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A Momentous Year for the Church in China

Most observers agree that 2007 was an extremely significant year in the contemporary history of the Catholic Church in China. The centerpiece of all these portentous developments was the Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Church in China issued by Pope Benedict XVI at Pentecost – traditionally observed as the “birth of the Church.” Promulgated in late June in various languages, including both official and unofficial Chinese language versions, the Letter elicited a wide spectrum of responses from both the religious and secular sectors in China addressed: ecclesial leaders, communities of faith, as well as social/civic and political authorities. [For analysis of some of these “reactions” cf. p. 3.]

The Pope explicitly dealt with the most urgent challenges before the Chinese Catholic Church- both internal and external to its existence in that great Nation; and not shying away from controversy and complex juridical matters also. The requirement for apostolic continuity of the appointment of bishops was one of many pressing issues dealt with in the Letter. In point of fact – the past year has seen a resumption of the mutually acceptable process that had evolved earlier, to ensure both inviolable apostolic continuity in the appointments of bishops to various dioceses; as well as reasonable compliance with religious law and policy in China at the present time.

During 2007, five new bishops were appointed/consecrated to take up episcopal leadership in China – either as the diocesan bishop of a vacant See or co-adjutor bishop with the right of succession to the current bishop.

- Bishop Paul Xiao Zejiang, 40, ordained Co-adjutor Bishop of Guiyang, Guizhou on September 8, 2007.
- Bishop Li Shan, 42, ordained bishop of Beijing on September 21, 2007.
- Bishop Lu Shouwang, 41, ordained bishop of Yichang, Hubei, on November 30, 2007.
- Bishop Gan Junqiu, 43, ordained bishop of Guangzhou, on December 4, 2007.
- Bishop Joseph Li Jing, 40, Co-adjutor of Ningxia, Inner Mongolia on December 21, 2007.

The selection of these priests to take up leadership was a cause of great rejoicing in their respective dioceses. Solemn liturgies followed by traditional Chinese banquets and celebration with family and the Catholic faithful – were attended by tens of thousands of people and many hundreds of priests, religious sisters, and usually, many brother bishops from neighboring dioceses. In each case, the ritual of episcopal consecration was provided by other validly consecrated bishops – thus insuring the requirement to preserve the apostolic continuity of the Chinese Episcopacy. This is a cause for profound rejoicing and gratitude for God’s Providence for the Church of China.

At the same time, everyone concerned is well aware of the crisis of leadership facing the Church in China. There are currently 97 dioceses in China (re-configured to be co-terminus with civil territorial boundaries from some 138 dioceses from the pre-PRC or missionary era Church). There are reportedly just over 100 bishops in China at present, about 40 of whom do not have their ecclesiastical jurisdiction recognized by local government authorities; and therefore extremely limited in their capacity to function publicly. In addition, perhaps 80% of the Chinese bishops are quite elderly – many in their late eighties and even nineties. Twelve senior bishops died in 2007 alone. Hence the challenge to replace this leadership, let alone to supply adequate leadership for the rapidly growing Church in China is of crisis proportions.

No matter how one may judge their ulterior motives, it is clear that the political authorities concerned with religious matters in China are anxious to see new leadership in place, in order to avoid devolution of rational and reliable direction of the Churches. Clearly – albeit for very more fundamental theological and doctrinal reasons, the Holy See shares this concern.

Another dimension of this leadership crisis is the challenge to provide suitable education, theological and spiritual formation and training in ecclesial administrative capacity for the bishops of China. Two major efforts towards these goals are the Maryknoll Society sponsored Chinese Seminary Teachers & Formators Project which in the past 15 years has

enabled more than 60 young priests from China to obtain graduate degrees in US Catholic Colleges and universities with more than 50 of the having already returned to serve the Church in China. Five of them have become bishops. A second and more immediate response to this need is the program organized by the Verbiest Foundation in Belgium which has sponsored several intensive training courses for younger bishops and diocesan administrators – to spend a few weeks on exposure visits to dioceses in various European countries. Several major Religious Orders collaborate in this project; and in addition the German Benedictines have arranged scriptural courses and intense prayer and retreat exposures for other young bishops and promising clerical leaders from China.

