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AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

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CHINA - VATICAN

Mgr Jia Zhiguo, underground bishop, released after 15 months

by Wang Zhicheng

The prelate celebrated Mass last night with about a hundred faithful. He was originally arrested when the Patriotic Association tried to stop the official and underground Church from seeking unity as desired by the Holy See. Mgr Jia reassured the faithful that he did not join the Patriotic Association.

*AsiaNews - www.asianews.it
- Mgr Jia Zhiguo, underground bishop, released after 15 months*

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Beijing (AsiaNews) – Mgr Jia Zhiguo, underground bishop of Zhengding (Hebei), was released yesterday morning after 15 months of detention in an unknown location. Last night, surrounded by a hundred faithful, he celebrated Mass in the cathedral of Wuqu village (pictured) where he lives.

*UCA News - www.ucanews.com
Catholics washed out by new floods in China*

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It is unclear why the authorities released the prelate. In the past, Mgr Jia was often arrested and then released months later. During the periods in detention, he was usually kept alone in a single room and subjected to individual political indoctrination sessions to convince him to join the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA), the Communist Party organisation that is trying to create a national Church without links to the Holy See.



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Speaking to members of his congregation, he made the point of saying that he did not join the CPCA, nor that he accepted to the authority of the government-approved Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China.

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Sources told AsiaNews that his latest arrest was meant to undermine Vatican attempts to reconcile official and underground Church in Hebei, the region with the highest number of Catholics.

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Mgr Jia, underground bishop, had made up with Mgr Jang Taoran, official bishop of Shijiazhuang (Hebei). The two prelates got together often and had begun to work on a joint pastoral plan. However, as soon as the CPCA found out, the two men were told to stop meeting, and were placed under 24 hour police watch.

According to local Catholics, police warned Mgr Jia Zhigou that "working together was a

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bad idea because a foreign power like the Vatican was behind it. If they [the two prelates] want to cooperate they should do it through the government and the CPCA.”

Given Mgr Jia’s resistance to joining the CPCA, police tried to mock the prelate, saying that the government was going to name someone in his place, and that “it was time for him to retire since he was ill.”

Such harassment was eventually followed by his arrest on 30 March 2009 when the Plenary Commission of the Church in China met in the Vatican. At that time, the Holy See expressed its “deep sorrow” for Mgr Jia’s arrest, and for the situation of “other bishops and priests deprived of their freedom.”

With Mgr Jia’s release, two underground bishops remain in prison: Mgr James Su Zhimin (Baoding diocese, Hebei), 76, who was arrested in 1996 and whose whereabouts are still unknown, and Mgr Cosma Shi Enxiang (Yixian diocese, Hebei), 87, arrested on 13 April 2001 and still missing.

About ten priests are in prison or in forced labour camps. ♦

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

Catholics washed out by new floods in China

Published Date: July 20, 2010

Catholic communities are once again having to pull together and support each other as more torrential rains flood China’s Sichuan province.

The Liduba Church and nearby houses in Nanchong diocese have been engulfed by flood water. Around 3,000 Catholics and other citizens had to be evacuated to higher ground on July 18.

In the same diocese, the flood waters reached as high as the second floor of the five-story Quxian Church.

“I have had to take shelter at a parishioner’s home,” said Father Chen Xihong. “It’s like being on an isolated island. No one expected the flooding to be this serious, so we left all our possessions behind, including my vessels and kit for saying Mass.”

The province is without electricity, gas and fresh water and the threat of malaria is growing, as the waters recede slowly and mosquitoes multiply. This is the latest in a succession of natural disasters to strike southwest-

ern China, including a deadly 8.0-magnitude earthquake which devastated Sichuan in 2008.

“The Catholics who suffered trauma in that earthquake survived through their faith in God,” said Father Chen. “Now they face losing their homes again, Catholics in the temporary shelters have gathered together to pray again for God’s help.”

Church workers in Nanchong city say they hope to bring relief supplies to Father Chen and his parishioners in the next few days.

