



THE CARDINAL KUNG FOUNDATION



The Cardinal Kung Foundation

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The Arrest of Two unofficial (underground) priests and The Plight of Bishop Jia Zhiguo, and Other Bishops

Stamford, Connecticut, U.S.A. — In his pastoral letter to China last year, Pope Benedict XVI established the date May 24 as the day "for the Catholics of the whole world to be united in prayer with the Church which is in China.....in liturgical memorial of Our Lady, Help of Christians, who is venerated with great devotion at the Marian Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai.....I would like that date to be kept by you as a day of prayer for the Church in China..."

Upon the encouragement of Pope Benedict, and as a tradition in honoring Our Lady of Sheshan 佘山聖母, thousands of Chinese made a pilgrimage to Sheshan 佘山 in Shanghai in May. Most of them had tacit approval from the Chinese government. Those who had no such approval risked arrest and detention. The entire underground clergy of the Shanghai Diocese was placed under house arrest during the month of May in order to prevent them from making pilgrimage to Sheshan. Other underground Catholics were warned by the government official not to participate in visiting Sheshan on May 24.

Among the pilgrims were two underground priests from Xuanhua 宣化 Hebei 河北. Father Zhang Jianlin 章建林, age 42, was intercepted by Chinese authorities in Nanking 南京 on his way to Sheshan to participate in the prayers for China on May 24. Father Zhang was sent back by the security police to Xuanhua where he was promptly arrested and detained. Father Zhangli 張利, age 45, announcing his intention to go to Sheshan on May 24, was arrested and detained few days before May 24 in order to prevent him from going to Sheshan. Both priests disappeared while they were in the hands of Chinese authorities. There has been no news on these two priests since their arrests. We do not know what is happening to them and where they are.

The underground diocese of Xuanhua has many houses dedicated to prayers. They have now all been forbidden by the Chinese authorities to be used as prayer-houses. Those larger houses have now been fitted with video cameras by the authorities in order to have continuous monitoring of these houses of worship to make sure that no prayers are to be recited there.

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo 賈治國, the unregistered or "underground" Roman Catholic Bishop of Zhengding 正定, Hebei whose repeated arrests by the Chinese government have been reported by the Cardinal Kung Foundation and by various world news media many times, was last arrested on August 23, 2007, the 11th time since January 2004, and was finally released on December 14, 2007.

However, Bishop Jia's release did not bring about his "freedom" to carry out his duties as a bishop of a diocese. Bishop Jia is now under house arrest, confined in the living quarters of his cathedral, Christ the King Church in Wu Qiu 武邱. He is not allowed to receive any visitor except for a few rare occasions when the visits were supervised and accompanied by the government officials.

Near the vicinity of the Christ the King Church, the public police bureau has set up an observation post in order to monitor the activities and visitors to this church in WuQiu. The government has an organized unit of six officers patrolling the vicinity of the church 24 hours a day, forbidding any visitor to visit Bishop Jia, or to approach the vicinity of the church. Bishop Jia is seriously sick causing a constant tremor of his right hand. The bishop requested medical service outside of his living quarters, but was denied by the authority.

Bishop Jia, almost 74 years old, was consecrated a bishop as the bishop of Zhengding, Hebei on December 19, 1980 mandated by the Pope. He has spent 18 years in prison. Zhengding is a small village situated approximately 100 miles south of Beijing. It is a faithful Roman Catholic community with approximately 110,000 Catholics. Bishop Jia is also caring for approximately 100 abandoned handicapped orphans. This orphanage is greatly in need of financial help.

There are approximately 35 underground bishops in China. Every one of them is either in prison, disappeared, under house arrests, or under surveillance. Bishops Su Zhimin 蘇志民, Bishop of Baoding 保定, and Shi Enxiang 師恩祥, Bishop of Yixian 易縣, were arrested in October, 1997 and April 2001 respectively. There has been no news on these two bishops since then. Both have now disappeared. We do not know if they are still alive. Bishop Han DinXiang 韓鼎祥, the Bishop of Yong Nian 永年, was arrested in December 1999, and disappeared in the last two years of his prison. He died suddenly in prison on September 9, 2007 in a very mysterious and suspicious circumstances. He was not allowed a Catholic burial. Instead, by order of the government, the Bishop was cremated and buried within 6 hours of his death!

These bishops' current plight are just some examples of many underground Roman Catholic bishops whose civil rights are being seriously violated in China. The persecution of religious believers is very much alive in China and ongoing regardless of the fact that the Olympics games will be held in China less than a month away. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us in his letter to China published on June 30, 2007 "Many bishops have undergone persecution and have been impeded in the exercise of their ministry, and some of them have made the Church fruitful with the shedding of their blood."