

News Update on Religion and Church in China November 22, 2012 – February 28, 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” (2013, No. 1, pp. 3-15) covered the period October to November 2012.

November 22, 2012:

Closures of rural schools to be suspended until further notice

According to an official of the Ministry of Education, the ministry has decided to reconsider its configuration of the school system in rural areas. No further closings or mergers of rural schools will be carried out until new plans have been made public. In 2002, after the government had pushed through its plans to reorganize or merge rural schools in order to make better and more equitable use of existing resources, many schools in rural areas were closed. Statistical studies showed that between 2000 and 2010 an average of 63 rural elementary schools and three rural middle schools were closed daily. The result was a 52% drop in the number of elementary schools and a 25% decrease in the number of middle schools. The number of pupils in rural elementary schools fell by more than 31.5 million, and the number of middle school pupils shrank by 16.4 million. Many of the pupils affected by the closings enrolled in schools in towns or cities, while some simply dropped out. Overcrowded classes and long commuting times are further negative effects of the numerous school closures or mergers (*Xinhua* Nov. 22, 2012).

December 2012:

100 Mainland Chinese studying Catholic theology in Taiwan

According to Fr. Gendron, SJ, Dean of the Fu Jen St. Robert Bellarmine Faculty of Theology in Taiwan, more than 100 seminarians, priests, and religious sisters from Mainland China are currently studying theology at the Faculty, reported *UCAN*. Now an independent entity, the Faculty originally was associated with Fu-Jen Catholic University. It is recognized by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, and since 2012 both its curriculum and degrees are recognized by the Taiwanese Ministry

of Education. Students from Mainland China who are studying theology in Taiwan benefit from this arrangement. (It should be pointed out, however, that applications from Mainland China are examined by Taiwan's Ministry of the Interior while applicants from Taiwan's other universities are routinely handled by the Ministry of Education.) Fr. Gendron, SJ, expects that within two years it will also be possible for lay people from Mainland China to enroll in the Faculty. This would make the program even more interesting, since there are almost no equivalent programs existing in China itself. In addition, in Taiwan Mainland students will be able to study theology in Chinese (*UCAN* Dec. 5, 2012; *Vatican Information Service* Dec. 17, 2012).

December 2, 2012 – February 24, 2013:

16 Tibetans burn themselves in protest – self-immolations now total 106

Of the 16 persons, who set themselves on fire, 13 or 14 died as a result of their burns. Four of the 16 Tibetans were monks, one was a woman. Three were only 17 years old, another was 18. Seven of the self-immolations took place in the Gannan Autonomous Tibetan Prefecture (Gansu Province), 6 in the Aba (Tibetan Ngaba) Autonomous Tibetan and Qiang Prefecture (Sichuan Province), the focal point of the self-immolations so far. Three self-immolations took place in Qinghai Province. This means that between March 2011 and February 24, 2013 a total of 106 Tibetans have set fire to themselves in protest against Chinese rule (lists can be found at www.tibetoffice.ch and www.savetibet.org).

In recent months authorities have arrested an increasing number of persons in connection with the self-immolations. In the single region of Huangnan (Qinghai) alone, 70 were arrested, as *Xinhua* reported on February 7. The *South China Morning Post* reported that a law was passed at the beginning of December, according to which anyone who plans, organizes, incites, or helps another in carrying out a self-immolation will be charged with premeditated murder. On January 31, for the first time two Tibetans were convicted of murder for incitement to self-immolation. One of them, Lorang Konchok, a monk of the Kirti Monastery, was sentenced to death with a two years' reprieve.

The Chinese government also increasingly mobilized representatives of Buddhism in the country to take a public stand against the self-immolations. This for instance was the case at a January 16 conference on the Buddhist understanding of life and the self-immolations, organized in Chengdu, in which high ranking monks and scholars of Chinese, Tibetan, and Theravada Buddhism took part (*South China Morning Post* Dec. 11, 2012; *The Guardian* Jan. 31, 2013; *UCAN* Feb. 8, 2013; *Xinhua* Jan. 16, 31; Feb. 7, 2013; www.sara.gov.cn Jan. 17, 2013).

December 3, 2012:

Directives for teachers in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries take effect

On November 25, 2012, the leadership of the Chinese Buddhist Association adopted the “Measures for the Determination of the Status and the Appointment of Teachers of Buddhist Teachings in the Monasteries and Temples of Tibetan Buddhism” *Zangchuan fojiao simiao jingshi zige pingding he pinren banfa* 藏传佛教寺庙经师资格评定和聘任办法. The Chinese text can be found at www.sara.gov.cn, and a Tibetan language version can be found at www.sara.gov.cn/zcfg/qgxzttxgfgzd/18478.htm.