As China continues to emerge as a global power, Christianity has a major role to play in providing moral and ethical underpinning. This will demand a vibrant and viable local Church up to the challenge to witness to the Gospel in contemporary China reality. The latest version of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001) and updated data available at the website: www.globalchristianity.org/ibmrnote.php identifies China where the population is estimated to reach 1.5 billion by 2033, as one of "the most responsive to Christianity, Christ and the Gospel": as well as the country with the fastest growing number of new converts to Christianity [IBMR 01/08 pp.27-30]. The situation clearly calls for prayer and very supportive response from the Sister-Churches in solidarity with the Church in China.



Maryknoll Society sponsored Chinese Seminary Teachers & Formators Project

As a complement to their scholastic program while in the USA, young clergy, religious sisters and a few lay women from China attend an annual retreat in summer; and a pastoral seminar over the Christmas-New Year school holiday. This year the seminar theme was "The Artist as Missioner of the Soul and the Senses" – reflecting on how drama, painting, sculpture, film and music remind us of the foundational life-death-resurrection rhythm of human life. Art is an effective medium to contemplate and express Faith. Five artists shared their life experiences, feelings, and love of their craft; from which the participants took inspiration and encouragement to remain strong in their own vocational callings.



Participants at the Winter 2007 Pastoral Enrichment Seminar

Reactions to the Pope's Letter

At Pentecost 2007, Pope Benedict XVI addressed a Pastoral Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China. Although expectedly addressed to China's Catholics, the letter had a particular message for the leaders of the Catholic Church which is in China, as well as to China's civil authorities. While mainly pastoral in its intent, it reaffirms that the Vatican wants to pursue dialogue with the Chinese government.

The Letter presents a theological framework within which all current problems and difficulties are to be viewed and resolved. After greeting the Catholics in China and stating its purpose, the letter presents its two main parts: "*Situation of the Church – Theological Aspects*" and "*Guidelines for Pastoral Life*." It ends with a "*revocation of the extraordinary faculties and special pastoral directives*" for Church activities in past decades, and calls for "*a day of prayer for the Church in China*," before the Pope imparts his apostolic blessing.

As soon as the Letter was released, media attention turned immediately to everyone's response to the Pope's Letter: that of the Chinese Government; of the Chinese Catholics in general from "registered" and "non-registered" Catholic communities, that of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association particularly, and of other "Chinese Catholics" in "greater China" (Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan); the responses of Europe and North America. Summing the responses all together, it seems the Letter was generally well received.

The Chinese Government's reaction was reserved and non-committal. Some believe the absence of strident negative reaction could be considered positive. Some observers interpreted this as evidence of the Chinese government's desire to pursue normalization of diplomatic negotiations with the Vatican. The Government authorities called upon the Chinese Catholics through the Patriotic Association to remain "calm" upon reception of the Letter. Perhaps fearing an overreaction, all domestic distribution of the Letter by print or by internet was restricted, in effect holding up its dissemination among the Chinese faithful. Obligatory political sessions were organized for Catholic priests accused of having publicly distributed extracts of the Pope's Letter to their Catholic faithful without authorization.

On the whole, there was a favorable reception on the part of the Bishops and the Faithful in China, many of whom thanked the Holy Father for his "*wonderful letter*," which "*had made clear the position of the Church without*

offending anyone." The Letter successfully presented a delicate balance between a "clarity of the principles" when talking about the constitution of the Church, and a "great understanding" when speaking to the people "in their present local situation."

Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong took the occasion of the recent consistory in Rome on November 23, to address the Pope and cardinals saying that: "*Almost all Chinese Catholics and most of their Bishops are now in communion with Rome*" and share a "*communion of hearts waiting and praying for better times*."

