanchuan SVD of Taipei and Cardinal Shan Guoxi SJ, Bishop Emeritus of Gaoxiong. Liu invited the 89 year old Cardinal to take part in a visit to mainland China scheduled for June of 2011. Back in September of 2010, one mainland religious delegation had already visited Taiwan under the leadership of Wang Zuo'an, Director of the State Administration [Bureau] for Religious Affairs (*UCAN* Jan. 12 and 14; March 16, 2011; see also entry of beginning of June, 2011).

January 10, 2011:

The Pope addresses the diplomatic corps on freedom of religion and China

On the occasion of the New Year reception of members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, in his address on religious freedom around the world, Pope Benedict XVI spoke, among other things, about countries with a “legal or social order [that] is inspired by philosophical and political systems which call for strict control ... of the state over society.” Subsequently, he alluded to Catholics in mainland China who are “experiencing a time of difficulty and trial” (www.vatican.va).

January 11, 2011:

A 7.9 meter high statue of Confucius has been unveiled in Tian'anmen Square in Beijing

The statue, created by artist Wu Weishan, was erected on a 1.6 meter high marble pedestal in front of the North entrance of the newly renovated National Museum on the East side of the square. From this vantage point, Confucius gazes on the slightly smaller (6 x 4.6 meter) portrait of Mao over the Gate of Heavenly Peace. The erection of this Confucius statue in this central square of the capital which is so rich in history, is seen by commentators as part of the contribution of the official re-evaluation and revival of Confucius and his teaching to the strengthening of China's “soft power.” Over the last five years alone, on the initiative of the Chinese government, 322 Confucius Institutes have been set up in 96 countries. These institutes are part of efforts to spread Chinese language and culture and are intended to help form a positive image of China abroad. The goal is to establish 1,000 Confucius Institutes worldwide by the year 2020.

It was with the student protests in Tian'anmen Square in 1919 that the “May Fourth Movement” began, which among other things called for the tearing down of the “Confucius shop.” Confucius and his teaching were also attacked in the first years of the People's Republic and particularly violently during the years of the “Cultural Revolution” (*SCMP* Jan. 12; *Die Welt* Jan. 13; see also entry of April 22, 2011).

January 13, 2011:

Regional Major Seminary of Hebei announces new leadership

The new rector is Bishop Feng Xinmao of Hengshui (Jingxian, Hebei). He will be replacing Bishop Ma Yinglin (not recognized by Rome). Bishop Fang Jianping of Tangshan and the priest Sun Jigen of the Diocese of Handan have been named chairman and secretary respectively of the seminary's executive board. *Asianews* reports that the seminarians have welcomed the appointment of Bishop Feng as rector. In November/December of 2010 they had gone on strike because the Hebei provincial government Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs had named one of its own department heads as vice-rector. On December 4, 2010, the provincial government rescinded this appointment. The Hebei Regional Major Seminary currently has 116 students (*Asianews* Jan. 15; *Xinde* Feb. 1).

January 13, 2011:

Underground priest in Hebei taken away by security officials

According to local sources of *UCAN* ten men forcibly removed 40 year old Peter Zhang Guangjun (Diocese of Xuanhua, Hebei Province) who was dragged away from the home of a Catholic family – without even shoes or a coat. Days later he was still unaccounted for. Church sources surmise that this action on the part of the security forces is intended to “convince” him to support the official Church and the government (*UCAN* Jan. 19; see also entries of April 8 and April 13, 2011).

January 24, 2011:

State Administration for Religions Affairs presents the main focus of its working plan for 2011

For Buddhism and Daoism, the plan gives instructions for dialogue and exchange about content and orientation under the covering theme of “tranquility, harmony.” For the Catholic Church, the plan is for “education in the principles of independence and autonomy” and “guidance to furthering self-selection and self-consecration of bishops.” For the Protestants, the plan proposes promoting the normal order of activities. The faithful are to be instructed to change over from private worship meetings to registered churches and meeting points. As for Muslims, the plan proposes strengthened support for the Hajj work of the Islamic Association. Individual pilgrimages to Mecca are to be completely eliminated. Further elements of the plan are intensification of religious exchanges with Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, a tightening of controls (*guanli*) of the collective religious activities of foreigners in China, and lastly defense against infiltration by foreign powers. The State Administration for Religious Affairs published its working plan on its website (www.sara.gov.cn; vgl. *Xinhua* Jan. 24).

January 26, 2011:

Communist Party Chief Zhang Qingli: Tibet is more complicated than Xinjiang

Of all the provinces and regions of China, the Autonomous Region of Tibet has not only the harshest natural conditions but also the most complex societal conditions, said Zhang Qingli in an interview with *China Daily*. He continued that there are parallels to the Autonomous Uigur Region of Xinjiang, but there are also differences. Ethnically, Tibet is more uniform. According to Zhang, there are more than 20,000 mosques in Xinjiang, but only 8,000 Imams; Tibet, on the other hand, has less than 1,800 monasteries but there are 46,000 monks. The largest separatist force in Xinjiang, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, has been categorized by the UN as terrorist, and as such, the authorities are free to combat it, whereas a Tibetan separatist movement such as the Tibetan Youth Congress is not yet been labeled terrorist, Zhang argued. – Zhang Qingli, Secretary of the Communist Party of the Autonomous Region of Tibet since 2006, previously held official positions in Xinjiang (*China Daily* Jan. 26; *TibetInfoNet News Digest* Jan. 15–28).

January 27, 2011:

Mainland Chinese philanthropist launches charitable tour in Taiwan

Well known for his publicity-packed charitable operations, mainland billionaire Chen Guangbiao announced that he would give away approximately 500 million NT\$ (12,000,000 Euro) during the course of his fifth charitable tour of Taiwan. In Hsinchu alone, in the auditorium of the local government building, accompanied by a flock of business people and journalists, Chen gave away 6.7 million NT\$ (c. 160,000 Euro) to the local Women's Association, to social service organizations and to 315 needy families. Each of the "red envelopes" contained 10,000 NT\$ (240 Euro) in cash. Chen set aside a further 65,000 Euro to finance school meals for poor school children. His tour of Taiwan has been accompanied by criticism. A representative of the Council for Mainland Affairs explained that the Taiwanese government is unable to interfere since Chen is not breaking any laws. The underprivileged are the ones who will have to decide whether or not taking Chen's money offends their dignity, he said (*Central News Agency website* Jan. 27).

January 28, 2011:

"Joint Declaration on Fostering Harmony among Religions"

Published as an action of the official press organs of Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism, the declaration is intended to be a joint contribution to the "Interfaith Harmony Week" which – following upon a 2010 resolution of the UN General Assembly – is to take place annually in the first week of February. In five points, the declaration calls for love of country and of religion; adherence to the leadership of the Party; efforts toward equal opportunities, tolerance, and greater exchange among religions; combating misuse of religion, as well as struggle against terrorism, separatism, extremism and inhuman cults; adherence to the principles of independence. It also calls for positive contributions of the religions to social welfare, to economy, and to the protection of nature.

In a circular letter, the leadership boards of the official Catholic Church have called on dioceses to take part in this "Harmony Week." Bishop Li Shan opened the week in Beijing on February 27 with a Mass. However, many other dioceses have been hesitant in their response to the initiative. According to one Catholic source, they consider this event "arranged by the government" as simply "too political" (*People's Daily Online* Jan. 28; *Renmin ribao* according to *fjnet.com* Jan. 29; *UCAN* March 11).

January 30, 2011:

United Front representative denies that the Karmapa Lama is a Chinese spy

According to reports, cash in various currencies (including Chinese RMB) amounting to more than US\$ 1,000,000 has been discovered in the Gyuto Monastery in Dharamshala, residence in exile of the 17th Karmapa Lama, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, who fled from China to India in 1999. The suspicion began to be bandied about in the Indian media that the Karmapa Lama was a Chinese spy. In repeated press releases on its website, the public relations office of the Karmapa Lama vigorously denied any contact with the Chinese authorities. The money found came from freewill contributions by supporters from various countries, the office said. The Tibetan government-in-exile expressed its solidarity. Xu Zhitao, representative of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, also denied that

the Chinese government was attempting to use the 17th Karmapa Lama to control the monasteries along the Chinese-Indian border. Such accusations are simply a sign of Indian mistrust of China, he said. Even as allegations of connections to China were being rebutted, Indian authorities were apparently conducting further investigations into alleged irregularities involving foreign exchange regulations (*Global Times* [online] Jan. 31; *India Today* [online] Jan. 28; *Taz* [online] March 11; www.guardian.co.uk Jan. 31; Feb. 10; www.sify.com Feb. 24; www.voanews.com Jan. 31; Statements of the Office of the 17th Karmapa Lama can be found at www.kagyuoffice.org/OfficialStatements.php).

