

News Update on Religion and Church in China September 1 – November 24, 2013

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2013, No. 4, pp. 3-18) covered the period June 18 – September 19, 2013.

September 1, 2013:

Record numbers in the “minor seminary” of the Diocese of Xingtai

30 new students were enrolled for the school year which began on September 1 – the largest group in recent years. A total of 70 teenage students are currently enrolled in the preparatory seminary of the Diocese of Xingtai (Hebei Province), which was opened in 1989. The seminary’s Rector, Fr. Zhang Jican, wants to emphasize the teaching of the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation during the coming school year. Since its opening, the seminary has provided a secondary school education to approximately 1,200 minor seminarians (*Fides* Sept. 5; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Oct. 5).

September 6, 2013:

State Council approves document calling for accelerated development of the aged care sector – with stress on home care

Since the number of those over 60 years of age will increase from 194 million in the year 2012 to 300 million by the year 2025, and the provision of old age care services is still inadequate and is very unevenly distributed between rural and urban areas, it is urgent to speed up development in this area – the State Council declared in its document. According to the document, it is essential to ensure basic care and services for especially needy elderly people; therefore, massive investment is needed in grass roots services for the elderly. Both individuals as well as families need to be supported in discovering their responsibility in this area, the document says. Otherwise, it puts emphasis on the development of market resources: the “social forces” should become the main carriers of the aged care sector and should be supported in the development of aged care facilities. To this end, equitable competitive opportunities should be created, bureaucratic obstacles should be eliminated, foreign investment should be encouraged, and both family businesses and small businesses should be encouraged to participate in



Volunteers such as this young woman from the Vincentian Fraternal Family in Hebei Province visit elderly people living alone in rural areas. They distribute food and clothes, help with laundry and cleaning, provide rudimentary health care and welcome personal attention. Photo: Vincentian Fraternal Family.

care for the elderly. The document states that by 2020, a comprehensive domestic elderly care network should be in place, with the neighborhood communities (*shequ*) serving as a link. The number of beds available in aged care facilities should reach 35–40 for every 1,000 elderly inhabitants. According to the document, among the important political measures to be undertaken are the training of specialized personnel and the involvement of charities. The latter should be a “major force” in the development of aged care facilities, in the development of care products for the elderly and in the provision of services for the aged. The document also provides for the establishment of volunteer services for the elderly. The volunteer efforts of government cadres, of employees of companies and units, and of students should be encouraged, as should self-help organizations made up of older people themselves (“Views on Speeding up the Development of the Elderly Care Service Sector” 国务院关于加强发展养老服务业的若干意见, can be found at the site: www.gov.cn/zw/gk/2013-09/13/content_2487704.htm).

Already on June 27, 2013, the Ministry of Civil Affairs had issued measures for the establishment and management of aged care facilities. In many places the churches and other religious groups in China are already taking care of elderly people who are on their own through home visits by volunteer groups, etc. (see, for example, the article by Joseph Loftus: “Walk before you can run’: The Catholic Church and the Care of China’s Elderly,” in: *RCTC* 2013, No. 1, pp. 16-23).

September 9, 2013:

President of Turkey’s Department of Religious Affairs pays first visit to Xinjiang

According to Turkish news reports, in meetings with Wei Xinhui, director of the Religious Affairs Bureau of Xinjiang Autonomous Region, and with Nur Bekri, governor of the territory, Mehmet Görmez, President of Turkey’s Department of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), said that the more freely people can practice their religion, the easier it will be to achieve peaceful co-existence. According to state owned *Xinjiang Daily*, Nur Bekri in turn explained that in Xinjiang the official policy of equality, freedom of religious belief and the right to education and to the use of the local language and script is implemented conscientiously. He also said that the country’s policy on nationalities and religions is supported by the members of all ethnic groups. Görmez also delivered a public lecture at the Id Kah Mosque in Urumqi. From Xinjiang, Görmez traveled to Beijing, where among other activities, he was received by the Vice Prime Minister Liu Yandong (*Anadolu Agency* Sept. 9; *Xinhua* Sept. 12; www.diyamet.gov.tr Sept. 10; www.malaysianur.com/turkeys-religious-affairs-in-urumqi/; www.sara.gov.cn Sept. 13; www.xjdaily.com.cn Sept. 11).