On November 5, 2012, the State Administration [Bureau] of Religious Affairs had already adopted the “Measures for the Recognition of the Status, Titles, and Appointment of Teaching Personnel at Institutes for Religious Education,” which apply to all religions (see *RCTC* 2013, No. 1, p. 10).

December 6, 2012:

Russian Orthodox Church celebrates 300 years of presence in China

The Russian Orthodox Church has organized a number of events in Hong Kong to commemorate the 300th anniversary of its establishment in China. At that time, the Emperor Kangxi (1654–1722) had issued a decree giving approval for the foundation of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Beijing. In addition to a variety of liturgical services, on December 6 there was a roundtable conference, at which the participants discussed a number of issues regarding the Orthodox Church in today's China. Although the Orthodox Church to this day is still not officially recognized in China, there are four churches which are officially allowed to hold services. The number of the faithful is estimated at 15,000–20,000 (*UCAN* Dec. 7, 2012).

December 11–16, 2012:

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) meets for the first time in a communist country – message to China

During the course of the 10th Plenary Assembly of the FABC in Xuan Loc (Vietnam), Hong Kong's Bishop, John Cardinal Tong, expressed the hope in one of the homilies that the FABC would be able to meet some day on Chinese soil. He asked the members of the Assembly to pray that solutions may be found to the problems which exist between China and the Vatican. The closing message of the Assembly states: "We also express our communion and solidarity with, and encouragement for, the Catholic Church in China. We missed the presence of its representatives in our Assembly and we dearly hope that one day we would have a wider fellowship with their active participation in the FABC" (*Vatican Insider* Dec. 17, 2012; www.fabc.org).

December 12, 2012:

Official Catholic leadership committee rescinds appointment of Shanghai Auxiliary Bishop Ma Daqin



Vicar General Ma Daqin on Sheshan Mountain prior to his consecration as bishop in May 2012.
Photo: *UCAN*.

At the end of a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference, held December 11–12, at which representatives of the United Front Department of the Communist Party and of the State Administration of Religious Affairs took part, the decision was announced to revoke Bishop Ma Daqin's appointment as coadjutor bishop [he was appointed auxiliary bishop by Rome], and to bar him from all offices in the Patriotic Association. This decision was made public by the speaker of the Patriotic Association and the Bishops' Conference in a written statement on December 14 (see a German translation of the text in *China heute* 2013,

No. 1, p. 8). *UCAN* had already reported on December 10 that Ma had also been suspended from his priestly functions for two years by the Diocese of Shanghai and had been removed as Dean of Pudong and as Pastor of Tangmuqiao.

The revoking of Auxiliary Bishop Ma's appointment as bishop triggered intense indignation among many Catholics in China, who vented their feelings on internet forums and other places. Archbishop Savio Hon, Secretary of the Pontifical Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, pointed out in a statement on December 13, that in the Catholic Church individual bishops' conferences (the Chinese Bishops' Conference not even being recognized as such by the Holy See) do not have the authority either to appoint bishops or to deprive them of their mandate. This being the case, Bishop Ma retains his office as Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai, Hon stated (see a German translation of the statement in *China heute* 2013, No. 1, p. 8).

Ma Daqin was ordained bishop on July 7, 2012, with the consent of the Pope and of the Chinese authorities and in his address after the ordination he publicly announced his resignation from the Patriotic Association. Bishop Ma was never allowed to take up his office as bishop and since then his freedom of movement has been restricted. *UCAN* wrote that his consecration was considered by the Chinese authorities to be one of the most serious incidents to occur in the Catholic Church of China in the last 30 years (*AsiaNews* Dec. 21, 2012; *Fides* Dec. 13, 2012; *UCAN* Dec. 10, 12, 28, 2012; *Vatican Insider* Dec. 11, 12, 13, 2012; www.catholicchurchinchina.cn Dec. 14, 2012).

December 12, 2012:

Official Catholic leadership committee decides on draft revision of “Regulations Regarding the Election and Consecration of Bishops”

According to official reports, during the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference, held Dec. 11–12 (see above), a draft revision of the 1993 “Regulations of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference Regarding the Election and Consecration of Bishops” was approved. The content of the new document, however, has not yet been made public (www.chinacatholic.cn Dec. 14, 2012; www.sara.gov.cn Dec. 14, 2012; for an English translation of the 1993 regulations see *Tripod* No. 177, September–October 1993, pp. 52–54).