February 2011:

Rising inflation is having an impact on the Church's budget

The official news agency *Xinhua* spoke of concerns with regard to China's persistent inflation. In February, the Consumer Price Index rose by 4.9%, while the Manufacturers' Price Index went up by 7.9%. Further increases were expected in March. According to *UCAN*, this difficult situation also has an impact on the finances of parishes as well as on church sponsored charitable activities. Wang Ting of the Catholic Social Services Center of the Diocese of Xi'an said that the situation is causing problems in project work since the budget drawn up last year is no longer sufficient due to the rising costs (*UCAN* Jan. 26; *Xinhua* March 27).

February 3, 2011:

Chinese New Year

In China the "Year of the Rabbit" kicks off with the traditional Spring Festival.

February 6, 2011:

Newspaper report: 2010 saw far more divorces than weddings in China

The Chinese newspaper *Fazhi wanbao*, referring to statistics of the Ministry for Civil Affairs, announced that in all of China during the year 2010 there were 1,960,000 divorces registered as opposed to only 1,200,000 weddings. Reasons given to explain this dramatic rise in separations were the 2003 simplification of the divorce laws, the separation of families due to job related internal migration, and greater financial independence for both men and women.

February 7, 2011:

Fire damages thousand year old Fahai Temple in Fuzhou

The conflagration destroyed the main hall of the temple in Fuzhou (Fujian Province). Many Buddha statues were damaged. The temple, founded in the year 945, is also the headquarters of the Buddhist Association of Fujian Province and houses a large number of ancient and very valuable Buddhist scriptures which a report says seem to have survived the blaze. Following the fire, the State Administration for Religious Affairs sent out to all of its branch offices a call for renewed fire protection (*UCAN* Feb. 17; *Xinhua* Feb. 7; english.cntv.cn Feb. 9).

February 7, 2011:

Diocese of Handan: Special Masses offered for departing migrant workers

In the parish of Quzhou in the Diocese of Handan (Hebei Province) a special Mass was celebrated for those members of the parish who were about to set out for other parts of the country in search of work. As the pastor, Fr. Xu Shuwen, reported, departing parishioners were urged to come to the parish to ask for letters of recommendation and were advised to go immediately to the nearest Catholic church upon reaching their destination. They were encouraged to remember to celebrate the four greatest holy days of the year by attending Mass, and to ask for a dispensation from the local pastor if they were not able to be present at Mass on Sunday due to the demands of their jobs. According to Fr. Xu, in many parishes of the target locations to which the migrants are heading outreach to Catholic migrant workers is dear to the hearts of pastors, but, unfortunately, not all pastors have the same zeal. Since 2008 Fr. Xu's parish has been running special programs for its migrating parishioners who make up about 10% of the parish's 10,000 members, with that percentage increasing each year. Job centered migration from the countryside to the cities is an immense challenge to the Catholic Church in China since migrating Catholics frequently lose their contact with the Church in the process (*Xinde* March 10).

February 10, 2011:

Former leader of the Seventh Day Adventists in China dies at 93

Pastor David Lin died in Loma Linda, California, at the age of 93. Until 1950 he served in Shanghai as the Secretary (Director) of the Seventh Day Adventists in China. In 1958 he was placed under house arrest due to "counterrevolutionary activities," and in 1960 he was sentenced to 17 years in prison. In 1983 he once again took up his duties as pastor in Shanghai. After 1991 he and his wife moved to California. In 1949 there were 21,168 baptized adult Adventists in China. Today their number has reached almost 400,000 faithful, according to a report released by the *Adventistischer Pressedienst* (March 11).

February 14, 2011:

Xinhua: New directives for building up spiritual civilization in the countryside

The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council have issued a document titled: "Opinions on the further strengthening and development of the spiritual civilization in the countryside in the new situation." In addition to strengthening the core social values, numerous other questions are addressed such as the building up of infrastructure, health care, protection of the environment, ethical behavior, etc. The document also challenges people to struggle against "feudal superstition, pornography, gambling, drugs, and illegal religious activities" according to the law. Wedding and funeral practices should be carefully guided and in the process scientific and modern forms should be encouraged. On the other hand, the document calls for sticking to the traditional holidays and festivals which are sanctioned by folk tradition. Doing so will help to build up the outstanding cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, the document says (*Xinhua* Feb. 14).

February 17, 2011:

Bishop Augustinus Hu Daguo of Shiqian dies

Recognized only as a priest by the government, the underground Bishop Hu Daguo had lived for years at the official Cathedral of Guiyang, to which his movements were restricted. Bishop Hu was born in 1922 and was ordained a priest in 1951. In 1955 he was arrested and remained in a labor camp until 1979. In 1987 he was consecrated a bishop together with Bishop Fan Xueyuan of Baoding and was subsequently recognized by the Holy See. – In 1999 the official Church combined the three dioceses of Guiyang, Anlong, and Shiqian to create the Diocese of Guizhou, corresponding to the territory of Guizhou Province. 93 year old Bishop Wang Chongyi and 44 year old Coadjutor Bishop Xiao Zejiang lead the church, assisted by 19 priests and 44 religious sisters. The two bishops are recognized by both the government and by the Pope. Approximately 100,000 Catholics live in Guizhou Province (*UCAN* Feb. 17).

February 20, 2011:

Geng Hui, Catholic composer of Church music, dies

Born in 1941 in Taiyuan (Shanxi Province), Geng studied at the conservatory in Shenyang and for many years was active as a professor of music in teacher training. Since 1985 Geng also taught music in the Major Seminary of Taiyuan and began to compose Chinese-language Masses. His best known composition in the Chinese Church is his 1995 “Chinese Unity Mass” (*Zhonghua heyi missa*), in which he endeavored to combine Chinese and Christian musical themes (see article on the website of the Diocese of Taiyuan www.tycatholic.cn).

March 2, 2011:

Bishop Lucas Li: St. Joseph as patron and model for migrant workers

In a Mass to celebrate the opening of the Month of St. Joseph, the Bishop of the Diocese of Fengxiang (Shaanxi Province) explained that St. Joseph is not only the Patron of the Universal Church but also of Chinese workers. All of the faithful should follow his example and take up their responsibilities in their families, in their Church, and in society at large. In particular, Catholics who migrate to look for jobs in other places should learn from his example (*Xinde* [online] March 3; *Zenit* March 18). – St. Joseph (Feast Day March 19) is especially revered by Chinese Catholics and is the most frequently chosen baptismal patron for men.

March 4, 2011:

Taiwan: Five condemned prisoners are put to death

The executions took place despite appeals from national and international organizations and from the Catholic Church in Taiwan. The most recent executions had been in April 2010 when four prisoners were executed following an unofficial five-year moratorium. At that time the Minister of Justice had resigned amid the controversy over the death penalty. The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan and the Catholic Bishops' Conference had joined the fray with statements on the abolition of the death penalty

(see *China heute* 2010, No. 2, pp. 85f. [in German]). Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International, spoke of this development as a step backwards for the country which had once been considered one of the leaders in the movement for the abolition of the death penalty in Asia (*Asianews* March 7 and 29; *Central News Agency website* March 28; *UCAN* March 3).

March 9, 2011:

Bishop Andreas Hao Jinli of Xiwanzi dies

Underground Bishop Hao (not recognized by the government) was born in 1916 and was ordained priest in 1943. Between 1958 and 1981 he first spent ten years in prison, then was transferred to a labor camp. In 1984 he was secretly consecrated a bishop. In 1988 he became Ordinary of the Diocese of Xiwanzi (Chongli) in Northern Hebei Province. Constrained for years to a wheelchair, he lived in the village of Gonghui under strict government surveillance. After his death the police closed off the streets leading to the village but that did not prevent many of the faithful from managing to make their way to his funeral on March 17. Since the death of Auxiliary Bishop Leo Yao Liang on December 30, 2009, the diocese which counts more than 35,000 Catholics has no longer had an active bishop. The official Church combined the dioceses of Xiwanzi and Xuanhua in 1980 to create the Diocese of Zhangjiakou. Despite difficulties the two underground dioceses continue to exist (*Asianews* March 14; *Fides* March 21; *UCAN* March 10; see also entry of April 13, 2011).

March 11, 2011:

Severe earthquake in Japan – prayers and donations in China

Already on March 11, the day of the earthquake, Bishop Li Liangui, Director of the Catholic charitable organization Jinde Charities in Shijiazhuang, and the Chinese Buddhist Association sent messages of solidarity to Caritas Japan and to Buddhist organizations in Japan. A message of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference to the Japanese Bishops' Conference followed on March 15. The website of the official Protestant bodies also called on March 15 for prayers for Japan.

Chinese Catholics in many local communities prayed for the victims of the earthquake in Japan. According to *Xinde*, the occasion provided an opportunity for Chinese clergy and laity to overcome the remnants of resentments against Japan that have lingered on since World War II. During the Masses, prayers were also offered for the victims of the March 10 earthquake in Yingjiang (Yunnan Province) in which 25 people were killed.