In another show of Catholic solidarity, Christ the King Church and Rosary Church in Fujian, eastern China, have raised around 16,000 yuan (US\$2,300) through the sale of 200 Chinese artworks, to help flood victims in the north of the province. ♦



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Tuesday, 8 June 2010 10:48PM

A Catholic church in Tibet

LHASA, May 31 (Xinhua) -- Every day-break on the southeast edge of the Tibetan Plateau, Lucy walks into the only Catholic Church in Tibet, dips her fingers into the holy water and makes the sign of the cross before praying.

Rain, hail or shine, the 62-year-old has attended Masses and sermons since she was baptized as a child. The priest who baptized her gave her the Western name.

But Lucy is at home among Tibetans, who swing prayer wheels and prostrate themselves in front of Buddhas.

Unlike Catholics elsewhere, Lucy reads the Bible in Tibetan and presents hada, long pieces of silk used as greeting gifts among Tibetans, to the Virgin Mary.

The church she visits every day is perched on a hill in the valley west of the Jinsha River. It is in the village of Yanjing, also known as "Yerkalo", and is adorned with gesang flowers in its court, where white hada frame the religious artworks.

Built by French missionary Felix Biet in 1865, the whitewashed structure has two crosses on its outer walls while its interior is adorned with Gothic arches and frescos on the ceiling.

Father Felix was born in 1838 and ordained a priest in January 1864. He arrived in Tibet two months later. He was also ordained a bishop and died in 1901.

After the church was built, clashes between its followers and those of a nearby lamasery were common. The clashes reached a peak in the 1940s when armed lamas took over the church. The church was not returned to Catholic hands until 1951 after many local Catholics had asked the local

authorities, the Qamdo People's Liberation Committee, to return it to them.

That handover marked the end of clashes between the local Catholics and Tibetan Buddhists, according to the China Tibet News website.

The church became an elementary and middle school during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In the late 1980s, the church was renovated at a cost of 102,000 yuan (about 14,934 U.S. dollars), 95,000 yuan of which came from the government.

Tibetan priest Father Laurent says the Upper Yanjing Village has a population of less than 1,000, and that the church, with more than 500 parishioners, has enriched the local culture and coexists with Tibetan monasteries.

"Many villagers bring their babies to be baptized, and the baptism is performed over eight consecutive days. The babies will receive religious names like Paul and Anne. The names will be with them for their whole lives, and when they die, they will be buried," he says.

But wedding ceremonies do not take place in the church, Father Laurent says, the priest will instead go to the couple's home and pray for them.

Maria takes charge of cleaning and daily necessities. But her husband Zhaxi Wangdui is a fervent Tibetan Buddhist.

Maria says they are both pious and respect each other's beliefs - "We still share the same culture and lifestyle after all."

When the Tibetan New Year falls, normally in March, Maria joins her husband and the village folk to celebrate.

"After all these years of coexistence,

couples who belong to different religions in the village can stick to their own faiths when they marry and their children can choose their own religion once they grow up."

At Christmas, Father Laurent says Catholics from neighboring provinces come while Buddhists from nearby lamaseries are invited over.

"Religious conflicts between the Catholics and Buddhists are a thing of the past," says Father Laurent. ♦



China. Seven New Bishops Do Not a Summer Make

They were ordained and installed with the twofold approval of the Church of Rome and of the communist authorities. Optimism at the Vatican. But also caution. For Chinese Catholics, religious freedom remains a forbidden dream .

by **Sandro Magister** (www.chiesa.espressonline.it)



ROME, July 26, 2010 – Twice in the span of a few days, "L'Osservatore Romano" has given extensive coverage to two new episcopal consecrations that took place in China, the first on July 10 and the second on July 15.

The texts of both new stories, because of their delicacy from a diplomatic point of view, were not composed in the newsroom but directly in the offices of the Vatican secretariat of state.

Both, in fact, demonstrate a shift in the sequence of episcopal ordinations in that country.

In recent years, episcopal ordinations in China have seen fluctuating fortunes, between openness and rigidity on the part of the communist government. In 2005, all the new bishops were ordained with the approval of both the pope and the Chinese authorities. In 2006, however, in reaction to the nomination as cardinal of Hong Kong bishop Joseph Zen Zekiun – a nomination seen as hostile by Beijing – the Chinese government resumed ordaining bishops without the pope's mandate. In 2007, the year of Benedict XVI's letter to the Catholics of China, the bishops were again consecrated with the approval of Rome. The new bishop of Beijing was also installed with the agreement of the pope.