December 13, 2012:

Wuhan: Following a controversy, provincial government replaces leadership of diocese

Fr. Shen Guo'an, interim head of Wuhan Diocese and Fr. Shu Zigeng, General Secretary of the Patriotic Association and of the Commission for Church Affairs on the provincial level, were both dismissed from their offices. They were replaced by a five member administrative committee under the leadership of Fr. Cui Qingqi who, according to *UCAN*, is close to the government. Sister Wu Lin, one of the vice presidents of the Patriotic Association at the national level, was also appointed to the new committee. At the same time, the diocesan council was dissolved. Officials of the religious affairs' bureau of Hubei Province announced this shuffle of the Church leadership at a meeting to which, according to *UCAN* sources, 15 priests and several sisters were escorted. Previously, on November 29 at a get-together following a common retreat, in which 19 of the 23 priests of the diocese took part, it was decided to have a shake-up of the parishes in the diocese and this was publicly announced on November 30, 2012 by the diocesan head Shen Guo'an – despite the objection of the authorities, who reportedly told some of

the priests that the meeting was illegal. When the diocese went ahead with the planned transfers all the same, the provincial authorities dismissed Shen from his office the very same day.

The Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong raised the question in a comment as to why the authorities, contrary to the Constitution, were interfering in normal religious matters such as meetings of priests or the filling of diocesan offices (*AsiaNews* Dec. 21, 2012; *UCAN* Dec. 21, 2012; www.hsstudyc.org.hk Dec. 20, 2012; see: *RCTC* 2011, No. 1, p. 30).

December 16, 2012:

Death of Bishop John Chen Shizhong of Yibin (Sichuan Province)

Bishop Chen Shizhong was born into a Catholic family in 1917. He entered the minor seminary in 1927 and went on to the major seminary in 1938. He was ordained a priest in 1947. During the 1950s and during the Cultural Revolution he spent a number of years in prison. In 1981 he was rehabilitated and returned to Yibin, where he was consecrated bishop in 1985. He later was recognized by the Holy See. Bishop Chen was involved in the building up of the regional seminary in Chengdu, which he led beginning in 1988. Just a year later, however, he returned to the Diocese of Yibin for reasons of health. One of Bishop Chen's principal concerns was the formation of priests and religious sisters. During his 27 years as bishop, he ordained more than 40 priests in the five dioceses of Sichuan Province. His successor is Coadjutor Bishop Luo Xuegang (born 1964), whom Bishop Chen consecrated in 2011 with the approval of both the Holy See and the government.

The Diocese of Yibin has 9 priests, 7 religious sisters, one seminarian, and 40,000 Catholics (*AsiaNews* Dec. 17, 2012; *Fides* Jan. 8, 2013).

December 17, 2012:

Taipei: Belgian missionaries and sisters receive awards

Taipei's Mayor, Hau Lung-bin (Hao Longbin), presented awards to six missionary priests and two religious sisters in recognition of their decades-long humanitarian service in Taiwan. Among the recipients were priests of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), Fr. Frans de Ridder, Fr. Marcel Goffart, Fr. Antoine Mäs, and Fr. Willy Ollevier as well as sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (ICM), Sr. Hilda Van Hoolst and Sr. Maria Cläys. Mayor Hau praised them especially for their commitment to needy families, to the homeless, and to those suffering from dementia. In his speech, the mayor stressed their exemplary selflessness and recommended them as models to the general public. *Willi Boehi*

December 18, 2012:

China Aid publishes internal Party document on combating foreign infiltration by means of religion and campus proselytizing in Chinese universities

The USA-based organization China Aid said that they received the document from sources at the highest level of the Communist Party. Based on their own information they regard the document as authentic. The document, dated May 15, 2011, warns that foreign forces are increasingly using religion, especially Christianity, to infiltrate universities and operate campus missionary programs. It calls



First page of the document.
Source: chinaaid.org.

and the State Administration of Religious Affairs. The document was disseminated as Document No. 18 (2011) by the offices of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and of the State Council of the Peoples' Republic of China. This fact, according to China Aid, is a clear sign of the great importance that the government is giving to this document. It is addressed to party, government, and army personnel at the provincial level and above (www.chinaaid.org Dec. 18, 2012).

December 21, 2012:

Taiwan: Execution carried out of six death row prisoners

The execution of the six prisoners was criticized by the European Union and by Amnesty International. Taiwan's Minister of Justice, Tseng Yung-fu (Zeng Yongfu), pointed out that, according to opinion polls, almost 80% of the Taiwanese population oppose the abolition of the death penalty. A provisional moratorium on executions, in place since 2005, effectively ended on April 30, 2010, with the execution of four men. Five further executions followed in 2011. Fifty-five more death sentences have been imposed but not yet been carried out. The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan as well as the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Taiwan have issued appeals for the abolition of the death penalty in April 2010 (*Central News Agency* Dec. 22, 23, 2012; see: *China heute* 2010, No. 2, pp. 85-86 [in German]).