The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong held a week of prayer for Japan. In Taiwan the victims were remembered in many Buddhist temples (such as Foguangshan and Fagushan). The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Taiwan called communities and Catholic universities to pray and encouraged all Christians active in the medical field to volunteer and join rescue teams. In the "paper dome" in Puli (Nantou District) Taiwanese Catholics and Protestants joined together in their prayers for Japan. The paper edifice was designed and built by the Japanese architect Shigeru Ban following the 1995 earthquake of Kobe when it served as a provisional church. Afterwards, it was moved to Nantou, the epicenter of the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan, where it now serves as a dialogue center. – The count of the dead and missing from the earthquake and tsunami wave in Northern Japan has been estimated at 30,000 (as of the end of March). There has been severe damage to the atomic power plant at Fukushima (*Asianews* March 23; *Fides* March 14; *UCAN* March 22; *Xinde* [online] March 24; www.ccctspm.org March 15; www.fjnet.com; www.jinde.org March 14; www.sara.gov.cn March 14 and 22).

March 16, 2011:

Tibetan monk sets fire to himself in protest

According to reports from the International Campaign for Tibet, 21 year old Phuntsog, a monk of the Kirti Monastery in the Ngaba/Aba District (Sichuan), set fire to himself in the city of Ngaba. Police who extinguished the flames reportedly beat the monk. He died the following day. The monk set himself on fire to commemorate Tibetans “killed in the Chinese government’s brutal crackdown in the region ... in 2008,” the Tibetan government-in-exile said. Immediately following the incident hundreds of monks and lay people took to the streets in protest. According to a March 30 report from the Tibetan government-in-exile, the authorities were now carrying out a patriotic education campaign in the monastery and the monks were forbidden from pursuing their religious studies.

According to *Xinhua*, the person who set fire on himself was another monk who had long suffered from epilepsy. The other monks had forcibly removed the badly burned monk from the hospital, *Xinhua* said. – The *Voice of Tibet* reported on November 19 that already on November 15 of last year, the monk Lobsang Palden had hanged himself in a monastery in the Sog/Suo District of Nagchu/Naqu (Tibetan Autonomous Region) after government officials of the local Religious Affairs Bureau had persistently harassed him about his contacts with the Dalai Lama (*Radio Free Asia* March 17, 18, and 22; *South China Morning Post* March 18; *TibetInfoNet News Digest* Jan. 15–28; March 12–25; *Xinhua* March 17 and 18; www.tibet.net March 17 and 30; see also entry of April 21–22, 2011).

March 19, 2011:

Bishop of Urumqi calls on families to erect house altars

All families in Xinjiang composed of two or more faithful should recite together at least one decade of the Rosary each day, wrote 79 year old bishop Xie Tingzhe in his Lenten Pastoral Letter. In this way each and every family becomes a church. The Bishop (not recognized by the government) published his pastoral letter on his blog. – A family altar is a necessity, the Bishop explained to *UCAN*, since there are only 18 churches in all of Xinjiang and the government does not allow Catholics from several families to get together for private prayer. The Diocese of Urumqi has 10,000 Catholics and covers an area of 1,600,000 km², equal to that of the Autonomous Uigur Region of Xinjiang (*UCAN* March 21).

March 20, 2011:

Catholic newspaper reports on Buddhist-Catholic help for homeless seniors

A 72 year old single, homeless man who lived by rummaging through garbage for usable items had already received help several times from the Buddhist Changming Foundation. The foundation eventually found a home for him at the beginning of 2011 in the Catholic Jinde Home for the Elderly in Shijiazhuang. Since the home is already bearing the expenses of more than ten elderly individuals who have no income and no relatives, the Buddhist foundation has announced its intention to pay the old man’s maintenance costs and expressed its satisfaction that he was being lodged in a home for the elderly that is a “believing” home, *Xinde* reported on March 20. – In mainland China, apart from government arranged political meetings, there is scarcely any contact or cooperation between different religions and denominations.

March 25, 2011:

Tibetan parliament-in-exile takes note of Dalai Lama's retirement from political office

After initial refusal, the Tibetan parliament-in-exile in Dharamsala has finally agreed to the withdrawal of the 76 year old Dalai Lama from his last remaining executive role in the Central Tibetan Administration in exile. According to Article 19 of the Tibetan Charter (Constitution), he exercises the highest executive authority which includes the approval of laws, the naming of ministers, convening and dissolving of the parliament, etc. The amendment of the Charter, made necessary by the Dalai Lama's retirement, is now underway. The Dalai Lama officially announced his (often spoken of) retirement from political life to the Tibetan parliament-in-exile on March 14, 2011. He will, however, continue to be the spiritual figurehead of all Tibetans in exile, he said.

On March 20, 2011, elections (prepared far in advance) began for the new Prime Minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile. Approximately 85,000 exiled Tibetans around the world have voting rights in the election. All three of the candidates are laymen, while the previous holder of the office, Samdhong Rinpoche, is a Lama (*AP* March 20; *BBC News* March 15; *IANS* March 29; *TibetInfoNet News Digest* March 12–25).

March 30, 2011:

First consecration of a bishop for 2011 – with approval of both government and Pope

Born in 1964, Paul Liang Jiansen has been consecrated Bishop of Jiangmen (Guangdong Province). The three co-consecrating bishops (Gan Junqiu of Guangzhou, Liao Hongqing of Meixian, and Su Yongda of Zhanjiang) are all likewise recognized by the Pope. Priests and faithful from both Hong Kong and Macau also took part in the celebration. Bishop Liang entered the major seminary shortly after his baptism in 1985. He was ordained a priest in 1991. In 2004, his now deceased predecessor Bishop Li Panshi named him Vicar General. The Diocese of Jiangmen has 7 priests, 26 religious sisters, and almost 20,000 faithful. The diocese includes the island of Shangchuan, where St. Francis Xavier died in 1552 before he was able to set foot on mainland China (*Asianews* March 30; *UCAN* March 30).

March 30, 2011:

Taiwan diocese announces activities for centennial of Republic of China

The Diocese of Gaoxiong in Southern Taiwan has composed a special “Prayer for the Nation” and has called upon all Catholics to pray it daily. In a press conference the diocese announced a program that is to include concerts and folk performances from the indigenous peoples in July and also a big prayer meeting to be held in December. Archbishop Liu Cheng-chung declared that all should make every effort to preserve and to promote the natural beauty, the people, the democratic values and the traditional cultures of Taiwan. The Church, too, wants to expand its services to the people of Taiwan, he said.

The Council for Cultural Affairs of the Republic of China (Taiwan) has called for groups involved in the areas of traditional customs, religion and art to develop programs for the centennial year based on the motto “The entire people asks blessings for 100 years of peace and well being.” Various organiza-

tions from different religions have already announced initiatives. Last Pentecost Monday, as part of the national celebration (but also to mark the 50 years of its own Golden Jubilee), the Diocese of Gaoxiong organized a concert of seven Catholic choirs (*UCAN* March 31; June 15; www.cca.gov.tw; see entry of January 1, 2011).

April 1, 2011:

First interview with Vatican's "new China strategist"

In his first interview since his appointment as Secretary for the Pontifical Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which is also responsible for the Church in China, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-fai said that not all of the 45 bishops who had taken part in the 8th National Assembly of Chinese Catholic Representatives (despite Rome's instructions not to attend) had been coerced into doing so. The number of opportunists among the Chinese bishops has increased, he said. According to Hon this has been the result of inadequate formation of the clergy and of compromises in the appointment of bishops, something about which both the priests and the faithful in China have been complaining in recent times. It has been clear to the Chinese government for a few years now that illegitimate bishops will never be really accepted by the faithful, and China has therefore been working hard to see to it that priests who are obedient to their (the government's) rules can obtain the permission from Rome to be ordained bishops, Hon explained. If a candidate is denied approval by the Holy See, Beijing threatens to go ahead with the ordination anyway. With the carrying out in Chengde of a consecration not approved by Rome the government wants to make it very clear just who is the boss in this house, Archbishop Hon said. Like Cardinal Zen he believes that there continue to be good reasons for the existence of an underground Church. He is convinced that, since China has well prepared and capable negotiators available for this area, the Vatican also needs to have the same kind of negotiators for its dialogue with China (*Avvenire* April 1, as found at <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1347369?eng=y>).

April 5, 2011:

***Qingming*: Millions of Chinese honor the dead on "tomb sweeping day"**

The official news agency *Xinhua* reported that from April 3–5, approximately 460,000,000 Chinese visited cemeteries and memorial sites in order to pay homage to their deceased relatives. Authorities had strengthened security measures in order to avoid fires or panic stampedes, the report said. Since 2008 three traditional feast days, among which is *qingming* or "tomb sweeping day", are once again recognized as official, national holidays (*Xinhua* April 5).