Turkey traditionally feels a bond of brotherhood with the Turkic speaking Uyghur people and it protested against the suppression of the riots in Urumqi in July of 2009 by the Chinese authorities (see: *China heute* 2009, No. 3, p. 143 [in German]). Since then, however, Turkey has been making intensive efforts to draw closer to China.

September 13–18, 2013:

Turkish Islamic Cultural Exhibition in Yinchuan – Görmez contrasts Islam in China with Islam in Europe

With demonstrations of Islamic calligraphy, Qur'an recitations, dance and an exhibition, visitors in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in northwest China were provided with a close-up look at Islamic culture in Turkey. The cultural show was part of the official "Turkey Year" in China and was jointly organized by Turkey's Department of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), the Chinese State Administration [Bureau] of Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA). In the corresponding official "China Year" in Turkey in 2012, Turkish citizens in Istanbul were introduced to Islamic culture in China (see: *RCTC* 2012, No. 4, p. 15).

Before the Friday prayers on September 13, Mehmet Görmez, President of the Diyanet, told Muslims in Yinchuan that they could be proud of themselves and of their ancestors: "While centuries ago when Muslims who set up great civilizations in Europe [...] were thrown out of their lands you in China managed to maintain your existence. Today there are no signs left of Andalusia, Kurtuba, Granada and El-Hamra that brought enlightenment to Europe. However, you maintained the messages of peace and compassion of Islam in your hearts, in [...] Ningxia, Yinchuan and all over China [...] for 13 centuries [...]" "Get on well with your neighbors and all other people in your country. Never abandon the path of peace," Görmez said. He also mentioned that for the last two years there has been a special effort at cooperation between the Diyanet, the SARA and the CIA which involves, among other things, the translation of Islamic works from Chinese into Turkish and vice-versa (www.diyamet.gov.tr Sept. 13; www.sara.gov.cn Sept 15, 18).

September 18, 2013:

Taiwan: Religious groups hold press conference opposing same-sex marriage

In a press conference of the "Taiwanese Alliance of Religious Groups for the Love of Families" various religious groups expressed their strong opposition to the legalization of marriage between partners of the same sex. Sixty religious leaders, including Buddhists, Protestants, Catholics, Daoists, followers of Tiandijiao, the Unification Church ("Moonies") and the Yiguandao, took part in the press conference. On October 3, 2013, the Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights (TAPCPR) made public its draft proposals for three amendments of the Civil Code. The proposed changes would provide for marriage for same-sex couples with the right to adoption, a civil partnership law and the registration of relationships between more than two people. The draft law on same-sex marriage passed its first reading in the Legislative Yuan (parliament) on October 25. While tens of thousands of participants in the Taiwan LGBT Pride Parade marched in Taipei on October 26 for equal rights for homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals, on November 29, other tens of thousands marched in protest against same-sex marriage (report by Willi Boehi; *Taipei Times* Sept. 19; asienspiegel.ch Dec. 2; chinapost.com.tw Sept. 22; Oct. 27; focustaiwan.tw Nov. 30; newtalk.tw Sept. 19; tapcpr.wordpress.com).

September 25, 2013:

Taiwan's Minister of the Interior inaugurates "Temple Stay in Taiwan" program

At a press conference in the Buddhist Ling Jiou Mountain Monastery in Gongliao, New Taipei City, Minister of the Interior Lee Hong-yuan (Li Hongyuan) unveiled the plan to open temples and religious houses for foreign and local tourists to have a live-in experience which will give them access to the multi-faceted culture and spirituality of the island. At the same time, the program aims at promoting local tourism. Among the first five trip destinations selected and recommended by the Ministry of the Interior, there are several Buddhist monasteries as well as the Mount of Beatitudes Catholic monastery in Kaohsiung (report by Willi Boehi; *Taipei Times* Sept. 26; www.moi.gov.tw Oct. 4).

Sojourns in religious houses in Taiwan were of course already possible before this program was launched.