December 21, 2012:

“Doomsday” – sect gains national attention prophesying end of world

According to reports, in the days leading up to the date which the Mayan calendar purportedly predicted as the end of the world, the “Church of Almighty God” *quannengshen jiao(hui)* 全能神教(会) (also known as “Teaching of the Eastern Lightning” *dongfang shandian jiao* 东方闪电教) came to national public attention with its publicized predictions of the disaster to come. In December of 2012, *Xinhua* reported the arrests of dozens of adherents of the sect on charges of spreading rumors of the end of the world in Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Jiangsu, Fujian, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Hubei, Henan, and Beijing. The sect, founded in the 1990s, preaches Almighty God or a Second Christ, a reincarnation of Christ in the person of a Chinese woman, whose antithesis is Satan or the “big red dragon,” whom the sect iden-

tifies with the Communist Party of China. For years the sect has been enticing believers away especially from the Protestant and Catholic communities. Chinese Catholic websites and newspapers (e.g., *Xinde*, with a series of articles in its edition of December 6, 2012) gave the faithful warnings against the sect and against its end-of-the-world prophecies. On the website of the official Protestant organizations a warning was posted on December 10, 2012 against a resurgence of “Eastern Lightning,” calling it “the heretical organization which represents the greatest danger for the Chinese Church.”



The *South China Morning Post* reported that the sect, which is banned in Mainland China, is spreading in Hong Kong and is infiltrating Christian mainstream churches there (*South China Morning Post* Dec. 18, 2012; *UCAN* Dec. 11, 20, 2012; *Xinhua* Dec. 17, 20, 21, 22, 2012; www.ccctspm.org Dec. 10, 2012).

Members of the “Church of Almighty God” in December 2012 in front of the headquarters of the provincial government of Gansu. Photo: *UCAN*.

December 24, 2012:

Christmas Masses throughout China

As in past years, the Christmas liturgies this year, especially in the larger cities, once again drew a large number of people, including many non-believers. Many parishes made good use of this opportunity to intensify their efforts to evangelize. In Xi’an, for example, despite intense cold, several thousand faithful took part in an open-air Mass in front of the cathedral. At an Information booth set up for the occasion, visitors could pick up books and other informational material. Choral music and performances enriched the different Christmas liturgies.



Christmas 2012 in Xi’an: Open-air Mass since the old cathedral is too small. A newly baptized young woman is receiving a Bible. Photos: www.xinde.org.

In Shunqing parish of Nanchong (Sichuan Province) 10,000 evangelization brochures were distributed. After the Midnight Mass and on December 25, there were various kinds of programs, among which there were special programs for non-Christians with songs, catechesis, gifts, etc.

In Shijiazhuang, for the eighth time, the Catholic Jinde Charities invited people to a Christmas Charitable Evening. The event got very positive coverage in the press with around 400 volunteers and benefactors taking part.

In St. Peter’s Church in Shanghai, there were four Christmas Eve Masses, one after the other, three of which featured a living manger scene. The first Mass was for the German speaking community (700 participants), then there was one for the Chinese speakers (1,000) followed by a Mass for English speakers (700), and finishing up with a Mass for the Korean speaking community (700). These are only a few examples of the liveliness and creativity of the Chinese parishes on the occasion of

Christmas. In recent years, Christmas has become an occasion for a festival marked by consumerism, especially among young people. In some places Christmas sees the highest rate of sales for the entire year. Surprisingly, even the official news agency *Xinhua* reports in an article that some people are seeking “the original meaning of the Western festival” and are being baptized (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Jan. 19, 2013; *Xinde* Jan. 10, 2013; *Xinhua* Dec. 25, 2012; www.sara.gov.cn Dec. 24, 2012; www.xinde.org Dec. 26, 31, 2012).

December 25, 2012:

Pope Benedict XVI speaks to China after his “Urbi et Orbi” blessing

In his traditional Christmas message on the occasion of his “Urbi et Orbi” blessing, Pope Benedict XVI extended best wishes to the Chinese people and to their new leadership: “May peace spring up on the vast continent of Asia. May the Child Jesus look graciously on the many peoples who dwell in those lands and, in a special way, upon all those who believe in him. May the King of Peace turn his gaze to the new leaders of the People’s Republic of China for the high task which awaits them. I express my hope that, in fulfilling this task, they will esteem the contribution of the religions, in respect for each, in such a way that they can help to build a fraternal society for the benefit of that noble People and of the whole world” (www.vatican.va).

January 2, 2013:

Muslim groups call for more mosques in Hong Kong

According to demands by the Federation of Muslim Associations in Hong Kong, the city should build more mosques and Islamic community centers to accommodate its growing Muslim population. Khan Muhammad Malik, chairman of the Association, said at a press conference on January 2 that the number of mosques in the city had remained the same as in the past even though the Islamic population of the city had grown five-fold in the past five decades. He also stressed that there were too few public places where Muslims can gather together as a community. There are presently five mosques in Hong Kong: four on Hong Kong Island and one in Tsim Sha Tsui. Malik wants new mosques to be built, especially in the New Territories, since many Muslims live there. He estimated the number of Muslims in Hong Kong at around 200,000. In addition, he said that the government should build community halls for the Islamic population where they could also tutor their children. He said “rents in Hong Kong were too high for the community to rent places of their own” (*South China Morning Post* Jan. 2, 2013).