April 8, 2011:

Priest Joseph Chen Hailong (Diocese of Xuanhua) arrested

UCAN has reported that the 29 year old priest, Joseph Chen Hailong, who cares for Beijing's underground Catholics in the outlying neighborhoods of Yanqing and Yongning was arrested, along with two companions, by dozens of plainclothes policemen from Xuanhua who had apparently lain in wait for him for weeks. The following day they handed him over to officials of the Bureau for Religious Affairs. According to the news agency, he is at least the third underground priest to have been arrested in Hebei Province since the beginning of the year. The priest Zhang Guangjun, also from the Diocese of

Xuanhua, was arrested on January 13, 2011. It is reported that during his imprisonment they deprived him of sleep for at least five nights in a row and that they tortured him in other ways, both physically and verbally. After a temporary release on bail, he was once again arrested on March 8, 2011 and presumably beaten again. Another underground priest from Hebei Province, Wang Lifang from the Diocese of Zhengding, disappeared in the middle of March after he had been lured out by a false request for the administration of the sacrament of the sick (*UCAN* April 13).

April 9, 2011:

Beijing Diocese opens “Year of Evangelization by the Laity”

During the opening Mass in the Cathedral, 50 catechists from various parishes who had previously taken part in a several month long formation program were formally commissioned to go out as evangelizers. The diocese called upon Catholics to each pay the cost for at least one Bible which will be given to catechumens or course participants. – On May 8, 90 interested participants signed up for the 35th course for catechumens at the “North Church” in Beijing (*UCAN* April 14; www.catholic-bj.org April 9 and 10; May 9).



Bishop Li Shan and the priests of the diocese sign a transparency about evangelization. Photo: *UCAN*.

April 10, 2011:

More than 160 members of Beijing Protestant Shouwang Church arrested

They were temporarily arrested as they attempted to make their way to an open-air worship service. On following weekends other members of the Shouwang Church were arrested as they tried to gather in public places. The church is Beijing’s most well known house church. On May 11, a group of house church leaders addressed an appeal to the National People’s Congress (*South China Morning Post* April 11 and 18; May 13 and 23; for more, see *China heute* 2011, No. 2, p. 72 and an appeal by He Guanghu on pp. 85-86 [in German]).

April 11, 2011:

Chinese Islamic Association launches competition for a new logo

The logo is intended to increase the influence of the association in society and to eventually be used both nationally and internationally on documents and in publications. The winning design will receive

a prize of 5,000 Yuan. The brochure describing the competition says: “The Chinese Islamic Association is a social organization loving the country and the religion. It is registered with the civil authorities and under the direction (*zhuguan* 主管) of the State Administration for Religious Affairs. It represents more than 23,000,000 believing Muslims throughout the whole country” (as found at www.sara.gov.cn).

April 11, 2011:

Bishop Fang Xingyao: 11 candidates for office of bishop await appointment by Chinese Bishops' Conference

Bishop Fang, Chairman of the Patriotic Association of the Chinese Catholic Church, made this statement in an article appearing in the official newspaper *China Daily*. According to Fang, vacant sees in 44 of 97 dioceses are a serious obstacle to further evangelization in China. Liu Bainian, Honorary Chairman of the Patriotic Association and of the official Bishops' Conference, stated on May 13 in the Beijing-friendly Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po* that 10 candidates have already been reviewed by the Chinese Bishops' Conference (which is not approved by Rome). According to Liu, the 11th is Bishop Liang Jiansen, who was already consecrated on March 30, 2011 (see entry of March 30). He did not name any other names. Liu called on the Vatican not to interfere in “China's work of self-selection and self-consecration of bishops.” He also called on the Vatican to recognize and support those bishops who had already been consecrated. Self-selection and self-consecration of bishops is necessary for successful evangelization, it belongs to the normal field of responsibility of the local Church and, as such, needs no Papal approval, he said (*China Daily* April 11 as found at *UCAN* April 11; bj.wenweipo.com May 13).

April 13, 2011:

Diocese of Hong Kong's Justice & Peace Commission calls upon Hebei Province government to end persecution of underground Church in Zhangjiakou

For years the province government in Zhangjiakou (Northern Hebei Province) has exerted pressure on priests to force them to accept the so-called “priest's identity card,” to join the Patriotic Association, and to accept the official principles of “independent self-rule of the Church,” the document states. Since 2006 almost 20 priests of the Zhangjiakou region have suffered illegal arrest, physical as well as psychological abuse and forced education sessions, the commission says. It also points to cases of torture and gives names: There is the case of priest Zhang Guangjun (see entry of April 8). The priest Yu Zhongxun, arrested in September 2007, was hung all night long from a basketball backboard; tied for 10 days to a stool; burned with cigarettes; and even had chili-water forcibly poured into him. The priest Liu Zhongjun was arrested June 8, 2009. For the last six days of his six-month imprisonment he was subject to total sleep deprivation and forced to maintain the same position for hours on end.

The commission calls for the immediate release of the detained Hebei priests and gives the following names: Fr. Li Huisheng and Fr. Ren He (both from the Diocese of Xiwanzi), Fr. Chen Hailong (Diocese of Xuanhua), Fr. Wang Lifang (Diocese of Zhengding), Bishop Su Zhimin and the priests Lu Genjun, Ma Wuyong, Liu Honggeng (all four from the Diocese of Baoding) as well as Bishop Shi Enxiang (Diocese of Yixian) (text of the appeal can be found at <http://www.hkjp.org/statement.php?id=109>).

April 13, 2011:

Vatican China Commission publishes message to Chinese Catholics

From April 11–13, 2011, in the course of its IV Plenary Meeting, the China Commission instituted by Pope Benedict XVI directed its attention to the situation of the Church in China. During the course of their discussions, commission members noted that there seems to be a “general climate of disorientation and anxiety about the future,” further aggravated by the many vacant diocesan administrations, internal divisions, and by urbanization and the depopulation of rural areas. At the same time, there are signs of a living faith and of great commitment, the commission states.

The message takes a very detailed stance on the November 20, 2010 episcopal consecration carried out in Chengde without Papal mandate, and on the 8th National Assembly of Catholic Representatives of the Church in China from December 7–9, 2010. “As far as the sad episode of the episcopal ordination in Chengde is concerned, the Holy See, on the basis of the information and testimonies it has so far received, while having no reason to consider it invalid, does regard it as gravely illegitimate, [...] and this also renders illegitimate the exercise of the ministry.” Pressure placed on the participating bishops and external coercion could however mean that the canonical penalty of excommunication (foreseen by Canon Law for participation in illicit episcopal consecrations) might not have been incurred automatically, the document says. “Every bishop involved is therefore obliged to refer to the Holy See and find the means of explaining his position to the priests and faithful [...]” Priests and faithful, in turn, should have some understanding for the situation of their bishops. With regard to the urgent need to fill the many vacant sees, the commission hopes “that there will not be new wounds to ecclesial communion, and asks the Lord for strength and courage for all of the persons involved” (*Vatican Information Service* April 14).

April 13-15, 2011:

Vatican confirms beatification process of Ming Dynasty Chinese convert

In its message of April 13 (see preceding item) the China Commission stated: “We have learnt with joy the news that the diocese of Shanghai can start the beatification cause of Paul Xu Guangqi [1562–1633], which will be added to that of Fr. Matteo Ricci, S.J.” Vatican spokesman Fr. Federico Lombardi described the news to journalists during an April 15 press conference as a wonderful ray of hope for China today and in the future. The layman Paul Xu Guangqi was a highly educated, high-ranking imperial official, a great and faithful servant of both his country and of his people; he demonstrates clearly that there is absolutely “no contradiction or risk in being both Chinese and Catholic,” Lombardi said.

It was Shanghai Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian who initiated the beatification process for Xu, a native of Shanghai. According to *Asianews*, Shanghai’s underground Catholics share in the joy at the opening of the beatification process but they were also eagerly awaiting the beatification of Shanghai Cardinal Gong Pinmei (1901–2000) who spent 33 years in prison because of his faith and his fidelity to the Pope (*Asianews* April 22; *AFP* April 15).

April 14, 2011:

***Xinhua* report: Chongqing secondary school forced to drop optional Bible course**

According to the report of the state news agency, a course on religious literature that had been introduced as part of the diversification of the lesson plan, proved to be so popular that there were more students interested than there were places available. “Netizens” criticized the course as inappropriate. Vice Rector Deng Xiaopeng is quoted as having said that the secondary school, which is affiliated with the Southwest China Normal University, was ordered to drop the course so as to avoid unsolicited religious influence on the students. The *Xinhua* report also cites Zhang Xinying, a former vice director of the Institute for World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Zhang explained that students can deal with the Bible in class as a purely literary work if it can be guaranteed that the teacher will not be proselytizing. But there are many examples of cases where foreign language and literature teachers are using their classes to spread a religious faith, Zhang said. According to the report, Ye Xiaowen, former director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, told *China Daily* that the beginning of 2012 will see the publication of a religion textbook designed for college students.

