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Editor's Note:

This mixed profile of life in China Today – appeared in the December issue of the Magazine by that name. In essence it also sets out **the context and challenges for Gospel witness in China today** to which the churches are called. *"Life in China, the world's most populous nation, is generally more affluent than ever before. But since the onset of opening up and reform some 30 years ago, its citizens are also subject to greater strain. A more meritocratic approach enables Chinese people fully to exert their talents and achieve personal dreams. Growing marketization has remarkably boosted productivity, substantially augmenting public and individual wealth. The downside to this enormous social and economic transition is manifest in sky-high housing prices, fierce social competitiveness that starts at kindergarten, increasing pollution, food safety risks, and a nascent social security system. These are the growing pains that China must bear on its road to economic and social maturity. But they cannot dampen the people's optimism, more justified than ever before."*

Lately, there has been abundant media coverage of developments in both Church and Society in China to which we seek to add some balance and perspective. In view of this, we apologize for omission of the usual *Reading Notes* – and promise to restore this feature in the next CCQ. SJC

Most Rev. John Tong Hon Co-Adjutor Bishop of Hong Kong

In December, **Auxiliary Bishop John Tong Hon**, 68, was named by Pope Benedict XVI as co-adjutor of the Hong Kong Diocese with right of succession to *Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun*. Bishop Tong is well respected as a specialist on the Church in China. For the past 28 years, he has directed the *Holy Spirit Study Center*, which researches and documents developments in the Catholic Church in China. At his installation Mass on February 10, Bishop Tong acknowledge that although he accepted the role 'with diffidence and a feeling of inadequacy,' he had confidence in the wisdom of the Holy Father's appointment; and the support and prayers of the wide variety of people whom make up the Hong Kong diocese.



Bishop Tong made special mention of the Hong Kong diocese as a "Bridge Church" between the faithful in China and in the world Church. This role was assigned to the Churches of both Hong Kong and Taiwan many years ago by the late Pope John Paul II. **Bishop Tong promised to continue striving to act as a bridge himself between the Holy See and the Beijing authorities, by recourse to a flexible approach vis-à-vis the principles which the Vatican maintains in all its diplomatic relations with states.** *"The principles are there. But there is some degree of freedom on how to interpret the principles or how to materialize them."* We should also hold up justice, endorse what is right, and criticize what is wrong," he added.

As quoted in *Christianity Today* (02/08), Bishop Tong also seemed to indicate he would not be as outspoken as Cardinal Zen has been on Hong Kong politics, saying, *"There are many talents in the Church. It is not for one single bishop to speak up all the time ... my role is to serve as a bridge."* Tong reiterated his *"great expectation that the Chinese government will guarantee full religious freedom for Catholics in China, so that they can make an ever greater contribution to society."*

Religious Issues

Mission Priorities in China

The recently concluded **35th General Congregation of the Jesuit Society**, named five "global apostolic preferences" as "**Challenges to Mission Today.**" Two of them, expressly address *China* and the "intellectual apostolate" particularly in Asia. Commenting on the latter issue, the newly elected Superior General, Adolfo Nicolas, stated his belief that intellectual work is a key dimension of intercultural dialogue. "**Intellectual work has a more pastoral objective, such as creating bridges between our life, our Christian faith and other cultures, other traditions, other religions that also have a depth of experience, and seeing how to communicate about this.**" "In countries ... in the East, this profound dialogue has two doors: the spiritual dialogue that can change pastoral life and help Christians to have a profound experience; and the dialogue between Christianity and these cultures at the high intellectual level. At this level it can have an influence on the situation in the long term, though not immediately."

Alluding to China as 'a mystery,' Nicolas said, "it is very difficult to know what we can do, but we know that China is a very interesting country that will contribute greatly, not only in the economy but above all in culture. He described Chinese culture as "impressive and profound in all fields." He went on to observe "we must always follow the national laws and not think of doing something bizarre in China. We have to collaborate with projects in which China takes the initiative. **The initiatives for the Church must come from the country, where there is a Church, and the Church in China is very alive.**"

Nicolas pointed to the 2008 Summer Olympics Games in Beijing as a very important moment for China. "I think we must above all accept China's will to present itself to the world, and not use this moment to do missionary initiatives or other things," he added. "It's a moment in which others must respect that China has become a very great, a very important country. If we respect this then we can collaborate with it, and work with it on world projects."