But starting in December of 2007, everything came to a halt. For more than two years there was not a single new ordination, in spite of the fact that a very high number of dioceses in China are vacant, or headed by very elderly bishops.

The impasse was broken on April 18 of this year, when in Hohhot, in Inner Mongolia, 47-year-old priest Paul Meng Qinglu was consecrated bishop.

Since then, new ordinations have resumed at a brisk pace. And always with the approval of both Rome and the Chinese authorities.

On April 21, Joseph Shen Bin, age 40, was ordained bishop of Haimen, in the province of Jiangsu. On May 8, Joseph Cai Bingrui, age 44, was ordained bishop of Xiamen, in the province of Fujian. On June 24, Joseph Han Yingjin, age 52, was ordained bishop of Sanyuan, in the province of Shaanxi.

Moreover, on April 8, another bishop ordained in 2004 with the sole mandate of the Holy See, Matthias Du Jiang, was installed as head of the diocese of Bameng, in Inner Mongolia, with the official recognition.

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The news did not escape observers. The latest issue of the international magazine "30 Days," printed in Rome and required reading for both Vatican diplomats and Chinese authorities in the field, dedicated an entire article to precisely this "change of pace" in relations between the Holy See and Beijing. "30 Days" pointed out, among other things, that for the first time in the history of the People's Republic of China, one of the participants in the ordination on May 8 was a bishop from Taiwan, Joseph Cheng Tsai-fa.

For the two episcopal nominations that took place in July the Holy See provided ample publicity, evidence that it believes the new course is in a consolidation phase.

In both of these cases, the news published in "L'Osservatore Romano" specified not only that the new bishops enjoy the twofold approval of Rome and Beijing, but also that this was the condition of all of the bishops who participated in the consecration, listed one by one.

The bishop ordained on July 10 in Taizhou, in the province of Zhejiang, is Anthony Xu Jiwei, age 75. From 1960 to 1985, he spent much of his time in prison and forced labor. In recent years, he spent periods of study in South Korea and Europe. The diocese in which he assumed leadership had been vacant for 48 years.

The bishop ordained on July 15 in Yan'an, in the province of Shaanxi, is John Baptist Yang Xiaoting, age 46. His is coadjutor with right of succession to the elderly and ill bishop of the diocese. He has an unusual educational background. From 1993 to 1999, he studied in Rome, at the Pontifical Urbaniana University, receiving his undergraduate and doctoral degrees in theology. In 2002, he also received a master's in sociology of religion from the Catholic University of America in Washington. After returning to China, he founded a center for formation and research. He is dean of studies at the seminary in Xi'an, where he continues to teach. His episcopal ordination was attended by more than six thousand faithful, with 110 priests and 80 sisters.

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At the Vatican there is a cautiously optimistic view of this batch of episcopal appointments made with the twofold approval of Rome and Beijing.

Naturally, Vatican diplomats know that new strictures on the part of China are always lying in wait. Above all, they know that this kind of solution is not at all optimal, neither for the Church nor for religious freedom in general. In the world today, it is only in Vietnam that the requirement of the state "placet" for every new bishop is suffered by the Church in obedience to written accords with the regime. There is no accord of this kind in China, and none is expected anytime soon, but it is exactly what is now happening in practice. While for the bishops still not recognized by the government, life is miserable, full of arrests and harassment. Just as the activities of the officially recognized bishops, and of their respective dioceses, is subjected to asphyxiating control.

But the prevalent impression, at the Vatican, is that the idea that prevails today among the Chinese authorities is to leave behind the religious policy of the past, which required Chinese Catholics to break off relations with Rome and join a sort of "patriotic" Church, with bishops appointed solely by the government.

In the view of Vatican diplomats, the factors that led the Chinese authorities to this change of stance are pragmatic in nature. They were illustrated early this year in "30 Days," in an interview with the influential scholar Ren Yanli, a member of the Chinese academy of social sciences and of the institute of research on world religions, who for decades has followed the affairs of the Chinese Church and relations between China and the Vatican.