April 21-22, 2011:

300 Tibetan monks taken away from the Kirti Monastery

Following the March 16 incident in which a young Tibetan monk of the Kirti Monastery (Ngaba / Aba District, Sichuan) burned himself to death in protest, there were a series of demonstrations in the region and measures taken by the authorities against the monastery (see entry of March 16, 2011). On April 15, the Dalai Lama stated in an appeal that the monastery, home to about 2,500 monks, was completely surrounded by armed forces, who have also been sporadically interrupting the supply of food and other necessities to the monastery. During the night of April 21–22, reports indicate that 300 monks were forcibly loaded into army trucks and taken to an undisclosed place. Protesting monks and village residents found themselves up against armed security forces equipped with armored vehicles and police dogs, two civilians were reportedly killed. The 11th Kirti Rimpoche, living in exile in India, provided that information to journalists on April 29.

The state news agency *Xinhua*, on the other hand, reported several times in April that life in the monastery was being carried on in a normal fashion. On April 27, *Xinhua* reported that the government was conducting “legal training” in the monastery since some of the monks had been involved since 2008 in upsetting the civil order by their involvement in disturbances, prostitution rings and gambling, while others had become alcoholics – all things in contradiction to the teachings of the Buddha. The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances called on the Chinese authorities on June 8 to report on the fate of those monks who had been taken away from their monastery in trucks. On June 9, a spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry responded by confirming that the government was conducting “legal education” in the monastery “in order to maintain religious order there;” there had been “no such thing as enforced disappearance” (*The Boston Globe* / AP June 10; *Kyodo* April 29; *Xinhua* April 16, 26 and 27; www.dalailama.com April 15).

April 22, 2011:

New Confucius statue removed from Tian'anmen Square

The statue of Confucius by artist Wu Weishan, standing 9.5 meters high (including the base), had only been installed a few months ago, on January 11 of this year. In a surprise move, it was taken down again during the night and moved to the inner courtyard of the National Museum before which it had been erected. Public reaction to the statue on Chinese internet had been hotly debated. “The action concerns the symbolic allocation of the central place of the People’s Republic of China and can therefore be read as a further sign on the highest level of struggles for power and of cultural struggles” commented Mark Siemons in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (April 26; *Die Welt* April 23; www.peopleforum.cn April 22; see entry of Jan. 11, 2011).

April 23, 2011:

About 50,000 attend annual memorial sacrifice at “Genghis Khan Mausoleum”

Xinhua reported that this was the 784th anniversary of the sacrificial rite at the memorial, which lies in the Ordos Highlands in the Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia (Genghis Khan’s actual burial site is unknown). Participants included Mongol groups from the region and visitors from neighboring Mongolia. The article laments that the centuries-long tradition is being threatened since younger Mongols are losing their interest in sacrificial culture (*Xinhua* April 23). The present mausoleum building was built in 1954.

April 23, 2011:

“Underground” Bishop Li Hongye of Luoyang (Henan) dies at 91



Bishop Peter Li Hongye suffered a heart attack as he was celebrating the Easter Vigil and died the same night. He was born in 1920, was ordained priest in 1944 and in 1955 was arrested because of his faith. After his release in 1985, he went back to his diocese and was clandestinely consecrated Bishop of Luoyang in 1987, although he was never recognized as bishop by the authorities. In 2001 he was placed under house arrest in Luoyang. Suffering from heart problems, in 2004 he returned to his hometown of Gongxian (about 50 kms east of Luoyang), and it was there that he died. Just ten days after he was buried, authorities partly demolished the cross and dome-shaped monument over his grave (photo), leaving only the base. Luoyang is one of the least developed dioceses in China. The only church open and functioning is the Mother of Christ Church in Luoyang, built in 2005. All of the other

churches were either destroyed during the Cultural Revolution or had been confiscated and were never given back. The diocese has about 10,000 Catholics, served by 18 underground priests and one official priest (*UCAN* April 26; May 17 [also photo]).

April 23–24, 2011:

Easter: More than 21,287 baptisms in mainland China's Catholic churches – 3,500 baptisms in Hong Kong

This Easter, 80% of those receiving baptism in mainland China were adults, the Chinese Catholic newspaper *Xinde* (*Faith*) reported. This shows clearly the growing importance of evangelization efforts by both clergy and laity – and this, despite the fact that in the last year the faithful “have encountered very many challenges and difficulties,” it said. Using various research tools, including questionnaires sent to 101 dioceses, *Xinde* and the Xinde Center for Cultural Research (both Shijiazhuang) had calculated that there had been 21,287 baptisms. This figure, however, is incomplete for several reasons, since some dioceses or parishes did not return the questionnaires, others did not keep detailed written records of baptisms or had “many communities” to look after, the report said. Baptisms from the “underground” are probably not included in the total.

In the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong some 3,500 were baptized during the Easter Vigil this year, as compared to the 3,000 baptized there at Easter of 2010. In New York City's St. Joseph's Church, heart of the Chinese Catholic community in Chinatown, 181 Chinese received baptism. Of these, 125 had been born in the Southern Chinese Province of Fujian (*HKSE* April 23; *UCAN* April 29; *Xinde* June 10; *Xinde* online May 2).



Evangelization “Contact Card” distributed by the Hong Kong Central Council of the Laity. On the back side, in addition to the text “Friend would you like to get to know Jesus?” there is the telephone number of a “Faith Hotline” manned 24 hours a day.

April 25, 2011:

State reception: “10 years of interpreting the Koran” – Many challenges in the “Islam work”

Jia Qinglin, Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and other officials met at the Great Hall of the People with the 200 representatives who attended the summing-up meeting on the 10th anniversary of the work of “interpreting the scriptures” of Islam. “Thanks to the central authorities’ serious attention and loving care and to the correct guidance and vigorous support of relevant departments, the work of ‘interpreting the scriptures’ has yielded ample results over the past 10 years, effectively promoting and developing those positive ideas in Islamic teachings that fit the socialist society, rebutting the fallacious and absurd doctrines promoted by the ‘three forces’ [separatism, extremism, and terrorism] to distort and misrepresent Islamic teachings,” Jia explained.

In future, the task of “interpreting the scriptures” must move ever closer to the reality of Islam in China, insisted Wang Zuo’an, Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, addressing

the conference. He said that it has proven beneficial to tie together the “interpreting of the scriptures” with the promotion of political and legal guidelines in the “new sermons” (*wa’z*). When “interpreting the scriptures,” the *ahongs* (imams) in some areas, organized by the Islamic Association, also spread information about drug and AIDS prevention, family planning and other legal issues, and serve to dampen the “pilgrimage fever” (to Mecca), Wang explained. According to him, there are still many challenges in the “Islam work:” It is necessary to hinder the infiltration of extremist ideas; underground



Koran schools; the interference of religion in the fields of government, law and education; conflicts between different Islamic schools, and Islamic “group incidents” (*Xinhua* April 25; www.sara.gov.cn April 25).

Jia Qinglin greets Muslim representatives in the Great Hall of the People.
Photo: *Xinhua*.

April 28, 2011:

Results of 6th National Census made public – Chinese population is aging

In November 2010, the population of the People’s Republic of China (mainland only – not counting Hong Kong and Macau) numbered 1.3397 billion persons, an increase of 73.9 million compared to the previous census of 2000. 49.68% of the mainland population (i.e., 665.57 million) lives in urban areas. This percentage has grown by 13.46%. Guangdong (104 million) and Shandong (95 million) have nudged Henan (94 million) from its past position as the most populous province. The percentage of older people is rising rapidly: 13.26% of the population is 60 or older, while the under 14 group has shrunk to 16.6%. For every 100 newborn girls, there are 118.06 boys. – On April 26, at a study session of the Politburo, President Hu Jintao insisted on sticking to state family planning policies (*South China Morning Post* May 1; *Xinhua* April 26 and 28).

April 28 – October 22, 2011:

International Horticultural Exposition in Xi’an – Diocese opens “pilgrim hostel”

In the old imperial city of Xi’an the number of tourists is steadily growing, but so is the number of Catholic pilgrims from every corner of China. Every year dozens of pilgrim groups flock to Xi’an. As its “contribution to the Horticultural Exposition” and as a service for Catholics who come to Xi’an either to visit the Expo or as pilgrims, the diocese has emptied out – for the duration of the Horticultural Expo – two complete floors of the diocesan office building next to the Cathedral. Now holding 180 beds in 17 rooms, the space has been converted into a simple hostel for pilgrims. The temporary hostel will be served round the clock by volunteers from the diocese. There will be no “per night” fee charged for pilgrims, *Xinde* reported (April 20).

April 29, 2011:

UCAN: Report on Chinese Catholic blogging culture

Following research on the blogging culture among the churches of Asia, the Asian Catholic news agency *UCAN* has determined that blogging is playing a unique role for the Catholic Church in mainland China. In addition to the 80 year old underground Bishop Xie Tingzhe of Urumqi, who has been active on the internet for years now, at least two other mainland Chinese bishops publish their own blogs using pseudonyms. Many Catholics and also many priests in China now have blogs of their own since blogging is subject to fewer restrictions than publishing a website. Even *UCAN* is taking advantage of this phenomenon for its Chinese-language news service *CathNewsChina*. The website www.ucanews.com has been blocked for users in mainland China since March of 2010, so the news provided by *CathNewsChina* has been posted on a series of blogs which are changed from time to time (*UCAN* April 29).