January 7, 2013:

Two-year closure of the Montecorvino Major Seminary in Taiyuan announced

The decision came on January 6 during a meeting convened by the provincial Bureau of Religious Affairs, in which the leaders of the eight dioceses of Shanxi Province took part. *UCAN* reported this news citing local sources. Bishop Huo Cheng, Chairman of the seminary’s Board of Directors, which was dissolved at the same meeting, announced the decision on January 7. During the two-year closure, the seminary is to be reorganized. Coadjutor Bishop Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan was charged with oversee-

ing the reform measures. *UCAN* reports that the State Administration of Religious Affairs will evaluate the seminary and permit its reopening to students on condition that the seminary can meet the prescribed standards regarding teaching staff, finances, library, etc.



The Montecorvino Seminary. Photo: *UCAN*.

Since 2011 there have been conflicts between the seminary leadership and government authorities concerning the office of rector (see *RCTC* 2011, No. 2, p. 110). During this time, the number of seminarians fell from 70 to 28 at the beginning of 2013. For now, the seminarians have returned to their dioceses. Courses being held at the Formation Center for religious sisters, located on the seminary grounds, will continue as usual during the closure of the seminary (*UCAN* Jan. 11, 2013).

January 7 – March 3, 2013:

Changes planned in system of “re-education” labor camps

According to a report by *Xinhua*, in the run-up to the National People’s Congress, some members have advocated a reform of the controversial labor camp system in which people can be sentenced by the police, without trial, to up to four years of “re-education.” They argue that the system of labor camps is a disgrace to China’s image and urgently needs reform, since it contradicts the government’s principles of lawful governance and justice which the country pursues. It was also noted that this system violates several laws such as the “Law on Legislation” and the “Administrative Penalty Law” and cannot be reconciled with a human rights convention the Chinese government has signed. According to *Xinhua*, the Chinese re-education system, in place since 1957, is extrajudicial punishment which is prone to abuse by the police, making it difficult to develop a sense of law in the population, i.e., the ability to know right from wrong, and it hampers China’s efforts to develop a government by law. The system of labor camps is a source of fear in the population since it is neither monitored nor controlled by higher authorities, *Xinhua* wrote.

According to *Asianews*, since December 2012 the government has begun releasing dissidents from labor camps ahead of time, and then placing them under house arrest for the remainder of their sentence. This measure also affects some pro-democracy dissidents, though it does not apply to Catholic bishops and priests who are detained in re-education camps because of their fidelity to the Holy See, *Asianews* remarked.

According to data on re-education from the Ministry of Justice, in 2008 there were 350 work camps in China, in which 160,000 persons were being held. Because of widely conflicting reports from government officials, it is not clear whether the system of re-education in labor camps is going to be reformed, abolished, or whether it will be replaced by some other system of administrative detention (*AsiaNews* Feb. 15, 2013; *Human Rights Watch* Jan. 8, 2013; *South China Morning Post* Jan. 8, 2013; *The Guardian* Jan. 7, 2013; *UCAN* Jan. 8, 2013; *Xinhua* March 3, 2013).

January 11–13, 2013:

Ecumenical youth encounter in Hong Kong

As part of the build-up to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 30 young Christians of different denominations came together for a weekend retreat organized by the Hong Kong Catholic Diocesan Youth Commission. For many of them, it was the first time that they were able to pray and exchange experiences with Christians of other denominations in a relaxed atmosphere. As part of the experience, the young people visited a prison and a mission house. They also went on an outing to the oldest Catholic monastery and to a 110 year old Anglican school in an effort to better understand Christianity's historical contribution to society in Hong Kong (UCAN Jan. 16, 2013).

January 13, 2013:

State Administration of Religious Affairs publishes its agenda for 2013

What is new is the announcement that the question of the status of sites for religious activities and of institutes for religious education as legal persons (*faren* 法人) will be looked into, with the aim of formulating appropriate legislation. The Daoist Association will be instructed to establish guidelines for the recognition of “scattered-living Daoist monks” (*sanju daoshi* 散居道士, i.e., monks not living in monasteries) – a group apparently rather difficult to regulate within the class of religious personnel, who otherwise are largely covered by provisions already in place.

The data base of sites of religious activities, religious personnel, communities, and institutes for religious education which was already announced a year ago, is to be further built up, and should eventually be accessible online.