September 27, 2013:

Appeal hearing in Henan by members of the "Shouters" against their conviction for "cult" activities – another case in Inner Mongolia

30 members of the Christian-inspired group known as the "Shouters" were arrested on April 12, 2012, in Ye County, Pingdingshan City in Henan Province. On April 1, 2013, seven of them were condemned by the county court and sentenced to prison terms of between three and seven and a half years for "using a cult organization to undermine law enforcement." According to reports by the US-based organization ChinaAid, a September 27, 2013, appeal hearing in Pingdingshan ended without a verdict because the 14 lawyers (13 of them Christians according to the *Voice of America*) representing the seven accused did not return to the courtroom that evening in a bid to block a hastily reached verdict by the court.

In another case, on July 25, 2013, three members of the "Shouters" were also convicted in the district court of Yuquan, Hohhot City in Inner Mongolia, and sentenced to eight and nine years in prison. They had been charged with forming and using a cult organization in order to undermine law enforcement. They had already been arrested in July of 2012. As ChinaAid reported on October 13, 2013, the three have so far been prevented by the local government from exercising their right to appeal.

The "Shouters" (*huhānpai* 呼喊派) came into existence as a breakaway group from the "Local Church" (*difang jiaohui* 地方教会). The latter was founded in Fuzhou in 1922 by Watchman Nee and continued in Taiwan and in the USA under Witness Lee. The "Shouters" were banned in the People's Republic of China in 1983 and were declared a cult organization in 1995 (*South China Morning Post* July 7; *Voice of America* Sept. 25; www.chinaaid.org April 27; Oct. 7, 8; www.cnfxj.org).

September 28, November 11, 2013:

Two Tibetans set themselves on fire in protest

The first case was a 40 year old family man in the Autonomous Tibetan and Qiang Prefecture of Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) in Sichuan, the second a 20 year old monk in the Pema District in Qinghai. Both died of their burns. Between 2011 and the end of November 2013, a total of 122 or 123 Tibetans have burned themselves in protest against Chinese rule, 104 or 102 of them died as a result (different counts

are found at www.savetibet.org and www.tibet.net). The number of self-immolations, however, has declined since May 2013.

In a November 20 address to the parliament in Tokyo, the Dalai Lama said that it was difficult for him to dissuade Tibetans from protesting by self-immolation: “I can’t ask them to act differently because I have nothing to offer them.” He called on the Chinese authorities to investigate why so many Tibetans have chosen this path (*Phayul* Nov. 21).

September 28, 2013:

Hong Kong Government sets first poverty threshold – 1.3 million Hong Kong residents are officially poor

The Hong Kong government has set the poverty threshold at an income of HK\$ 3,600 (EUR 340) per month for a single-person household, not including state benefits. According to this standard, 1.31 million Hong Kong residents (19.6% of the population of 7 million) are currently living below the poverty line. One-third of Hong Kong’s elderly and one-fifth of the children are poor, despite the fact that more than half of those living below the poverty threshold have one or more full-time workers in the household. The *South China Morning Post* noted that Hong Kong, with 19.6% poor, is in relatively good shape in comparison with countries such as the UK, the USA, France and Korea, which calculate the rate of poverty using the same formula. It added, however, that after accounting for state benefits, only the United States have a greater percentage of poor. According to the newspapers, critics have pointed to the fact that there are no figures on poverty among people with disabilities and among ethnic minorities. A study by the University of Bristol and City University of Hong Kong came up with the higher number of 1.47 million poor and disadvantaged in Hong Kong (*South China Morning Post* Sept. 29; Nov. 2; *Xinhua* Sept. 28).

Beginning of October, 2013:

Underground Priests arrested in Baoding (Hebei Province)

Two underground priests of the Diocese of Baoding were arrested in early October. According to *AsiaNews*, they were charged with having organized catechism classes for adults in Qinyuan City near Baoding. Fr. Tian Dalong and another priest, both in their forties, were arrested and since then are in police custody in Baoding, an area with one of the highest numbers of underground Catholics in China. Four lay people who had been helping the priests in their pastoral activities were each fined RMB 4,000. According to *AsiaNews*, at least 10 priests find themselves in a similar situation, with some of them having been sentenced to several years in labor camps (*AsiaNews* Nov. 19).