April 30, 2011:

Bishop Lü Shouwang of Yichang (Hubei) dies at only 45

Bishop Francis Lü Shouwang recently succumbed to an acute pancreatic inflammation. With his death, the official Church in China has lost its first bishop of the younger generation. There is now not a single bishop left in the five official dioceses of Hubei Province. Bishop Lü, who belonged to the Tujia ethnic minority, was born in 1966 and studied at the major seminary in Wuhan, where he also taught following his priestly ordination in 1991. His predecessor appointed him vicar general in 1999. Two years after his predecessor's death, Lü was consecrated bishop in 2007 with the approval of both the Pope and of the government. The Diocese of Yichang, which lies along the middle reaches of the Yangtse, has 24 priests, 12 religious sisters and 30,000 Catholics belonging to the Han, Tujia and Miao nationalities (*UCAN* May 3; *Xinde* online May 1).

May 1, 2011:

Beatification of Pope John Paul II – Chinese Catholics celebrate



Celebration of the beatification in Fengxiang.
Photo: *UCAN*.

his memory is strong among Chinese Catholics, writes *UCAN*. Catholics in China celebrated his beatification. In the Diocese of Fengxiang the 89 year old Bishop Lucas Li on May 1 led a procession

bearing a large portrait of John Paul II. *Xinde*, the largest Catholic newspaper in China, featured full page articles, spread over a number of issues, on the life and accomplishments of the new Blessed and invited readers to send in contributions on the theme: “Pope John Paul II and I.” These contributions frequently described the Pope as a personal model for one’s own faith (*Fides* May 2; *UCAN* May 6; *Xinde passim*, *Xinde* online April 29. On reactions from the Chinese Church on the death of John Paul II, see *China heute* 2005, No. 3, pp. 66-69, 85-91 [in German]).

May 3, 2011:

Jinde Charities is signing up young “Ricci Volunteers” for social welfare projects

In its appeal, the Catholic organization Jinde Charities, with headquarters in Shijiazhuang (Hebei Province), is hoping to attract 40 volunteers for deployment in social welfare programs throughout China. The volunteers should be Catholic, 21–30 years old, healthy, single and ready to live a very simple life. They are required to have at least a senior middle school diploma, one year of work experience as well as a letter of recommendation from their parish priest. Before being commissioned and sent out in July of 2011, volunteers took part in a three-week course practical and spiritual preparation. Jinde will provide the volunteers with shelter and a small sum for daily living costs. It will also provide supervision and organize volunteer get-togethers for sharing experiences. Volunteers will spend anywhere from six to a maximum of 24 months at their assignments, according to a report from *Xinde*. For the 2010 “Ricci Year” Jinde sent out its first group of 21 volunteers to care for patients suffering from AIDS and leprosy and to provide assistance to old people in need. Several volunteers also helped out in a Catholic minor seminary as well as in a convent of religious sisters (*Xinde* May 10, 2011; *Xinde* online July 26, 2010).



2010 sending service: “Ricci Volunteers” of bless each other. Photo: *Xinde*

May 5, 2011:

Official representatives of the 5 religions reject US report on religious freedom

The state news agency *Zhongguo xinwenshe* (May 6) reported that the secretaries general of the administrative bodies of the five officially recognized religions met in a joint session and issued a written response to the 2011 Annual Report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). In their declaration, the religious representatives said that the section of the USCIRF report dealing with China is full of prejudices and does not coincide with the facts. China is a state ruled by law and its citizens enjoy full religious freedom. The Chinese government supervises religious organizations and sites for religious activities through registration and public recognition and, as outlined in the law, maintains a directory of all religious personnel in conformity with accepted international practice, they said. Religion enjoys “extremely high esteem in society.” Cult organizations acting contrary to the values of society and humanity and ethnic separatist activities carried out under the banner of religion have nothing whatsoever to do with religious freedom, the religious representatives said. Taking action against such groups in accordance with the law is in line with the will of the people and the wish of religious communities, they declared.

May 10, 2011:

State Administration for Religious Affairs offers best wishes for Buddha's birthday

Since its arrival in China more than 2,000 years ago Buddhism has deeply influenced the social history and traditional culture of the country, the State Administration of Religious Affairs wrote. In its "Message to Our Friends in Buddhist Circles" it affirmed, among other things, that in the New China the Buddhists of the three language groups (i.e., Han or Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism) have always stood faithfully by the Party and the government and have supported social progress, contributing to international exchange and to furthering a harmonious society (www.sara.gov.cn).

May 10, 2011:

Pope appoints Archbishop Filoni Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

With this appointment a man who knows the situation in China very well has taken over the leadership of the Vatican department responsible for the "mission churches" and which is therefore also responsible for the Church in China. 65 year old Archbishop Fernando Filoni was the leader of the Vatican's study mission in Hong Kong from 1992–2001, during which time he functioned as the Pope's liaison with the Church in mainland China. From 2001–2006 Filoni was the Vatican's Nuncio to Iraq (remaining at his post throughout the war) and to Jordan. From 2006–2007 he was assigned to the Philippines, after which he worked as Substitute for General Affairs in the Vatican's Secretariat of State. According to one report he is also a member of the Vatican's China Commission. His predecessor, Cardinal Ivan Dias, retired from the office upon reaching the established age limit.

Observers said they expect that Archbishop Filoni's China experience will be of great help to him in his new position where he will have to deal frequently with the difficult questions regarding the Chinese Church. Catholic websites in China also reported on the appointment. Already on December 23 of last year Hong Kong Salesian Father (now Archbishop) Savio Hon took over the No. 2 spot in the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (*Fides* May 10; *HKSE* May 22; *UCAN* May 11; see entry of April 1, 2011).

May 10, 2011:

Diocese of Chengdu (Sichuan) elects bishop candidate

The priest Simon Li Zhigang, born in 1963, received 41 of the 45 votes cast by the electoral college, composed of 23 priests, 17 lay persons, 4 sisters and one seminarian. The See of Chengdu has been vacant since 1998. Li Zhigang has been acting as administrator for the affairs of the diocese since 2000 (*HKSE* May 22). To date he had not received any recognition from the Vatican. [Update following the press deadline: Fr. Simon Li Zhigang succumbed to cancer of the liver and died on June 18, 2011 (*Asianews* June 18)].

May 11, 2011:

Diocese of Shantou (Guangdong) elects bishop candidate under strong pressure from the authorities

15 priests, 5 sisters, 2 seminarians and 50 lay people have elected the only candidate, the priest Huang Bingzhang, with a vote of 66 “pro,” 3 “contra,” and 3 abstentions. The authorities have wanted to name Huang bishop for a long time, but have run into resistance since Shantou already has a bishop, 81 year old Bishop Zhuang Jianjian, who is not recognized by the government, *UCAN* reported. One priest has told that he was “accompanied” by several members of the security forces to the site of the election where the number of “helpers” in civilian clothing was greater than the number of electors. Other electors admitted that they voted for Huang out of concern for their careers or their families. According to *UCAN*, five of the 20 diocesan priests did not take part in the election. Three were detained under surveillance in their parishes, one was held by the police and one went into hiding. The priest Huang Bingzhang was born in 1967. Since his ordination in 1991 he has been the pastor of the Cathedral in Shantou. In 1998 he became a member of the National People’s Congress. He is also a Vice President at the national level of the Patriotic Association of the Chinese Catholic Church and Chairman of the Patriotic Association for the province of Guangdong (*UCAN* May 12).

May 11, 2011:

Government announces new guidelines on opening of bank accounts by sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education

The document bears the title: “Circular of the People’s Bank of China and the State Administration for Religious Affairs regarding the Opening of Entity Settlement Accounts by Sites for Religious Activities and Institutes for Religious Education” (中国人民银行国家宗教事务局关于宗教活动场所和宗教院校开立单位银行结算账户有关事项的通知). Its aim is to strengthen controls (*guanli*) over the sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education and “to promote healthy development.” According to the circular, religious sites and institutes can ask to open an entity settlement account (in China the distinction is made between bank accounts for entities [*danwei*, “units”] and accounts for private persons) with a bank. To open an account, the religious site or institute must present to the bank, among other things, its certificate of registration with the religious affairs department of the government, the number of which will be entered into the documents for the opening of the account. Religious sites and institutes which already have a bank account as a *danwei* must make the necessary adjustments in their accounts within one year of the announcement of the new measures. The text of the circular can be found on the website of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) at www.sara.gov.cn/zcfg/bmgz/8315. Already on January 11, 2010 the SARA had issued a document titled: “Administrative Measures for Monitoring the Finances of Sites for Religious Activities (for provisional implementation).”