After pointing out that "the faithful will never listen to pastors who are elected and consecrated autonomously, without the pope's consent," and that "the latest bishops appointed without pontifical mandate remain isolated, and no one wants to receive the Eucharist from their hands, during Mass," Ren Yanli continued:

"The government has realized that if it wants the bishops to be pastors who are esteemed and followed by the faithful, and not viewed as isolated functionaries imposed from the outside, appointment by the pope and full communion with him are indispensable elements, which cannot be omitted. This means that, in fact, the idea of imposing on the Chinese Church an independence involving separation from the pope and from the universal Church is being set aside. The process that leads to an increasingly explicit affirmation of the communion of the Chinese bishops with the pope – and of everything that this involves – is irreversible. There can be no turning back on this road."

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But the cautious optimism of the Vatican diplomats is contrasted by the more pessimistic view of other churchmen who are closely following the evolution of the Chinese situation.

One of these is Cardinal Zen, a Salesian like Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, secretary of state and therefore head of Vatican diplomacy, but who has often found himself in disagreement with him.

The differences between Bertone and Zen are in many ways the same that divide two international media outlets that are very informed about and dedicated to the Chinese question: on one side, the magazine "30 Days," closely aligned with Vatican diplomacy, and on the other "Asia News," the online agency directed by Fr. Bernardo Cervellera of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions.

In a commentary for "Asia News" on July 23, released in Chinese as well, Fr. Cervellera presented the reasons that might lead one to doubt China's real willingness to open up a future of freedom for the Catholics of that country.

Not only the "clandestine" bishops, in fact, but also the bishops who have the twofold approval of Rome and Beijing are not free to exercise their ministry. In fact, the bishops have two authorities they must obey, that of the Church and that of the state: a state, however, that reserves for itself the power to decide in matters that should belong exclusively to the Church. Often, therefore, the two forms of obedience show themselves to be incompatible for reasons of faith. And those who refuse to join the Patriotic Association, the government agency that controls the Church, can pay dearly for this decision.

At the beginning of this July, the ministry for religious affairs brought dozens of bishops to Beijing for four days of indoctrination on the government's religious policies. The communist authorities are working to make one of their puppet bishops – Ma Yinling of the diocese of Kunming, one of the very few Chinese bishops who do not have the pope's recognition – the president of the two bodies with the most control over the Church, the Patriotic Association and the Council of Chinese Bishops, an imitation episcopal conference, both of which have been left vacant by the death of the two puppet bishops who headed them.

All of this is keeping the tension high between the two components of Chinese Catholicism: the "underground" communities and the officially recognized ones. The letter that Benedict XVI wrote to Chinese Catholics in 2007 to show them how to restore unity clashes with the desire of the Chinese authorities to keep these divisions alive and exploit them for their own advantage. And in fact, the papal letter is still forbidden in that country, and is circulating with difficulty.

So while at the Vatican the latest diplomatic moves are studied and every word is carefully chosen, in the "underground" Chinese communities many are complaining that they feel "forgotten" by the Church of Rome.

The Vatican rarely raises its voice to ask for the liberation of the Chinese Catholics in prison. Two "underground" bishops have not been heard from for years: James Su Zhimin, of Baoding, and Cosmas Shi Enxiang, of Yixian.

Last July 7, Jia Zhiguo, the "underground" bishop of Zhengding, was liberated after being held captive by the police for fifteen months. Cardinal Ivan Dias, prefect of the congregation for the evangelization of peoples, wrote him a "welcome back to service" message.

Fr. Cervellera comments:

"Maybe Cardinal Dias thought that it was not yet time to also include the word 'prison' or 'isolation' to make the world understand that the bishop had not returned from a vacation, but a period of abolition of his rights."

Fr. Bernardo Cervellera's July 23, 2010 commentary on "Asia News": ♦

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China Infodoc Service [china.infodoc@online.be]

Friday, 23 July 2010 1:00AM

A Visit to China's Largest Catholic Village

Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D. | July 12, 2010 | Ignatius Insight

Editor's Note: Dr. Anthony E. Clark, Assistant Professor of Asian History at Whitworth University (Spokane, Washington), has been traveling and researching in China this summer. The following was written in Shanghai on July 8, 2010.