Cardinal-archbishop O'Brien of Edinburgh, returning from a visit to China in the first days of November noted that: "*Many have accepted the Pope's letter joyfully, others have been hurt by certain phrases, but there is a desire which I have clearly seen that this letter be used as a major step on the way forward to building up the unity of the Catholic Church in China and its challenging work of evangelization, while recognizing the legitimate role of the civil authorities*." He also observed that "*although there are challenges still to be met, religious freedom has grown over the past years*." For the good of the Church and China, further ways forward must be found in line with Church teaching as promulgated by Pope Benedict, "without denying the legitimate rights of the civil authorities there, and the Chinese character necessary to find new avenues for the way ahead." The emphasis is clearly pastoral, not political.

In his Pastoral Letter, to describe China's religious policy for the last 25 years, Pope Benedict XVI used the word: "religious tolerance" which means a reality far from "religious persecution" but which is not "religious freedom" yet. Hence the Holy Father's pastoral call for reconciliation and unity to the Chinese Catholics and his reaffirmed wish for dialogue with China political authorities.

One should not expect the Chinese authorities to change their religious policy immediately and for that reason, expect reconciliation and unity within the Church community to happen all at once. Yet, there is great hope that things will continue to evolve slowly in China. For this reason, Catholics inside and outside China are invited to "*actively wait and pray*" for reconciliation and unity within the Church community as well as normalization of diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican. Inside and outside China, Catholics stand behind the Letter of the Holy Father.

[Michel Marcil, SJ]

Church News

Ordinations on Mission Sunday



The new Bishop of Beijing, **Giuseppe Li Shan** celebrated the annual Mission Sunday in communion with the Universal Church, marking the occasion with the ordination of five new priests at Beitang, Holy Savior parish.

A local priest said that after many years Bei Tang is finally being restored and is resuming its role as the cathedral. *"The decision to ordain the priests on Mission Sunday is a sign of our new Bishop's missionary zeal and commitment. It is a gesture to put us in communion with the Universal Church following the indications recently given to us by Pope Benedict XVI."*

[China Infodoc 10/07]

Several Churches Open for Worship

In recent months several churches were consecrated and opened for worship. The churches had either been restructured or newly built and are a sign of the activity and hope in these Catholic communities.

The churches include Nan Liang Tai parish, diocese of Ba Meng, in northern Mongolia, first built in 1874; Yun Xiao parish, diocese of Xia Men, south Fu Jiang province, dedicated to Our Lady of China, built exclusively with offerings from the faithful for a total 70.000 euro; and a new parish church at Liu He, diocese of Tai Yuan, Shan Xi province, with statues of the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Anthony, St. Joseph and St. Francis "we want to be near all the saints" the faithful say.

On the occasion of the consecration of the parish church at Yun Cheng, an exhibition "The Light of Christ" was opened and thousands of missionary leaflets were handed out. During the consecration of a gothic style church dedicated to the Sacred Heart in the diocese of Han Dan, three new priests were ordained. In the parish church of St Joseph in the diocese of Lan Zhou, Gan Su province, the church has the shape of a boat to recall that the faithful are on a pilgrimage to the house of the Father.

[Fides 12/07]

Chinese Printers Celebrate 50 millionth Bible



In early December, a celebration was held in Nanjing to celebrate the printing of the **50 millionth Bible** at the *Amity Printing Company* (APC), which was printed on 11 September this year.

The *United Bible Societies* (UBS) and *Amity Foundation* (AF) signed an agreement during the celebration to extend the Joint Venture Agreement between the two of them for another ten years. UBS and AF first began the APC as a joint venture in 1988 and the current agreement is set to expire in June 2008.

Ten years after the Cultural Revolution, Amity Press was established in Nanjing and its first Bible was printed in 1987. Since then over 50 million Bibles have been printed there. Forty-two million of these were distributed in mainland China, whilst the remaining eight million were exported to over 60 different countries.

China is believed to have one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world. Officially there are thought to be around 22 million Christians in China, unofficially the number could be as much as four times higher. During the *Cultural Revolution*, the Bible was banned and all copies were confiscated. But today there are more Bibles than any other book in China — it is unofficially the best-selling book there. [China Infodoc 11/07]

Hong Kong Christians seek True Religious Freedom in China

A year before the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Hong Kong Christian leaders have asked China to grant true religious freedom in the country. *Even though Beijing tried to give the impression it would improve its human rights record, when it was applying to host the 2008 Olympic Games, there is no substantial evidence to show its human rights situation has improved*, according to *Rev. Kwok Nai-Wang*, a consultant to the Christian Conference of Asia.