May 12, 2011:

3rd anniversary of Wenchuan earthquake – Rebuilding churches

Especially in Sichuan people paused to remember the 87,000 victims of the Wenchuan earthquake. Chinese government media featured stories on the efforts to rebuild. The newspaper *Nanfang dushibao*

in Guangzhou however made veiled references, by way of vague allusions to the artwork of Ai Weiwei, to the activists who lost their freedom as a result of their research into the many school buildings which had collapsed. – On April 28, in Zhongba, Jiangyou City (Diocese of Chengdu) the newly rebuilt Sacred Heart Church was consecrated. On May 7 the parish of Xiaosishan laid the cornerstone for the reconstruction of its parish church. It is the fourth of 18 churches in the Diocese of Chengdu to be rebuilt (*Fides* May 14; *South China Morning Post* May 13; *Xinde* May 20).

May 12–24, 2011:

Delegation from State Administration for Religious Affairs visits Africa

According to its website, under the leadership of Director Wang Zuo'an a ten member delegation from the State Administration for Religious Affairs visited Kenya, Uganda and South Africa in the "search for possibilities for wider exchange and cooperation between the churches of China and Africa." The visit was occasioned by a joint invitation extended by the Global South Anglican Communion and the Anglican churches of the three African countries. Among other sites, the delegation visited Anglican schools, social welfare projects such as those for HIV/Aids patients and Bible Societies. Relations between the churches can help strengthen the long standing relations between the respective countries, said Wang Zuo'an in Kenya. Rev. Rosemary M'bogo, Provincial Secretary of the Anglican ecclesiastical province of Kenya, declared that they had also stressed the desire of the African churches to see an improvement in the treatment of Christians in China. Three quarters of all the Bibles in circulation in Kenya are printed in China (*Ecumenical News International* May 13 and 20; www.sara.gov.cn May 16, 20 and 24).

May 13, 2011:

Taiwan's Vice Minister of Justice defends use of death penalty

According to polls, almost 80% of the people of Taiwan are against abolishing the death penalty, Vice Minister of Justice Chen Shuohuang argued. The death penalty is allowed by law but is used only with the greatest circumspection, he said reacting to an accusation in the 2011 Amnesty International Report that Taiwan has regressed since 2010 in its efforts to abolish the death penalty (*Central News Agency website* May 13; see also text of the Declaration of the Bishops' Conference of Taiwan on the Abolition of the Death Penalty in *China heute* 2010, No, 2, pp. 85-86 [in German]).

May 18, 2011:

Pope Benedict XVI issues renewed call to pray for Church in China

During his general audience in Rome, the Pope issued a reminder of the upcoming Day of Prayer for the Church in China (May 24). The faithful in China "have a right to our prayers" and they very much need them. In an unusually long appeal the Pope spoke of "some" bishops who are suffering and who "find themselves under pressure in the exercise of their ministry. To them, to the priests and to all the Catholics who encounter difficulties in the free profession of faith, we express our closeness. [...] By our prayers we can obtain that their wish to remain in the one universal Church will prove stronger than the temptation to follow a path independent of Peter" (www.vatican.va).

May 18, 2011:

Diocese of Fengxiang (Shaanxi) elects bishop candidate in a “fair and free” process

The election was overseen by the Diocesan Curia. Officials of the local Bureau for Religious Affairs were invited as observers, they confirmed the validity of the election. 36 diocesan priests, six religious and six lay people unanimously (with one abstention) elected the priest Peter Li Huiyan (born 1965), sole candidate proposed by the local Ordinary, Bishop Lucas Li Jingfeng. The entire election procedure is in full accord with Canon Law as well as with the election regulations of the Chinese government, said the 89 year old Bishop Lucas Li in a statement to *UCAN*. Li Huiyan was elected in a process that was “open, just, fair and free,” he stressed. Lucas Li was originally an underground bishop before receiving government recognition in 2004 even though he did not join the Patriotic Association. One observer told *UCAN* that while the election method of Fengxiang was remarkable, it did not have any general significance for the Chinese Church (*UCAN* May 23; election report with photos: *Xinde* online May 22).



Episcopal election in Fengxiang: Distribution of the ballot papers (left) and the swearing-in of Bishop Lucas Li and the two vicars general. Photos: *Xinde* online (www.chinacatholic.org).

May 20, 2011:

AFP: Chinese government spokeswoman calls on Vatican to take concrete steps

“We hope that the Vatican can be clearly aware of the fact that China practises freedom of religious belief and of the continuous development of China’s Catholic Church,” said Jiang Yu, spokeswoman for the Foreign Ministry in a statement to journalists. The government hopes that the Vatican will now “create conditions for the development of China-Vatican relations through concrete actions” (after *Times of Malta* / *UCAN* May 20).

May 20, 2011:

Episcopal consecration with “double approval” in Yanzhou

With the consecration of Johannes Lü Peisen (born 1966), the Diocese of Yanzhou (Shandong Province) has a bishop once again after a seven-year vacancy. Bishop Fang Xingyao of Linyi, Chairman of the Patriotic Association, was the principal consecrator at the ceremony in St. Joseph’s Church in Jining.

The co-consecrators were Bishops Zhao Fengchang (Liaocheng) and Li Mingshu (Qingdao). This was the second consecration this year that took place with the recognition of both the Pope and the Chinese authorities. All of the participating bishops are recognized by both sides. Bishop Lü was ordained priest in 1989 and since 1994 has taught in the Holy Spirit Seminary in Jinan. He is also the Secretary General of the Patriotic Association of Shandong Province. According to *Asianews*, he was transferred to the Diocese of Yanzhou in October 2010 and was elected bishop-candidate by the priests there.

The Apostolic Vicariate of South Shandong was entrusted to the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) in 1882. It was renamed Yenchowfu in 1925 and was made a diocese in 1946. Today, the diocese has a bishop, nine priests, one deacon and about 10,000 Catholics. Saint Joseph Freinademetz SVD (1852–1908), canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2003, labored in Yanzhou as a missionary. For the first Bishop of Yanzhou, Johann Baptist Anzer SVD (1851–1903), see the article of Karl Josef Rivinius in *China heute* 2011, No. 2, pp. 118-125 [in German] (*Asianews* May 20; *UCAN* May 20).

May 2011:

Unrest in Inner Mongolia following death of Mongolian herder

In an attempt to prevent a coal transporting truck from crossing and damaging pasture land in the Xilingol League (prefecture), a Mongolian stock herder was run over and killed on May 10. Following his death, thousands of Mongols took to the streets in protest in Xilingol and in the regional capital of Hohhot. The protests were especially intense from May 23–31 but they were peaceful. The authorities reacted with massive contingents of armed police, internet shutdowns, and by sealing-off the universities. According to reports of the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center in New York, at least 90 persons were arrested. On June 8, the driver of the coal truck was sentenced to death.

In the opinion of commentators the background for the civil unrest is the marginalization of the Mongols – who only make up about 17% of the population of Inner Mongolia – due to the booming coal strip mining operations which are destroying the grasslands and with them the livelihood of many Mongolian stock herders. According to details provided in *Xinhua*, 15% of the entire Chinese coal reserve lies in the single prefecture of Xilingol. The authorities in Xilingol have closed down four strip mining operations since May 20, and have temporarily stopped work in 24 others for reasons of environmental damage, harassment of the local population and safety violations (*AP* May 31; *Radio Free Asia* June 7; *Reporters Sans Frontières* May 31; *Reuters* May 29; *South China Morning Post* June 1, 2 and 7; *Xinhua* June 1 and 8).

May 23–30, 2011:

50 years of diocesan partnership – Delegation of Diocese of Hong Kong visits Diocese of Essen

Hong Kong Bishop John Tong, Vicar General Dominic Chan, youth minister Paul Kam, Sr. Goretti Yeung, and lay representative Daniel So visited parishes, institutions and groups in various cities of the Diocese of Essen. Their program included, among other things, a meeting with the permanent deacons of the diocese as well as a visit to a mosque. On the occasion of the Day of Prayer for the Church in China, Bishop Tong, together with Bishop Franz-Josef Overbeck of Essen, celebrated a Pontifical High Mass in the Essen Cathedral on May 28. – The partnership between Essen and Hong Kong is the only existing partnership between a German and a Chinese diocese (www.bistum-essen.de).



On May 28, Bishop John Tong (left, right Vicar General Dominic Chan) blessed a statue of Our Lady of Sheshan erected by Fr. Roman Malek SVD at the Monumenta Serica Institute in St. Augustin. Photos: Joseph Xue.



May 24, 2011:

Supreme People's Court in Beijing sets limits on use of death penalty

According to *Xinhua*, Chinese courts were instructed to order a two-year stay of execution in the cases of those already condemned to death, if “immediate execution does not seem to be necessary.” Since 2007 all death sentences handed down by lower courts must be submitted for review to the Supreme People's Court which, according to *Xinhua*, has annulled 10% of all death sentences since that date. A commentary in the Hong Kong *South China Morning Post* says that China (which executes more people each year than any other country, and perhaps more than all other countries put together) finds itself in a dilemma with regard to the death penalty: On the one hand, China is facing international pressure to reduce the use of the death penalty. On the other hand, the Chinese public is angered by milder sentences handed down to corrupt officials or murderers (*South China Morning Post* May 30; *Xinhua* May 24).