“Tibet and Xinjiang work” lead the list of the bureau's key to do activities for 2013. Furthermore, Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries are to be checked for irregularities. As for the Muslims, ongoing problems regarding the Hajj will be studied and solutions sought. Among the Catholics, the bureau wants to press ahead with the election and consecration of bishops as well as with the training of “patriotic forces.” For the Protestants, “the success already achieved in the reasonable handling of private meeting points should be consolidated.”

All religions will be called on to sustain their “spiritual and cultural construction” guided by the authorities. In the Catholic sphere, the goal is, among other things, the development of “inculturated theological thinking” – a parallel to the “reconstruction of theological thinking” in the official Protestant church initiated in 1998, the results of which, according to SARA's plans, need to be more widely disseminated.

In the field of international religious exchange, the 2013 work plan emphasizes the Islamic cultural exchange with Turkey. During the course of 2013, the “ministers of religion” of the Maldives, Brunei, Indonesia, and Turkey are expected to visit China, as will Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate. Two Protestant forums are scheduled: one Chinese-American, the other with Protestant circles in Taiwan.

Most of the points mentioned in the list of upcoming events and priorities are merely the continuation of policies already in place (www.sara.gov.cn Jan. 18, 2013).

January 14–19, 2013:

Shijiazhuang: Seminar on “Priestly Maturity and Clerical Life”

According to a report from the Catholic newspaper *Xinde*, 19 young priests from various dioceses of China took part during January in a seminar on ongoing formation organized by the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies in Shijiazhuang (Hebei). In this seminar, given form by the colloquies and lectures of Dr. Chen Tianzhi from the Diocese of Qingdao (the first Chinese priest with a doctorate in Pastoral Psychology [University of Baltimore]), everyone was in agreement that it is vitally important for priests today to be able to deal with their emotional and affective side. The problems range from dealing with sexuality to internet addiction as well as to experiences such as the admiration that Catholic women might feel for young priests and which can easily end in a romantic relationship. Four aspects will help priests to mature in this area of life: 1) the realization that the real treasure of priestly celibacy is that it is a valuable gift which Christ has given his Church; 2) the intensification of the relationship with Christ in the inmost heart of the priest in the face of a secularized world and its temptations; 3) the strengthening of interpersonal communication skills; and 4) the intellectual and reflective engagement with the environment and a corresponding intelligent self-protection. This will help young priests strive for the priestly ideal of being “true shepherds without any falsehood” (*Xinde* Jan. 21, 2013).

January 18, 2013:

Publication of official statistics on the distribution of income

The National Bureau of Statistics has published its Gini coefficient for China. This is a measure that can take values between 0 and 1 and is widely used by economists to estimate how strong the differences in income distribution are in a country. The higher the Gini coefficient is, the greater the income inequality. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the Gini coefficient in China in 2012 reached a value of 0.474, which is above the warning level of 0.4 set by the United Nations, and which is considered the threshold above which there will likely be social unrest. In 2000 China's Gini coefficient was at 0.412. After rising as a result of the 2008 economic crisis to a level of 0.491, in following years it once again fell slightly, nevertheless, it shows that in China the gap in income between rich and poor is still very wide. There is a threefold difference between rural and urban areas and a fourfold difference between workers in the most profitable industries and workers in the least profitable industries. Even low income city dwellers have scarcely profited from economic growth. It is believed that the slowly sinking Gini coefficient since 2009 is not only a result of stronger state support of the rural population and of workers in lower paying jobs, but is also a result of the increasing migration of country people towards the urban centers where wages are higher (*Reuters* Jan. 18, 2013; *Staff Reporter* Jan. 21, 2013; *Xinhua* Jan. 18, 2013).

January 23, 2013:

Pope Benedict XVI has first meeting with General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam

As reported by the Holy See, during the 30 minute private conversation the hope was expressed that solutions can be found for some pending situations and that the existing fruitful cooperation can be strengthened.

In 2009 a high-level bilateral Vatican-Vietnamese commission was created which has met three times these past years. Vietnam and the Holy See do not have formal diplomatic relations but the two have

nonetheless reached several reciprocal agreements, among which is the 2011 agreement appointing a non-resident representative of the Holy See in Vietnam (*UCAN* Jan. 23, 2013).

January 23, 2013:

Study finds domestic violence in one quarter of all Chinese households

According to a survey by the All China Women's Federation, nearly one-fourth of Chinese women suffer from domestic violence. 24.7% of those questioned experienced varying degrees of abuse or beatings in their marriage. Some women were deprived of freedom, either by being controlled economically or by being forced to live a certain lifestyle against their will. The number of women beaten by their husbands – totaling about 5.5% – was twice as high in rural areas as in cities. Nonetheless, 85.2% of the respondents stated that they were satisfied with their family status. As reported in the study, published on January 23, “women's health, education, and earnings all have improved significantly in the past 10 years.” About three-fourths of the women are involved in family decision making as, for example, in decisions on the purchase of property, making of investments, or taking loans (www.shanghaidaily.com Jan. 23, 2013).