Traveling through China's poorer provinces one often sees blue coal trucks, mule-driven carts brimming with freshly harvested vegetables, squatting peasants smoking long-stemmed pipes, or dilapidated roadside hovels with exposed light bulbs hanging precariously from crumbling ceilings. Occasional pavilions or temples might be seen, though these were largely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Catholic churches suffered two major periods of destruction, the Boxer Uprising (1898-1900) and the Cultural Revolution. The anti-foreign Boxers, called the Fists of Righteous Harmony, swept through China's northern provinces attacking churches and Christians, and when the Red Guards were told to destroy the "four olds" – old ideas, old customs, old habits, and old culture – they attacked not only anything that seemed traditional, but also anything that was foreign or religious. Being old, traditional, foreign, and religious, Catholic churches, orphanages, seminaries, and hospitals suffered widespread destruction through the Maoist era.

Despite these two historical events Chinese Christianity has grown at a meteoric rate in recent decades, swelling from around four million faithful in 1949 to over fifty million today. The current government has behaved quite openly to this growth compared to its previous intolerance, though the situation in China

remains unsteady, and present signs suggest increased control over Catholic activities by the central authorities. Surveillance cameras monitor church entrances and the Religious Affairs Bureau has become more rigid in its stance against Roman "interference" in Church affairs in China. Papal authority, abortion, and the election of bishops continue to be sensitive topics, though the level of intensity of these conflicts differs from province to province.

One of the most astounding Catholic success stories in China is the village of Liuheacun, located an hour's drive outside of the economically poor capital city of Shanxi, Taiyuan, the center of what is China's most Catholic diocese. Liuheacun is difficult to find without help, and it is best accessed through the introduction of one of the local priests. On the way to the village one of Shanxi's largest secrets unfurls; church after church dot the landscape and high steeples rise above small villages as they do in southern France.

Passing through a narrow side road one arrives at Liuheacun and is welcomed by three great statues at the village entrance: St. Peter holding his keys is flanked by Saints Simon and Paul. Thirty minutes before Mass the village loudspeakers, once airing the revolutionary voice of Mao and Party slogans, now broadcasts the rosary. Winding through the village, the large church with its imposing edifice and towering dome loom above, and once you arrive you are greeted by a curious admixture of Romanesque architecture, yellow plastic palm trees, and streaming colored banners. Shanxi has its own peculiar tastes, and almost every church contains two large grandfather clocks (no-one could tell me the origin of this curious tradition) and lines of colored flags in and outside the sanctuary.

Liuheacun is China's largest Catholic village. Attending one of the church's Sunday Masses, which draws nearly three thousand faithful, is dizzying. Before Mass the priests and faithful kneel to intone the rosary in an old Shanxi-style chant – it is a loud affair, broadcast over loudspeakers. In what is only a very modest village by Chinese standards – around seven thousand people – more than ninety percent are Catholic. One of the reasons for its strong commitment to its Catholic faith, villagers say, is the village's endurance through the two terrible anti-Catholic persecutions.

Popular local stories circulate about how Liuheacun village survived the ravages of the Boxer Uprising. In a meeting with the church's lively pastor, Fr. Zhang Junhai, one of these stories was recounted. The residents say that as the Boxers approached the village during the summer of 1900, the Virgin Mary appeared above the church's bell tower in flowing white robes; her hands were extended in prayer before her. They say an army of angels surrounded her as she prayed, and whichever direction she faced pointed toward the direction from which the Boxers were approaching. Thus, with Mary's help the stronger men of the community were able to prepare in advance to ward off the Boxer attack. Several times the Boxers approached, and each time Mary appeared above the church praying in the direction of their advance. The Catholics of the village also attribute to Mary's assistance the fact that the Boxer cannons backfired on the attackers as they fired on the village. Today, the village's devotion to Mary is tangible; traditionally each family prays an evening rosary and displays an image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in their home.