October 6, 2013:

LA Times reports on plan to restore the Old Synagogue of Harbin

In February of 2013, the city government of Harbin announced its decision to restore the former Old Synagogue, built in 1909, which was declared a “national monument” in 2013. From the outside, the 450 seat synagogue is still recognizable as such. The interior, however, is unrecognizable, having been completely changed through years of use as a hospital and later as a youth hostel. The restoration promises to be difficult since the original building plans have been lost. The report does not specify what plans have been made for the use of the building following the restoration. The New Synagogue of

Harbin, built in 1921 and renovated in 2004, currently serves as a museum of Jewish life in Harbin (*Los Angeles Times* Oct. 6; http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/harbin/Harbin_Synagogue_Restoration_Project.pdf).

In 1931 there were about 13,000 Jews living in the northeastern Chinese city of Harbin. They had come to the city mainly as railroad workers or as refugees following the 1917 revolution in Russia. They left China after 1949.

October 6, 2013:

Wenzhou opens its churches to typhoon victims



The Dongmen church in Wenzhou offered shelter to many during Typhoon Fitow. Photo: www.chinacatholic.org.

Two churches in Wenzhou (Zhejiang Province) opened their doors to offer shelter to hundreds of people who had fled their homes during Typhoon Fitow, which raged on China's east coast. Those sheltered were mainly migrants who were provided with food and blankets. They stayed in the churches until the next morning. The parishioners took the opportunity to introduce the migrants to the activities of the Church and to show them a video on the life of Jesus.

During the typhoon season, churches in the affected areas frequently offer first aid to the victims. At the request of local governments, they regularly take in migrant workers and residents from zones which had been evacuated (*AsiaNews* Oct. 10).

October 11, 2013:

Falungong reports that numbers of those persecuted remain constant

According to a report from the US-based *Falun Dafa Information Center*, despite the closure of some labor camps, the kidnapping and torture of Falungong practitioners in China is continuing. Lately, however, the majority of Falungong adherents are no longer being detained in labor camps, but in "brainwashing centers" and prisons, the Center said. It argues that the trend towards brainwashing centers is dangerous, since they are less regulated by law than the labor camps and officially do not even exist. According to a report on the website Minghui, which also belongs to Falun Dafa, in the first half of 2013, 43 Falungong adherents reportedly died from the effects of torture; 2,101 adherents were abducted or arrested; 14 were sentenced to labor camps; 445 were tried in court and/or sentenced to prison; 186 were transferred to brainwashing centers. During the same period, Falungong adherents were released from many labor camps, a move that Minghui described as merely a strategy to reduce criticism levelled at the system of labor camps. According to the report, since the beginning of the persecution of Falungong in 1999, somewhere around 11,500 adherents have been sentenced to prison and 25,400 others have been sent to labor camps (*Falun Dafa Information Center* Oct. 11; Nov. 19; Minghui.org July 22).

October 14, 2013:

Christians and Buddhists in Taipei stage common protest against abortion

During the demonstration, more than 1,000 Christians and Buddhists shouted “abortion is murder” and other slogans and prayed in front of the presidential office in Taipei. They also handed over to the government a petition calling for the introduction of legislation requiring mandatory counseling and a seven-day period for reflection before an abortion can be performed. The demonstration was part of the U.S.-based “Stand for Life” campaign (*UCAN* Oct. 15).



Buddhist and Christian banners protesting abortion at the demonstration of October 14. Photo: *UCAN*.

October 17, 2013:

“Global Slavery Index”: 2.8–3.1 million persons in China live in slavery

China comes in at no. 84 out of the 162 countries examined by the private Australian Walk Free Foundation, which ranks countries on a “Global Slavery Index.” India, with an almost equal population, rose to no. 4 on the index, with an estimated 13.3 to 14.7 million people existing in a condition of slavery. In addition to the number of people who are actually enslaved, the ranking also takes into account the incidence of child marriages and cross-border trafficking of human persons. For China, the report primarily refers to slavery through forced labor (also in the context of labor migration, including unethical employment agencies), as well as trafficking in human persons for the purpose of forced marriage. According to the index, there are around 30 million people worldwide who are living in conditions of slavery. For Germany, the number is estimated to be between at 10,000–11,000 (rank 136). The researchers say that according to their findings corruption, and not poverty, is the main factor for the spread and endurance of slavery around the world (www.globalslaveryindex.org; *Reuters* Oct. 17).