May 24, 2011:

Day of Prayer for Church in China – More than 10,000 pray at Sheshan

UCAN reported that this year more than 10,000 pilgrims gathered at the Marian pilgrimage shrine on Sheshan mountain outside of Shanghai, where “Mary Help of Christians” is venerated (feast day May 24), and to which the Pope referred in his 2007 call for a Day of Prayer. This was undoubtedly the biggest crowd since the introduction of the Day of Prayer, to which the authorities had originally responded by severely restricting pilgrimages to Sheshan. The situation on Sheshan mountain had been tense, especially after the appeal of the Pope on May 18, yet on the actual day of the feast, there seems to have been relatively little visible police presence. During the solemn Feast Day Mass, Shanghai Auxiliary Bishop Xing Wenzhi said that worldwide prayer for the Church in China represented an “immeasurably strong force.” Following the example of the Blessed Mother, the faithful should put their trust in the Risen Lord and hope that the unity of the Church will be achieved soon.

On May 23–24, young Shanghai Catholics organized a 24 hour online prayer chain. Shanghai's underground Catholics were forced to pray in private houses on May 24, since the authorities had denied underground Catholics access to Sheshan mountain. However, one group of more than 400 underground Catholics from Wenzhou did manage to make the pilgrimage to Sheshan in 12 private buses on May 22, two days before the feast.

Parishes in other parts of mainland China also celebrated the Day of Prayer. There were reports of celebrations, for example, in Haikou (Hainan), Meizhou (Guangdong) and Beichang (Diocese of Xingtai, Hebei). In Nanyidian (Diocese of Linfen, Shanxi) a cross was erected on May 24 at the newly built Church of Our Lady Help of Christians. In contrast, *Asianews* reported that some parishes had announced that they would not be celebrating the Day of Prayer (*Asianews* May 18, 23 and 26; *Fides* May 23, 26 and 31; *UCAN* May 25; *Xinde* online May 26 and 30; www.catholicsh.org May 24).

May 28, 2011:

Baptism of 243 catechumens in the Cathedral parish of Tianjin

The catechumens had prepared for their baptism by taking part in a four-month long catechumenate course this past spring. Their average age was 32 years. 70% had diplomas from an advanced technical college (*dazhuan*) or higher. The parish's fall catechumenate course will begin on August 29 (*Xinde* online 30.05.).



Baptisms in Tianjin: 243 candidates for baptism fill the Cathedral on May 28, 2011. Photos: *Xinde* (www.chinacatholic.org).

May 31, 2011:

Government forbids traditional fast in Drepung Monastery near Lhasa

During the first two weeks of the Tibetan month of Saka Dawa, the Drepung Monastery near Lhasa traditionally practices a special fast called Nyung Ne. The authorities have forbidden this fast since the civil unrest in Tibet in 2008, said the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) in Dharamsala. It was announced earlier that the fast would be allowed in 2011, but according to information received by TCHRD, at the last moment the senior monks in charge were ordered to stop the preparations and to send home the large numbers of faithful who were already gathering at the monastery. Armed forces marched on the monastery in order to prevent protests. The TCHRD reported that 60 officials are currently in the monastery conducting a "legal education" course for the monks (www.tchrd.org May 31)

Beginning of June 2011:

No entry permit – 88 year old Cardinal Shan (Taiwan) cancels China trip

Cardinal Paul Shan Guoxi SJ had been invited to visit China by, among others, Wang Zuo'an, Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs during the latter's visit to Taiwan in September of 2010. The trip had been planned for June 5–13, and was to include visits to Shanghai and to Henan, the Cardinal's home province. Shan announced at the beginning of June that he would not wait any longer for his entry permit. All of the other members of the party which was to travel with him had already received their visas (*UCAN* June 2).

About June 3, 2011:

Illicit consecration of Bishop in Wuhan postponed indefinitely

The consecration of Shen Guo'an as Bishop of Wuhan, for which there was no papal approval, was originally planned for June 9, according to *UCAN*. Prior to that the authorities had applied strong pressure on some of the diocesan priests who were in favor of maintaining Church principles, and on bishops in neighboring provinces whom they had asked to ordain Fr. Shen. According to local Catholics, Fr. Shen is not a suitable candidate and he himself does not want to become a bishop. Shortly thereafter, the consecration was postponed indefinitely. Authorities notified bishops in neighboring provinces of the postponement. The candidate himself confirmed this on June 7, saying that he had been informed of the postponement but did not know the reasons for it.

In a June 3 interview in *Asianews*, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-fai, Secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, made a "brother to brother" appeal to Fr. Shen: "I trust that you will do the right thing. The only right thing to do is to refuse."

Fr. Shen, who was born in 1961, is the Vice-Chairman of the Patriotic Association in Hunan and was elected bishop candidate in 2008. The official Church had created the Diocese of Wuhan in 2000 by combining the Dioceses of Hankou, Hanyang and Wuhan into one. Wuhan has some 20,000 Catholics, 25 official priests and 40 priests in the underground (*Asianews* June 3 and 7; *UCAN* June 1 and 7).

June 4, 2011:

Hong Kong: 150.000 gather to remember victims of Tian'anmen Square

Lee Cheuk-yan, Chairman of the Hong Kong Alliance for the Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China and one of the organizers of the Day of Remembrance, said that the arrests of Ai Weiwei (on April 3) and of numerous other Chinese human rights activists had definitely contributed to the increase in the number of those taking part in this year's candle-light vigil in Victoria Park. Police estimates put the number of participants at 77,000. According to reports, the crowd was mostly made up of young people, some participants were carrying Jasmine blossoms, symbol of the North Africa inspired "Jasmine Revolution." According to the *South China Morning Post* a growing number of mainland Chinese are also traveling to Hong Kong each year specifically for the June 4 commemoration. Prior to the candle-light vigil in Victoria Park the Hong Kong diocesan Justice & Peace Commission and other Catholic organizations held a separate prayer service (*Asianews* June 6; *South China Morning Post* June 5; *The Washington Post* June 4).

June 6, 2011:

Vatican issues Canon Law declaration on question of excommunications resulting from illicit episcopal consecrations

China is not specifically mentioned in the “Declaration on the Correct Application of Canon 1382 of the Code of Canon Law,” issued by the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts. Nonetheless, observers are generally of the opinion that the episcopal consecration in Chengde last October and the threat of further illicit consecrations (see entry of April 11, 2011) were the real reasons for the declaration. According to Canon 1382, participation in an episcopal consecration which takes place without Papal mandate incurs the penalty of a excommunication *latae sententiae* [i.e., a penalty which takes effect automatically by the very fact itself of the act of participation]. The new declaration states that this penalty applies not only to the principal consecrator and to the one illicitly consecrated but also to the Bishops who function as co-consecrators (Point 3). Canon 1324, § 1,5°, however, envisions mitigating circumstances if the action was done by “a person who acted coerced by grave fear, even if only relatively grave, or due to necessity or grave inconvenience.” This mitigating circumstance (as well as the fact of physical force which frees one from penalty) has to be established for each and every one of those who participate (Point 4). Since the action of participation is an occasion of scandal and confusion for the faithful, the participating Bishops are called upon to “reestablish their authority through signs of unity and repentance.” The declaration reiterates the fact that it is forbidden for anyone who has incurred the penalty of excommunication to take part (as celebrant) in any Eucharistic celebration, to administer or to receive the sacraments, or to exercise any ecclesiastical office. Nevertheless, any sacraments administered under such sacrilegious circumstances would still be valid, even if gravely illicit (Point 5). It may also be that the Holy See, under certain circumstances, might even see itself constrained to impose direct penalties. If an excommunicated bishop has demonstrated genuine repentance, he has the right to be freed from the excommunication. Only the Holy See can make such a determination and lift the excommunication (Point 6). – The declaration, dated June 6, appeared in *L’Osservatore Romano* on June 11 (*Asianews* June 13; *UCAN* June 14; www.vatican.va).

June 8, 2011:

Ye Xiaowen: Why the Chinese Communist Party can unite religious believers

According to Ye Xiaowen (until 2009 Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs and since then Party Secretary of the Central Institute of Socialism, in a leading article published in the *People’s Daily Online*), this is due to the fact that the Party, which does not itself believe in the existence of deities, carries out a policy of guaranteeing freedom of religious belief. This policy expresses first of all the fundamental methodology of the Party of proceeding from what exists materially and objectively. Secondly, this policy expresses the Party principle of serving the people and of preserving the people’s fundamental rights – among which is the right to freely choose one’s own religious belief. Thirdly, it is necessary for China that religions play a positive role in China. Atheists and believers both have commonly shared fundamental interests. Fourthly, the policy of religious freedom is a part of China’s historical and cultural tradition. The harmonious coexistence in China of adherents of various religions together with non-believers stands as another Chinese marvel second only to China’s economic miracle (*People’s Daily Online* June 8).

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