

The Church in China — Pre and Post Tiananmen Square

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Whereas Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have enjoyed unprecedented liberalisation over the last year, China has suffered the exact opposite. Since the Beijing massacre of 3-4 June, the Chinese leadership, now firmly in the hands of the party's hardline gerontocracy and backed by the army, has chosen to reject reform on all fronts and revert to neo-Stalinist repression.

The tragedy is that the party deliberately refused the path of dialogue and moderation. Certainly, the students I spoke to in Tiananmen Square last May were pressing for reform of the political and economic system, but they were very far from seeking a 'counter-revolutionary' overthrow of the party, as has since been made out by a massive propaganda and ideological *blitzkrieg*. The present regime has thus itself exacerbated and polarised the situation, alienating students and intellectuals and a large part of the urban population. Thousands have been arrested and an unknown number executed for leadership of, or participation in, the democracy movement.¹ Isolated internationally by the denunciation of the West on the one hand, and by the breathtaking events in Eastern Europe on the other which have seen its erstwhile allies in East Germany and Romania disappear from the scene, the Chinese government has intransigently maintained one-party rule and resurrected the bankrupt ideology of the Cultural Revolution to cow a sullen and despairing populace.² On the economic front, despite lip-service to 'reform', all the major economic reforms pioneered by the technocrats associated with disgraced Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang (the only leader of stature who was prepared to dialogue with the students) have been put into reverse. As the country continues to face inflation, unemployment

¹ See *Amnesty International*, Report of 30 August 1989: 'PRC: Preliminary Findings on Killings . . . Since 3 June 1989.'

² During a brief visit to Guangzhou in mid-March 1990 I noticed that the bookshops had large displays featuring Lei Feng (the Cultural Revolution model soldier hero). They were conspicuously ignored by the populace.

and serious social breakdown with soaring crime and corruption, the government has retreated to a neo-Stalinist centralised economy and called upon the populace to tighten their belts for three years in stereotyped Maoist rhetoric.

The Churches after Mao

The Christian church in China has enjoyed a relative and precarious freedom over the past decade as an ideologically suspect and marginal element in a Marxist totalitarian state. Nevertheless, when the party moderates held sway, in paper and to some extent in practice, Christianity enjoyed constitutional protection and Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, under the umbrella of their respective 'patriotic' associations, enjoyed freedom of worship. The freedom of religion of Protestant house-church believers who refused to accept state domination through the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and Roman Catholics loyal to the Vatican (rather than to the Catholic Patriotic Association, CPA, which refuses allegiance to the Pope) was fragile at the best of times. Sporadic persecution occurred at the behest of local party cadres still governed by Maoist thinking, and quickened pace in 1983 and 1987 when the government launched ideological campaigns which indirectly affected the church. However, at other times 'dissident' house-church evangelists and 'black priests' (Vatican loyalists) ministered to large congregations, particularly in the countryside, relatively undisturbed by the authorities.

In 1987-89 the groundswell within the party and society at large for political and economic reform encouraged Christians to speak out against the unjust control of the church by atheistic party members in the Religious Affairs Bureau and United Front Work Departments, and their collaborators in the 'patriotic' religious associations. On the Catholic side, Bishop Ma of the Pingliang Diocese in Gansu province, and himself working within the CPA framework, issued a courageous statement on 14 August 1988 in which he denounced the CPA for denying basic Christian doctrine and announced his resignation from the organisation. He stated that:

Some of the highest leaders (of the CPA) have publicly discarded Catholic doctrine and canons, apostacised and trampled underfoot their (priestly) vows, marrying and having children while they still wear religious vestments and conduct Mass and confession . . . The mass of believers were enraged but dare not speak out, but now is the era of reform and 'open door', and society has completely changed, so we dare to speak out and

publish different opinions. Now I recognise that the silent nationwide resistance to apostate priests and bishops in the CPA, which is now becoming public, is completely necessary and just. We now call on those high-ranking bishops and priests who have married to resign and give up all their rights and privileges, and for all Catholic churches to forbid them to officiate in clerical vestments or to carry out any religious rites.³

On the Protestant side, an equally frank broadside was delivered by an elderly Christian in Fujian in March 1988 when he appealed to the National People's Congress, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and to Bishop Ding Guangxun, Chairman of the Three Self (TSPM). The author stated that:

For thirty years, the Chinese Christian Three Self Patriotic Movement, under the leadership of the Religious Affairs Bureau, has truly had its achievements! Under their tight supervision, 99 per cent of the churches in the entire country were closed down. 99 per cent of the pastors were attacked: some were labelled 'rightists', some were sentenced as 'counter-revolutionaries'. Some died, some were imprisoned, some were exiled to the remote border-regions, some were 'remoulded'. Bibles and hymn-books were all destroyed, and spiritual books completely disappeared. With these 'successes', their holding the 30th anniversary celebrations of the foundation of the TSPM has aroused a strong reaction both within China and overseas.⁴

In addition, he strongly criticised the practice of the Religious Affairs Bureau in appointing pastors unacceptable to the churches.