[ENI 8/07]

Jesuit Scholar Appointed Consultor

French Jesuit scholar **Benoit Vermander**, who researches religion and culture, has been appointed a Consultor to the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*.



Father Vermander, 47, director of the Jesuit-run *Taipei Ricci Institute*, was surprised at the appointment. Nonetheless, he rejoiced at "the possibility to contribute modestly" to "interreligious dialogue for peace and cooperation on the challenges that the world confronts," which he identified as "one of the greatest challenges of this time."

According to Vermander, religions help humankind redefine its future. He believes that interaction between religions results in a form of "spiritual empowerment," a way of helping people "go on their spiritual journey and become enlightened decision-makers, able to create a difference in their environments."

Father Vermander has headed the *Taipei Ricci Institute* since 1996, organizing dialogue and other sessions within the Chinese world on topics such as cultural diversity, sustainable development and spiritual empowerment.

On Oct. 24, he and his editorial team presented to the Pope a copy of the *Grand Ricci*, the largest-ever Chinese-French encyclopedic dictionary, published by the Ricci Institute in 2002. The Pope praised the compilation of the dictionary. Jesuits in Taiwan started work on the tome in 1951. [China Infodoc 11/07]

According to a recent survey of 4,500 people conducted by the *East China Normal University* in Shanghai, 31.4% of Chinese people over the age of 16 would consider themselves religious. Of those professing to be religious, around 12% were Christian.

[China Infodoc 11/07]

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Late Italian Jesuit Remembered

A special Mass was held recently at Sacred Heart Church in Taipei to commemorate Italian **Father Francesco Belfiori, SJ**. Fr. Belfiori died in Italy on November 11, 2007. He was 82.

Fr. Belfiori first moved to Taiwan in 1954. He was ordained a priest in 1958 in the Philippines and returned to Taiwan in 1960. Belfiori is counted among Church persons from outside China who dedicated themselves to restoring contact between the Universal Church and the Church in China after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

From 1980, Father Belfiori served in Hong Kong. In 1991, when the Jesuits established a new Chinese province for their apostolates in China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, he was appointed to the China Jesuit Service, which also serves Chinese overseas, offering academic exchange programs, pastoral services and the China News Analysis newsletter.

He returned to Italy in 2002 due to failing health. Fr. Belfiori was known for his generosity, loving heart, and dedication to the people he served. [UCA News 12/07]

Religion and Public Welfare

The positive role of faith-based welfare organizations in China was discussed at the first **Forum on Religion and Public Welfare**, co-sponsored by the Amity and Jinde Charities at Renmin University last summer.

In his opening remarks, **Zhang Liwei**, *Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation*, said in his opening remarks: *We are convinced that religions can make a substantial contribution to society. China's social problems are too big and complex to be solved by the government alone. There are a lot of areas where organizations initiated by religious believers, such as Amity and Jinde, can play a positive role.* A recent study showed that NGOs with a religious background fared better in terms of their quality of service, mobilization of volunteers and efficiency in the use of natural resources than NGOs without such a background.

[Amity News, Fall 2007]



Social Issues



Olympic Games' Organizers Prepare for All Faiths

The needs of people of all religions will be comprehensively met during next year's Olympics. "Under the leadership of Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2008 Olympics, we have been studying the practices adopted by previous host countries in order to meet the needs of all athletes and visitors," **Ye Xiaowen**, director of the *State Administration of Religious Affairs*, said. *I promise the religious services provided during the Beijing Games will be as good as any provided at previous Games*, Ye told reporters during a group interview on the sidelines of the ongoing Party congress.

A religious service center will be set up in the Olympic Village to provide a diverse range of services to meet the needs of athletes from various religious convictions. Athletes and those who accompany them will be able to enjoy different dishes specially made in accordance with their religious beliefs.