October 20, 2013:

Chinese NGO Huiling receives international award

The NGO “Huiling,” founded by Teresa Meng Weina, has been awarded the international prize “Vittorio Colombo.” The organization’s members began opening schools for mentally handicapped children as far back as 1985. They were doing real pioneering work in the field and have had a great influence on the development of China’s social system and on local authorities. At present, Huiling operates more than 100 centers in 13 of China’s major cities. Government authorities see Huiling as a model for China’s social services and as an example for other NGOs to emulate. Teresa Meng Weina, president of Huiling today, wants to improve the work of the NGO which she founded and further strengthen the awareness of the needs of mentally handicapped people in Chinese society (*Fides* Oct. 31). *Jan Kwee*

October 21, 2013:

***South China Morning Post*: Indian Christian in Hong Kong searches in vain for a place to bury his wife**



The Chinese Permanent Cemetery in Aberdeen.
Photo: K. Wenzel-Teuber.

The Indian, whose family has lived in Hong Kong for 30 years, has been turned away by many cemeteries on the grounds of his wife's ethnic or religious affiliation. In the Hindu cemetery, for example, where many Indians find a final resting place, no Christians may be buried. The church to which the family belongs is not a member of the Chinese Church Alliance, which is responsible for Protestant cemeteries in the city. The Chinese Permanent Cemeteries only accept the remains of ethnic Chinese. The family has also had no luck winning a burial plot in the lottery by which the city's public cemeteries make some gravesites available each year. The

woman died back in February of 2013. As the report explained, cemeteries in Hong Kong are exempt from the territory's anti-discrimination ordinance and can in fact reject applicants because of their race or religion (*South China Morning Post* Oct. 21).

October 22, 2013:

Chinese State Council's White Paper on "Development and Progress of Tibet" contains information on religion

The extensive text contains two paragraphs on "Respecting and protecting freedom of religious belief." It says that the freedom of religious belief is fully respected by the Central Government as well as by the Government of the Autonomous Region of Tibet. In Tibet, "Tibetan Buddhism, Bon, Islam, Catholicism and some other religions coexist. [...] The majority of the people in Tibet believe in Tibetan Buddhism." According to the White Paper, there are 1,787 places for different religious activities in Tibet, with more than 46,000 resident monks and nuns and 358 Living Buddhas. The system of the reincarnation of Living Buddhas [for which the State Council issued special regulations in 2007] is respected by the State, the document says and continues that "so far, over 40 incarnated Living Buddhas have been confirmed through traditional religious rituals and historical conventions." [What is not clear is the time frame to which this figure of 40 relates (since 2007?).] The State "strengthens the administration of religious activities according to law, prohibits religion from intervening in the country's administration, justice system and education, and allows no individual or organization to use religion for illegal activities." The concluding remarks of the White Paper contain a criticism of the Dalai Lama (the text of the White Paper can be found at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-10/22/content_17050578.htm).

October 22, 2013:

United Nations scrutinizes human rights situation in China

On October 22, 2013, the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva held its periodic universal review process on the situation of human rights in China. The Council reviews the human rights profile of each UN member state every four years, though the results of the review have no binding force. A few hours before the meeting Tibetan activists staged a protest against Chinese policy on Tibet in front of the conference building. During the session, delegates of many Western countries intervened with comments critical of China. The German Ambassador, Hanns Schumacher, urged China to ensure freedom of opinion and expression – including on the Internet – and to continue to go ahead with reforms of the criminal justice system (in particular, the abolition of the “re-education through labor” camps). He also called on China “to further reduce the number of crimes carrying the death penalty, publish figures on death verdicts and executions and inform a public debate with a view to a moratorium and eventual abolition.” During the course of the review, there were also countries that offered a positive assessment including various African countries which for years have been receiving significant support from China. In making his own country’s position known to the Council, China defended its human rights record, pointing to, among other things, improvements in social and economic rights. UN inspectors reported that at the last four-year review China had accepted recommendations to strengthen its engagement with civil society so as to protect human rights – this according to a report by *Reuters* (*BBC News China* Oct. 22; *Reuters* Oct. 16, 22; *The Epoch Times* Oct. 24.; see also entry of Nov. 12). In advance of the review, the Commission for Justice and Peace of the Diocese of Hong Kong had for the first time turned to the UN Human Rights Council with a petition which included the request to check issues of freedom of religion – particularly in the Catholic area.

October 24, 2013:

Contradictory signals: Shanghai Auxiliary Bishop appears at funeral, while Shanghai seminarian is ordained by the Bishop of Haimen

Bishop Ma Daqin announced his withdrawal from the Patriotic Association at his consecration as bishop in July of 2012 and has since been largely restricted by the authorities in his freedom of movement. He was later formally removed from office and has not been allowed to appear in public. Nevertheless, he showed up on October 24 at the funeral service for Shen Baoyi, who had been Ma’s predecessor as editor-in-chief of the Shanghai diocese’s Guangqi publishing house.



Thaddeus Ma Daqin preaching at Sheshan in May of 2012, prior to his consecration as Bishop. Photo: *UCAN*.

In connection with this story, *UCAN* reported that the continuous restrictions of Bishop Ma’s movements to the Sheshan Major Seminary for the last 14 months seem to have been relaxed somewhat in recent months. Citing an anonymous source, the agency also said that last July, accompanied by government officials, Bishop Ma visited the Jinggangshan revolutionary memorial as a symbolic gesture of repentance to the authorities.

Also, on October 24, Bishop Shen Bin of Haimen ordained Shanghai seminarian Xie Huimin to the priesthood. He had ordained him to the diaconate the previous day. As reported

by *AsiaNews*, readers of Chinese Catholic websites called for Ma’s release so that he would be able to preside over the ordination himself (*AsiaNews* Oct. 25; *UCAN* Oct. 31).

On October 8 Bishop Ma published on his blog a reflection on *Lumen Fidei*, the encyclical letter written by Pope Francis. The reflection quickly disappeared from his blog after having been accessible only a short while. Since then, Bishop Ma has not been permitted to publish any new posts on his blog, although he is being allowed to publish a short daily Scripture reflection on his Weibo account.

October 26–27, 2013:

Conference of Chinese NGOs which care for orphans

A total of 47 NGOs from all over China specializing in the care of orphaned children and in the running of orphanages took part in a conference in Beijing on the care and raising of orphaned children. The conference was jointly organized by the Catholic Jinde Charities and the Protestant Amity Foundation. A representative of the Ministry of Civil Affairs presented the policies of the Chinese government concerning this matter, policies which had been put in place in early 2013 to provide for stricter supervision of private orphanages after a disaster claimed the lives of orphans. Other speakers included professors, specialists from China and abroad, including Sister Wang Qingfen, who is in charge of the Liming Family, as well as representatives of NGOs from all five of the government recognized religions. The Liming Family includes orphanages, rehabilitation centers and groups which prepare young people with disabilities for employment (www.chinacatholic.org Sept. 5; Nov. 7). *Jan Kwee*

October 27, 2013:

Tianjin: Catholic Converts go on pilgrimage

A group of 40 Catholics who had recently converted from the Protestant church to the Catholic faith, set out on a pilgrimage to the parish church of Yixingfu in the Diocese of Tianjin. They belong to the Cathedral parish of Tianjin. In his homily, Fr. Yuan, parish priest of Yixingfu, explained among other things the structure of the ecclesial hierarchy and the nature of the Catholic Church. The new Catholics also had the opportunity to get to know the community life and the various pastoral activities of the Catholic parish of Yixingfu (*Fides* Nov. 6).