[UCAN 03/12/08]

Dialogue on Religious Perspectives

The Center for Religious Studies of State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) of the People's Republic of China, and **Georgetown University**, an American Jesuit Institution, have signed a cooperative agreement to foster innovative scholarship and research at both institutions, and to promote dialogue on religious perspectives of mutual concern. This is the fifth agreement with China signed by Georgetown. Additionally, there are agreements with the *China Scholarship Council*, the *China Central Party School*, *Renmin University*, and *East China Normal University*. **The significance of this agreement concerns religious exchanges between China's various religious organizations and their counterparts in other countries.**



Shanghai Stresses Evangelization



Bishop Aloysius JIN Luxian, S.J., of Shanghai Diocese, has asked his flock to intensify evangelization efforts to **mark this year's 400th anniversary of the introduction of Catholicism to Shanghai.** In a Pastoral Letter released December

24, Bishop JIN also urged Catholics to renew themselves spiritually in response to Pope Benedict XVI's call for prayers to Our Lady of Sheshan. The Pope made the call in his Pastoral Letter to Catholics in China, released at Pentecost 2007.

Noting that May 24 is "dedicated to the liturgical memorial of *Our Lady Help of Christians*, who is venerated at the Marian Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai Diocese, "Bishop Jin urged the Church throughout the world to pray with Catholics in China on that date. Bishop Jin, 91, a Shanghai native and a Jesuit, started his letter by recounting the story of Catholicism's arrival in Shanghai in 1608. He told Catholics "*not to forget the missionaries,*" including the Italian Jesuits Matteo Ricci and Julius Aleni and German Jesuit Adam Schall, who contributed to local arts and sciences. [America 01/08]

Papal China Commission

Pope Benedict XVI continues to pay significant attention to China. In early 2007, a consultation was convened in Rome to consider the dynamically evolving situation of the Catholic Church in China. At Pentecost, the Pope issued an historical *Pastoral Letter to Chinese Catholics*, which has continued to be the subject of widespread interest, both in the Church in China itself; as well as serving as a guide to the Sister-Churches around the world.

Subsequently a *Commission for the Catholic Church in China* was named by the Holy Father to study questions of major importance. The Commission held its first meeting in Rome, March 10-12, 2008. For politically sensitive reasons, no one from China was able to be present. Members of the Chinese hierarchy from Greater China (Hong Kong and Taiwan) were present; together with Senior Vatican officials responsible for China affairs; and a small team of China Church consultants or *experts* with experience in China.

This official statement was issued on 13 March:

"The Commission established by Pope Benedict XVI to study the most important questions concerning the life of the Church in China met in the Vatican from 10 to 12 March.

*"The meeting had as its theme the Letter which the Holy Father sent to Chinese Catholics on 27 May 2007. Participants first examined the reaction to the pontifical document both inside and outside China. They reflected on the theological principles that inspired the Letter in order to comprehend the future prospects they bring for the Catholic community in China. In concrete terms, in the light of the papal text consideration was given to certain important aspects regarding the Church's mission as 'instrument of salvation' for the Chinese people: evangelisation in a world experiencing globalisation; the application, in China's current situation, of the Vatican Council II doctrine on the nature and structure of the Church; forgiveness and reconciliation within the Catholic community; the requirements of truth and charity; the government of dioceses, which has great relevance for pastoral activity and for the formation of priests, seminarians, religious and lay faithful. In line with the indications expressed by the Pope in His Letter, **the will for a respectful and constructive dialogue with the authorities was reiterated.** Finally, and still in the light of the pontifical document, the participants exchanged information and experiences concerning the life and activity of the Church in China.*

"The meeting concluded with a meeting with the Holy Father. He listened to a brief report of the work accomplished over the three days and encouraged the participants to continue their commitment in favour of the Catholic community in China. He also mentioned the forthcoming event of 24 May, the Universal Day of Prayer for the Church in China".