Liu Bainian, vice-president of the *Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association*, said a temporary Catholic church will be set up in the Olympic Village and all churches in Beijing will be open to Catholic visitors.

In Qingdao and Tianjin, where events will also be held, Catholic churches there have begun offering English Masses twice a month in preparation for the Olympics. The dioceses have also invited foreign musicians to train their choirs to help them sing hymns in English.

[China Infodoc 10/07; Asia Focus 9/07]

Loving and helping the poor a priority for Han Dan diocese

For many years Han Dan diocese in China has given priority to helping the weaker members of society. According to the diocesan web site, the *Diocesan Centre for Catholic Social Service* has become a point of reference and represents the diocese in society. The centre organizes assistance according to need. Visiting the sick, the disabled and broken families are the daily activities of the Center, whose members offer moral

comfort and concrete help. Recently women religious of the *Jinde Catholic Association* were asked to give a talk on the prevention of AIDS. Interestingly, the volunteers at the Center are not all Christians, and the funds are donated and managed by Christians and non-Christians. **So besides being appreciated for its good work the Center also offers living witness of collaboration between the Catholic community and society.**

Han Dan diocese has a population of 8,380,000 including 130,000 Catholics. It has over 100 churches and chapels, 58 priests, 40 seminarians and 200 women religious members of 2 diocesan congregations. The diocese runs several dispensaries, medical centers, and social assistance centers. [Fides 05/10/2007]

43,000 Post Doctoral Researchers

At the First Plenary Session of the 4th China Postdoctoral Science Foundation (CPSF) Council, it was announced that at the end of 2006, China had a total enrollment of 43,865 post doctoral researchers, and 26,890 are on the waiting list.

Reportedly, among the postdoctoral researchers, 36,944 are in the natural sciences, and 6,871 in social sciences, accounting for 84.3% and 15.6% of the total. In the field of natural sciences, 11,354 researchers are engaged in basic scientific research, 30.7% of the total; and 25,640 are in applied scientific research, accounting for 69.3% of the total.

At present, 1,363 mobile post-doctoral sites have been established in China. Among them, there are 1,111 natural science sites and 252 sites for the social sciences, respectively 81.5% and 18.5% of all stations. There are 1,318 post-doctoral worksites for major fields of economic and social development, such as machinery, information, chemistry, energy, environment, agriculture, construction, and pharmaceuticals. According to preliminary estimates, employed post doctorates are on average 33.3 years of age, natural and social science researchers are on average 33.1 years of age, and business post doctoral researchers are on average 33.9 years of age. [People's Daily 06/07]

Officials Punished for Extravagance

Nearly 5,000 officials were punished for extravagance in the first half of 2007 according to the *Chinese Ministry of Supervision* (MOS). An investigation was launched on officials who over spent public money on banquets, overseas tours, purchase of luxurious cars or entertainment.

The government took disciplinary action against 4,866 of the *Communist Party of China* who violated party or government rules against squandering public funds. The central authorities have urged government officials at all levels to implement the country's anti-corruption policies and called on all officials to practice a frugal working style instead of wasting public funds. [China View 2007]

Aging in China

One of the internationally recognized benchmarks of an aging population is when 10% of the population is above the age of 60. That China is an aging country is confirmed by 2005 statistics which place 144 million Chinese citizens – 11% of the population – in the over-60 age bracket.

Propelled by a relatively low birthrate and longer lifespan, China's huge population will long continue to be gray. Expert opinion holds that China will be an irreversibly aging society throughout the 21st century. By 2051 the Chinese population above the age of 60 is expected to reach a peak of 437 million – approximately **double** the projected number of children and adolescents.

The aging phenomenon is more complicated, and has more serious ramifications in China than in more developed countries, because it occurs in advance of China's economic affluence. At the time developed countries turned gray, their per capita GDP ranged between \$5,000 and \$10,000. China's current per capita GDP is little more than \$1,000.

China's ballooning aging population poses serious economic and social challenges. Seniors are estimated to spend three to five times more on medication than their juniors. Developments in the aging service industry cannot keep pace with the relentless growth and demands of the aging population, particularly those in the "empty-nest," advanced-age and disabled groups.