October 28, 2013:

5 dead in attack by three Uyghurs at Tian'anmen Square – video of "Turkistan Islamic Party" claims responsibility

On October 28, a jeep loaded with cans of petrol plowed into a bridge pier directly in front of the Gate of Heavenly Peace and burst into flames. The occupants of the jeep, a Uyghur man and his wife and mother, died in the blaze as did two tourists. Forty people, including four foreign tourists, were injured. The authorities later arrested five Uyghurs in Beijing.

According to *Reuters*, on November 22, the US-based "SITE Intelligence Group," which monitors terrorist forums, posted a video online in which the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) claimed responsibility for that attack and issued a threat to launch attacks against other targets including the Great Hall of the People. On November 25, the Chinese government spokesman Qin Gang identified the TIP with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). The Chinese authorities had previously referred to ETIM as being behind the attack, although non-Chinese media had quoted Uyghur scholars in Beijing who expressed doubts about this. The United States has listed the ETIM as a terrorist group since 2002. *Xinhua* reports indicate that according to police there were 190 violent and terrorist incidents in Xinjiang

in 2012, significantly more than in the previous year (*China Daily* Nov. 26; *Global Times* Nov. 26; *Kyodo* Nov. 1, 3; *Reuters* Nov. 23; *South China Morning Post* Nov. 1, 3; *Die Welt* Oct. 29; Nov. 17; *Xinhua* Oct. 30, 31; Nov. 4, 29).

On the violent incidents in Xinjiang during 2013, see: *RCTC* 2013, No. 3, p. 11; No. 4, p. 5.

October 28, 2013:

Bishop Peter Liu Guandong (Diocese of Yixian) dies at 94



Bishop Liu Guandong in the year 2006.
Photo: UCAN.

Bishop Liu was born in 1919 in Qingyuan County of the Province of Hebei and was ordained a priest in 1945. He spent almost 30 years of his life in prison and in labor camps. In 1982 he was secretly consecrated Coadjutor Bishop of Yixian (Hebei Province) and in 1986 he became the Ordinary there. After Bishop Liu organized the establishment of a Bishops' Conference of the Underground Church in 1989, he was sentenced to a further three years in a labor camp. In 1994 he suffered a stroke and resigned from all his posts, he was nevertheless placed under house arrest in his home town of Weigezhuang. Bishop Liu eventually managed to slip away from the surveillance around his home in 1997, and from then until his recent death he remained in hiding (*AsiaNews* Nov. 8; *Fides* Nov. 13; *UCAN* Nov. 5).

October 31, 2013:

Prizes awarded to Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hongkong



Honored for his service of companionship:
Cardinal Zen. Photo: UCAN.

At a ceremony in Vancouver, Canada, the Cardinal received Canada's "John Diefenbaker Defender of Human Rights and Freedom Award" for 2013. According to the Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird, who presented the award, Canada was honoring Cardinal Zen for his unwavering commitment to human rights, democracy and freedom of religion – both in Hong Kong as well as for Mainland China. On October 23, the Divinity School of the Chinese University of Hong Kong presented Cardinal Zen with its "Lifetime Companionship Award" in recognition of his decades of pastoral concern for Hong Kong's prison inmates. Since the early 1960s, the Cardinal regularly

visited prisoners in the different prisons. Even after his retirement in 2009 he continues to visit inmates twice a month. In September Cardinal Zen invited Pope Francis to participate in the annual tradition of distributing mooncakes to all of Hong Kong's detainees (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Nov. 2, 9; *UCAN* Oct. 23; see also *RCTC* 2013, No. 4, p. 18).

November 7, 2013:

Last group of Chinese pilgrims to Mecca return from the Hajj – Fewer pilgrims than in previous years

According to figures released by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), a total of 11,800 Muslim pilgrims took part in this year's Hajj to Mecca. The SARA took charge of the coordination between the various authorities that was necessary for the pilgrimage and, together with the Chinese Islamic Association, assembled a team of several hundred leaders, doctors, chefs and volunteers to look after the needs of the pilgrims (www.sara.gov.cn Nov. 7).