January 24, 2013:

Taiwanese activists attempt to erect statue of the goddess Mazu on the contested Diaoyutai Islands

Activists have attempted to erect a statue of Mazu, the goddess of seafarers especially venerated in Taiwan, on one of the Diaoyutai Islands so that Mazu might protect the Taiwanese fisher folk active in the region and at the same time as a move to help strengthen Taiwan's claim on the islands. The activists, from the Taipei based Chinese Association for the Protection of the Diaoyutai Islands, as well as a reporter of the TV station Phoenix, sailed for the island group in a fishing boat, escorted by a vessel of the Taiwanese Coast Guard. They were, however, (according to Japanese media) forced to turn back before entering Japanese territorial waters. The Diaoyutai (Jap. Senkaku) Islands, currently controlled by Japan, are claimed by Japan, China, and Taiwan. Since September 2012 the dispute over the islands has intensified sharply (*Central News Agency* Jan. 24, 2013; *Kyodo* Jan. 24, 2013).

Beginning of February 2013:

Taiwan: National Council of Churches opposes all forms of violence

During its 12th Plenary Assembly, the National Council of Churches in Taiwan has spoken out in defense of life against all forms of violence. The main targets of concern for the council are still ecumenism, the promotion of indigenous peoples and the most vulnerable in society. Taiwan's National Council of Churches, founded in 1991, is composed of 16 churches and organizations, including the Catholic Bishops' Conference (*Fides* Feb. 13, 2013; www.oikoumene.org).

February 4, 2013:

China Aid publishes its „2012 Annual Report. Chinese Government Persecution of Christians & Churches in Mainland China, January – December 2012,“ sees a deterioration of the situation

The USA based organization China Aid, which champions the rights of Chinese house churches, spoke in its report of 132 cases of persecution of Christians by government authorities in the year 2012, in which a total of 1,441 persons (including 236 pastors) were detained, 9 were sentenced, and 37 were physically or verbally abused. The report gives no information about the length of the detentions. By far most of the incidents on their list come from the category of the Protestant house churches. China Aid detects a continuous deterioration of the situation over the last seven years and an increase in the number of cases reported. The organization noted an accumulation of the following measures against house churches: forced closings, for instance by placing landlords under pressure, sealing assembly rooms or cutting off electricity, making it impossible for the house church to function (one example for this is the Shouwang Church in Beijing); pressure on congregations or on the house church leaders to join the official “Three-Self-Church”; detention of church leaders under the pretext of the “suspicion of organizing or using a cult in order to undermine law enforcement” (www.chinaaid.org Feb. 4, 2013).

February 4, 2013:

Bishop John Baptist Liu Jingshan (Yinchuan) dies at 99



Mourning Bishop Liu Jingshan (above) and the funeral procession through the streets.
Photos: www.chinacath.org.

China’s oldest bishop, Mons. John Baptist Liu Jingshan, has died in Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Bishop Liu was born on October 24, 1913, in the Diocese of Bameng, Inner Mongolia. In 1929 he entered the minor seminary and studied from 1935–1942 at the major seminaries of Datong and Suiyuan (Inner Mongolia). He was ordained a priest in Suiyuan in 1942. In 1951 he was arrested and had to spend the intervening years until 1970 in a labor camp. In 1983, when he was already 70 years old, he took over the administration of Church affairs in Ningxia. In the whole region, overwhelmingly inhabited by Muslims, there were at that time only two priests. In 1993 the official Church undertook a restructuring of the Diocese of Ningxia and Liu Jingshan was consecrated bishop at almost eighty years of age. In 2007 he consecrated Joseph Li Jing, who had studied at Sankt Augustin (Germany), as his Coadjutor Bishop. Bishop Liu retired in 2009. Both bishops are recognized both by Rome and by the Chinese government. Bishop Liu was known as a kind, amiable man who nevertheless was able to make strict demands on his priests and seminarians. According to Bishop Li, Ningxia’s retired underground Bishop Joseph Ma Zhongmu, 95, paid his respects and celebrated a Requiem Mass for Bishop Liu.

The Diocese of Ningxia has 15,000 Catholics, 12 priests, and ca. 20 religious sisters. Bishop Liu was buried on February 8 amid the participation of almost 1,000 faithful (*UCAN* Feb. 5, 2013; www.xinde.org Feb. 5, 2013).