The Chinese government and society as a whole feel keenly the pressure exerted by the aging population and are working hard to resolve the issue. China Today 11/07

Mattel Apologizes to China



Mattel Inc. tried to save face with Chinese officials recently, taking the blame for the massive recall of millions of Chinese-made toys, as it strives to mend a strained relationship with the nation that makes most of its toys.

The world's largest toy maker sent a top executive to personally apologize to China's product safety chief, *Li Changjiang*, as reporters and company lawyers looked on. *Mattel takes full responsibility for these recalls and apologizes personally to you, the Chinese people, and all of our customers who received the toys*, Thomas Debrowski, Mattel's executive vice-president for worldwide operations, told Li.

The apology came ahead of an expected visit to China by Mattel's Chairman and Chief Executive Robert A. Eckert. *Eric Johnson*, a professor of operations management at Dartmouth College said the staging of Mattel's apology as a public event was telling. *This was all about saving face, which is very important in the Chinese culture*, he said. The *mea culpa* could help reshape the debate surrounding Chinese-made toys.

Debrowski acknowledged that the **vast majority of the products recalled were the result of a design flaw in Mattel's design, not through a manufacturing flaw in China's manufacturers**. Lead-tainted toys accounted for only a small percentage of all toys recalled, he added.

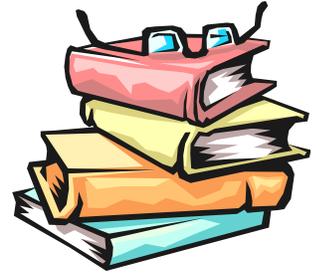
Since the recalls, Mattel has announced plans to upgrade its safety system by certifying suppliers and increasing the frequency of random, unannounced inspections. Mattel first established a presence in China 25 years ago and now makes about 65 percent of its products there. More than 80 percent of all toys sold in the U.S. are made in the Asian nation.

[China Infodoc 09/07]



Reading Notes

- **Jin Luxian Wenji (Jin Luxian's anthology).** *Jin Luxian.* Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House 2007. This book brings together articles previously published by Shanghai diocese's Guang Qi Press, including homilies, pastoral letters and teachings for local priests, nuns and laypeople. It also includes four travel journals, four speeches he made overseas and his doctoral dissertation. Bishop Jin was ordained in 1945; he is proficient in several languages, including English, French, German and Italian. After returning from studies in Europe and becoming rector of the Jesuit Seminary in Xujiahui, he was arrested in 1955 and spent 18 years in prison and 9 years in re-education camps. He was released in 1982 and ordained auxiliary bishop of Shanghai in 1985 without papal mandate. He has been recognized by the Holy See in recent years. This book was published with the approval of the central government, but as an "internal publication." This means it can be sold only in designated places and not in public bookstores. It can be ordered through Guang Qi Press or the publisher.
- **Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity.** Telling the stories of Chinese Christians across the centuries and around the world. The BDCC is an electronic database in both English and Chinese recording the lives and works of Chinese Christians from the Tang Dynasty to the 21st century. A work in progress, the BDCC will eventually include biographies of Chinese believers from the 7th century to the present, as well as some foreigners who are part of the overall story. Contributions of stories of Chinese Christians are welcome: go to www.bdcconline.net for more details.



Congratulations to the December 2007 Graduates in the Maryknoll Society sponsored Chinese Seminary Teachers & Formators Project!



Fr. John Ren Da Hai
M.A. Liturgy
St. John's University, MN



Sem. John Huang Wen Hong
B.A. Philosophy
St. Vincent's College, PA



Fr. Joseph Lin Jin De
M.A. Spiritual Direction
Fordham University, NY



23rd National Catholic China Conference

3-5 October 2008 - Our Lady of the Snows, Belleville, IL (proximate to St. Louis, MO)

Continuing Cross Cultural Conversations

Following on the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, the proposed theme will focus on youth: Christian and other religious believers, students, business people and so forth.

For more details see enclosed flyer/registration form or call 973-763-1131.