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Fostering Pastoral-Catechesis

While many non-Christians in China are interested in Christian Faith today, so far priests, religious and lay Catholics have received little formation in pastoral catechesis. The Belgian *Verbiest Institute* is involved in organizing such formation sessions, making good use of the talents and the long and rich experience of their senior staff like *Louis Kuo* from the Taiwan office; and *Joseph Lin* from Leuven. Recently Mr. Lin completed specialized formation in **Social Ethics**, which **will add an important dimension to the Pastoral Catechesis formation programs being provided to the dioceses in China.**

For several years Verbiest has also contributed to pastoral formation in Chinese seminaries. Most recently,

a three-month course on the Adult Catechumenate (RCIA) was added to the curriculum at the National Seminary in Beijing. It is hoped that this will develop into a full-year specialized formation in pastoral catechesis. This is seen as the beginning of a new phase in the growth of the local Chinese Church, led by the new generation of young bishops.

In recent years, dozens of priests, religious and lay Catholics have returned to China from studies abroad. They are capable of taking in their own hands the establishment of Centers for Formation in spirituality and in pastoral catechesis at the diocesan level, with which Institutes abroad can offer their cooperation. To date, Verbiest has organized 49 formation sessions in China, in which 2,500 priests, religious and lay Catholics have participated.

[Verbiest Update 01/08]

Reconciliation in Action



In a small village of Hebei Province some Christians of the open Church community went on the feast of Epiphany to the local "underground" church and decorated their altar with flowers. The parish priest was impressed and praised in his homily this wonderful symbolic gesture of reconciliation. **It was clear to all that this gesture was the fruit of the Pastoral Letter written by Pope Benedict XVI to the Chinese Church.** This concrete step towards unity in this Hebei village is **a prophetic act which means more than all that has been written and said about the intent of the Papal letter.**

In stark contrast, another priest of a registered Church observed: *"We have no prejudice against the underground. They are welcome to join our Eucharistic celebrations."* In fact, this priest revealed that he himself is not ready to reconcile. His attitude expects that the *other* should make the first step. The Christians of the Hebei village however took a concrete initiative in walking towards the "underground" Church. In so doing, they walked their 'Exodus,' freeing themselves from their own "exile in Egypt." This walk to the underground liberated them from any prejudice that kept them in exile. The symbolic gesture of the flowers speaks a clearer language than any homily or articles. Whoever looks at this with the eyes of faith can see the Spirit at work.

Verbiest Update 01/08

Teilhard de Chardin's Legacy

The ordination of *Bishop Joseph LI Jin* for Yinchuan Diocese marked a new phase of growth for the local Church, even as the Christian community also commemorated the origins of evangelization in the region by CICM missionaries. They took the occasion, midst the cold winter weather, to organize a visit to *Shui Dong Gou*, the site where Jesuits *Teilhard de Chardin* and *Emile Licent* discovered the Ordos Man (30,000 years old). During their archeological research between 1923 and 1933, CICM missionaries had been involved in guiding Teilhard and his expedition through the whole Ningxia region. Statues of Teilhard and Lucent, as well as two Chinese scholars who also did excavations there in the 1960s and in 2004, have been erected at Shui Dong Gou, which has become a tourist attraction.



New Bishop for Yinchuan

On December 21, 2007, 40-year-old Rev. *Joseph LI Jin*, appointed by Pope Benedict XVI and recognized by the Chinese civil authorities, was ordained the Coadjutor Bishop to the 96 year old Bishop LIU Jing Shan of Yinchuan Diocese in *Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region* in northern China. Although civil authorities allowed only three other bishops to be present, more than a thousand Catholics attended the consecration ceremony and more than sixty priests concelebrated. The liturgy was followed by a festive meal and cultural program. On the occasion, the local RAB also allocated funds to repair the 20-year old Cathedral and the bishop's residence.



Unity at Eucharistic Congress

Pope Benedict XVI's Letter to the Catholic Church in China is yielding fruits in the field of evangelization all across China. During the celebration of Chinese New Year, **Bao Tou diocese in Inner Mongolia**, organized its first Evangelization Congress; February 13-21. During the solemn Eucharistic Procession on the vigil of the Congress, over 2,000 faithful accompanied the Blessed Sacrament from the provisional chapel into the larger church.

Over 1,300 faithful from the area and from neighboring towns came together in a gesture of communion, in the midst of what has been a difficult and painful story for the local Catholics. Yet there was **great determination to continue on the path of restored communion, in the light of the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI.** Throughout the Congress, there was a notable environment of love and communion. As one elderly leader of a local group said, "now the Church is united again. I can finally return to the Father's House with my conscience clear and without rancor." The entire community is now *"eager to listen to the teachings of the apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of the bread, and in prayer."*