February 6, 2013:

Chinese Prime Minister sends greetings to Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

For the beginning of the 12th summit in Cairo of the heads of state and government representatives of the countries of the OIC, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao sent a message to the group with his compliments. “Both the Chinese people and people of the Islamic countries love peace and long for development,” Wen wrote. He assured the Islamic states of China’s readiness for cooperation. There are 57 states in the OIC, among them Islamic states as well as those with a majority or partial Muslim population (*Xinhua* Feb. 6, 2013).

February 8, 2013:

Death of Bishop Joseph Ma Xuesheng of Zhoucun (Shandong Province)

Bishop Ma Xuesheng has died at the age of 89. Born on September 16, 1923, in Zouping (Shandong), he entered the minor seminary in 1939. He studied philosophy and theology at Hankou (Wuhan), Macau, and Beijing and was ordained a priest in Jinan in 1957. There followed long years in which he was constrained to work as a cook and in farming. In 1988 he was ordained Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Zhoucun and installed there as diocesan bishop in 1997. Bishop Ma was well known for his closeness to the youth. In 2009, Bishop Ma became ill with cerebral paralysis and thus was not able to take part in the consecration of his Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang (born 1970) on November 15, 2010. The consecration of Bishop Yang took place with both papal and government approval. The Diocese of Zhoucun has around 18,000 faithful. There are 65 churches, 20 priests, and a small community of religious sisters (*Fides* Feb. 22, 2013; www.xinde.org Feb. 13, 2013).

February 9, 2013:

Hong Kong: New Year’s greetings of the six religious leaders

In a Lunar New Year message, dated February 9, the Colloquium of Six Religious Leaders extended their best wishes for the Year of the Snake. Among other things, they prayed for “social harmony and stable livelihood for the people of Hong Kong.” Given the global financial crisis, they called for appropriate measures by the government and the people. Another theme of their message was better education on the basis of their national cultural virtues that contribute to stable government and society. Finally, the leaders urged the citizens of Hong Kong to purify their hearts and souls and to care for their neighbors.

Worldwide, approximately 1.5 billion people celebrated the Chinese New Year. After the Year of the Dragon, the Year of the Snake has now begun (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Feb. 9; *Vatican Insider* Feb. 10).

February 10, 2013:

Pope Benedict XVI sends New Year's greetings to the peoples of the Far East

After the Angelus prayer at St. Peter's Square, Pope Benedict XVI sent his greetings to the "peoples of the Far East" on the occasion of the Chinese New Year. He said: "Today, the various peoples of the Far East celebrate the Lunar New Year. Peace, harmony, and gratitude to Heaven are the universal values that are celebrated on this happy occasion and are desired by all to build their own family, society and nation. I hope that those Peoples will be able to fulfill their aspirations for a happy and prosperous life. I send a special greeting to the Catholics of those countries, that in this Year of Faith they will be guided by the wisdom of Christ" (*Vatican Insider* Feb. 10, 2013; www.vatican.va).

February 11 and 28, 2013:

Pope Benedict announces his resignation and renounces his office

Both Church and state media in Mainland China carried the news of the Pope's announcement on February 11 that he has decided to retire and of his actual renunciation of his office on February 28. Chinese Catholics reacted with dismay, but also with understanding and gratitude for his particular care for the Chinese Church. Especially highlighted was his 2007 Letter to the Catholic Church in China. The spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on February 18 that China hoped that "the Vatican will show flexibility and sincerity in creating conditions for the improvement of China-Vatican ties under the new pope." In a March 1 statement, the official Catholic organizations in China (Patriotic Association and Bishops' Conference) asked the faithful to pray for the health of the retiring Holy Father and for the election of the new pope (*Xinhua* Feb. 18, 2013; www.catholicchurchinchina March 1, 2013; for more details see *China heute* 2013, No. 1, pp. 4-6 [in German]).

February 16, 2013:

6 Persons taken into custody in action against "illegal" temples on Buddhist Wutai Mountain

According to reports in official Chinese media, local authorities have closed down the "Buddhaland Center" and the "Temple of the God of Wealth," neither of which is registered as a religious site, on the charge that false monks were misleading tourists into donations of money and the purchase of costly incense and rituals. Both sites were closed down. Authorities of the Department of Industry and Commerce revoked their business licenses. Six persons involved in the "Buddhaland Center" were detained. Reports indicate that the local authorities swung into action with large scale controls on February 15 after the media had published articles on both sites just the day before. *Zhongguo xinwenwang* reports that following these actions, in the settlements in the rural area of Wutai Mountain, seven further village temples and vendors of Buddhist articles, accused of holding illegal religious services, were shut down by the authorities. The agency reports that on Wutai Mountain in the area of Taihuai Town alone there were 47 temples. Wutai Mountain is one of Buddhism's four holy mountains in China (*Xinhua* Feb. 17, 2013; www.chinanews.com Feb. 17, 2013; on this same topic see also: *China heute* 2012, No. 4, pp. 208-212, 227-229 [in German]).

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