In the year of 2013, the number of Chinese from the PRC making the pilgrimage to Mecca was lower than in previous years. According to official data, in 2012, 13,800 Chinese Muslims took part in the Hajj; in 2011, 13,700; and in 2010, 13,000. Pilgrimages to Mecca which are not officially organized by the SARA are not allowed.

November 12, 2013:

Party Congress: Central Committee plenum votes to abolish “re-education through labor” and to ease state birth planning rules

At the conclusion of its November 9–12 plenary assembly, the Central Committee of China's Communist Party published a communiqué containing decisions on a total of 60 different topics. Paragraph 34 provides for, among other things, the abolition of the system of “re-education through labor” as well as the gradual reduction of the number of crimes punishable by the death penalty. The system of “re-education through labor” (*laodong jiaoyang* 劳动教养), which had been introduced in 1957 to deal with “lesser crimes,” allows a person to be sentenced to up to four years in a labor camp by the police, without judicial process. Civil rights activists, members of Falungong and members of other persecuted religious groups have also been sent to the labor camps. Due to lack of supervision, the system is particularly vulnerable to arbitrary decisions and to outright abuse. Recently, it has also been critically discussed in the state-controlled media. Party Congress deputies have been calling for a reform of the system since before the last meeting of the National People's Congress in early 2013 (see: *RCTC* 2013, No. 2, p. 11).

Although the state's current birth planning policies will generally be maintained, according to the communiqué in future also families in which only one of the parents is an only child will be permitted to have two children (paragraph 46). In the past, it was required that both of the parents be single children. There will be special regulations in place for rural populations and for ethnic minorities (*Die Welt* Nov. 15; news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-11/15/c_118164235.htm).

November 12, 2013:

People's Republic of China elected to UN Human Rights Council

Beginning in January 2014, China will again be a member of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations. On November 12, along with Russia, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Algeria, China received enough votes to be included in the list of the 47 alternating member-countries which make up the council. Protests by human rights activists failed to change the outcome. Countries are elected to the Council for a period of three years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms. Thus several states, among them China, after six years on the Council had to pause.

Human Rights Watch had noted beforehand that China is among the states which have refused to allow UN inspectors into the country to examine various prosecution cases (*South China Morning Post* Nov. 13; *UN News Centre* Nov. 12; *www.zeit.de* Nov. 12).

November 16/17, 2013:

Pastor and more than 20 members of an officially registered Protestant church arrested in Nanle (Henan Province)

According to reports by the organization ChinaAid, Pastor Zhang Shaojie was the first one arrested on November 16 while meeting in his church with the head of the public security bureau of the Nanle County. Later on, the authorities also arrested other members of the church. Lawyers hired by the church were then hindered in their attempts to meet with their clients, the organization said; more than a week after the arrests, no formal charges had yet been brought in most of the cases and the families of those arrested had been given no information about where they were being detained. ChinaAid reported that a few years ago the local government of the Nanle County (Puyang City, Henan Province) had compelled all the house churches in Nanle to register with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, had coerced Pastor Zhang Shaojie into accepting the position as chairman of the local Three-Self Church and forced him to become a member of the county's Political Consultative Conference. According to ChinaAid, church members have expressed the suspicion that the government now wants to get rid of Pastor Zhang as Three-Self chairman, since he has often involved himself with marginalized social groups. In a November 27 call for help by members of the church, which ChinaAid made public, they stated that the problems had started after church members had travelled to Beijing to present petitions concerning certain incidents that had occurred with regard to church property. The church is said to have more than 40 different places of assembly in Nanle County (*AsiaNews* Nov. 21.; *UCAN* Nov. 25; *www.chinaaid.org* Nov. 17, 19, 22, 27 and 30).

November 24, 2013:

Solemnity of Christ the King: Catholic parish communities throughout China celebrate the conclusion of the “Year of Faith”

Many dioceses and parishes throughout China observed the Year of Faith, which Pope Benedict XVI had inaugurated on October 11, 2012, with a variety of different initiatives. One focus of all of the activities was the propagation of the faith. To mark the conclusion of the year-long initiative on the Solemnity of Christ the King, special activities and presentations were organized in many places (see report in *China heute* 2013, No. 4, pp. 200-201 [in German]).

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