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Nearly seven decades after the violent Boxer Uprising, the Cultural Revolution disturbed the peaceful rhythms of the village. The church was stripped of its pews, the altar lay bare, and revolutionary slogans covered the walls and columns. Like all China at that time, Liuheacun's church was closed and the faithful were compelled to either join the radical fervor of the Red Guards or suffer under the revolution for remaining Catholic. Some of the villagers erected tents for Mass where the priest courageously offered the Holy Sacrifice on a makeshift altar. One elderly man, in his nineties, quite openly recounted for us the arrest and beating of his Franciscan uncle during the turbulence of the Maoist era. The priest was "struggled against" several times, which included pulling his hair, physical beatings, and cruel forms of restraint. In the end, the priest suffered from a head injury and died. Stories of Mary's assistance and the sacrifices of such holy people as the Franciscan who died in 1969, strengthen the resolve of the village to remain committed to its faith.

Fr. Zhang informed me that there are new struggles today, less related to persecution than the burgeoning wave of materialism that prevails in modern China. While the youth are in the village they commonly attend catechism, in addition to a rich schedule of liturgical rites and parish events. Since nearly all of the villagers are active Catholics, those who remain in the community are little affected by the consumerism and secular views of China's majority. Less than three percent of China is Christian, so there is scant spiritual support for those who leave the village for study or employment outside the community. The villagers can rely on each other for support and encouragement; they are willing to bear the monetary fines when having more than one child since their Catholic neighbors support and assist them. But it is more difficult to resist official policies and pressures when away from the community. Liuheacun remains China's largest Catholic village largely because it has

formulated strategies for having multiple children, who are subsequently raised in devoted Catholic households. Attending Mass in the immense church, one is bewildered by the number of children whirling through the aisles before the service, a unique sight in one-child-policy China.

Just over two centuries ago, Liuheacun was little more than a sequence of agricultural fields; today it is a Catholic success story in a country with a long history of anti-Catholic persecution. When asked about the village's dedication to the Pope, Fr. Zhang noted its fierce loyalty to the Holy Father and its commitment to following his teachings. I noticed the proudly-displayed papal blessing and photograph of Benedict XVI near Fr. Zhang's desk as he answered this question. "We are a very traditional Catholic community," he said, "not like in other countries." I could not help but think that despite the irregularity of the Chinese Church's relationship with Rome, in many ways it retains a stronger Catholic identity and commitment than many other countries.

Liuheacun is an extraordinary Catholic village, and it enjoys comparative freedom from governmental interference, perhaps due to its remote location. It is also extremely poor, and the lure of material comforts continues to draw villagers away. Not all of those who leave the village strain to retain their faith, however. Liuheacun is one of the principal springs from which vocations emerge in all of China. It seems that in almost every diocese one encounters a young priest who tells you he is from Liuheacun, and there can be little doubt that most of China's Catholics have heard of this wellspring of faith and vocations.

The faith of China's largest Catholic village is passionate, for the very name of their small village alludes to God's role in synchronizing all existence. From ancient times China has believed in the harmonious "

relationship between the "five directions," north, south, east, west, middle, known as the "Five Harmonies" (Wuhe). Not long after the Catholics of this region settled, they named their new village "Six Harmonies Village" (Liuheacun) because they believe there can be no harmony without God, the "sixth direction."

As I departed from Liuheacun after attending a Mass that felt almost like Mass at St. Peter's, Fr. Zhang, his assistant priest, and the church manager stood near the gate, waving goodbye. Hundreds of old men and women stood near the church door watching the foreign guests leaving the village. And it seemed like a thousand children ran past us laughing and playing with each other. I imagined that many of those young boys and girls, God willing, someday will serve the Church as priests and nuns. I wondered also how many non-Chinese Catholics have heard of this astonishing village, tucked inconspicuously in the arid scenery of Shanxi province.

* Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Asian History at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington.

He completed his doctoral studies at the University of Oregon, where he studied Chinese history, literature, philosophy, and religion. His current research centers on the history of the Church in China, and he has recently finished a book on the Catholic martyrs saints in China. His other interests include East/West religious dialogue, especially between Catholic and Buddhist ideas of faith and salvation. Dr. Clark has written several academic books and articles on the topic of Chinese history and has been a guest on "EWTN Live," "Catholic Answers Live," and Relevant Radio to talk about Catholicism in China. He is also a contributing editor for This Rock magazine. ♦