Such views reflect the historical realities of the fifties and sixties (and even beyond) far better than the distorted history of the church published by the government and the 'patriotic' religious organisations and uncritically accepted even by some overseas Christian organisations who only have links with the TSPM or CPA leadership. Christian leaders and laymen working both within and outside the TSPM-controlled church structures have shared with me privately on numerous occasions their strong dissatisfaction with continued political control of the church by the RAB and UFWD through the TSPM. However, as early as 1984 confirmation of the often harsh reality hiding behind the bland exterior offered to the Western Christian visitor was provided from an unusual source; a high-ranking party cadre involved closely with supervision of Christianity wrote a

³*Shandao Baokan*, 4 December 1988.

⁴'Huyu Quanguo Renda, Zhengxie' ('Appeal to the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference'), privately circulated papers by Zhang Shengcai of Fujian dated 24 March 1988.

scathing indictment of the party's post-Mao 'liberal' religious policy.⁵ He called for a very liberal interpretation of the party's definitive religious policy enshrined in 'Document 19' of March 1982. For instance, he stated that: 'some comrades pay no attention to what it [i.e. Document 19] says, and still stubbornly maintain that freedom of religion is only so much talk, and that the party's real intention is still completely to eradicate religion.' He confirmed the existence of a great 'religious revival' in China, but maintained that this should not panic cadres into launching an all-out attack on religion. He rejected the artificial labelling of certain religious activities as being 'abnormal', and called for the thorough purge of 'leftist' (Maoist) attitudes from among officials dealing with religious affairs, which only too clearly continued to exist. 'If we are unclear about this, it will be difficult to eliminate "leftism" and difficult to change the image in the minds of some believers that the government's religious affairs bureaux are anti-religious bureaux.' These criticisms were written, not about the Cultural Revolution period, but the supposedly liberal 'open door' decade of Deng Xiaoping (prior to the June 1989 massacre).

But the party cadre went further. In an amazing attack which fully vindicates, from a high party source, the complaints of many Christians within China, he lambasted the 'patriotic' religious associations (e.g. CPA and TSPM) for being so subservient to the party that they failed to rally Christians effectively to resist party policies:

There are some 'leaders' in religious circles who have lost their representativeness, and do not represent the legal rights of religious circles. They are good at fawning, and being 'yes-men', and accepting [party] leadership, but what they do does not act as a bridge between the party and the believers but rather increases the gap between them, and makes the cadres even more isolated. If the cadres really want to unite the believers, they should not detest the religious leaders who are truly religious [lit., 'love religion'], and not simply welcome and rely on those religious leaders who do not love their religion.

Here from a high party source was conclusive confirmation that the ranks of both the TSPM and CPA *did* contain priests, bishops and pastors who had effectively abandoned their faith to collaborate fully with the communists, as has been reported by many Chinese Protestant and Catholic believers over the past decade.

⁵ 'Xuexi Yige Wenjiande Xinde' ('What I have Gained from Studying a Document') by 'Ru Wen', published in *Zongjiao* (Religion), No. 2, 1984. (This is an internal publication of Nanjing University.)

The writer further upheld the legality of 'home meetings' (house-churches) saying that, 'today they are very strong all across China. To oppose home-meetings means losing many of the masses. Some people say they are illegal, but they can produce no law which prohibits home-meetings'. He also confirmed that extreme 'leftist' policies were still being enforced in many areas of China:

In some places the situation is totally different from what it ought to be. Everything is done at the word of the local cadres. They do not respect religious traditions. The religious leaders do not dare open their mouths and so many things are done which harm believers. . . For instance, in some areas they make 'patriotic covenants', the 'Eight Don'ts' and the 'Ten Don'ts'⁶ in the name of the religious organisations which is extremely unhelpful to rallying the believers around the patriotic religious organisations. . . In some places they decree that young people and children under 18 are not even allowed to enter the churches, and force the pastors from the pulpits to proclaim 'patriotic covenants'.

The above official account has, in fact, been the reality in China behind the bland exterior presented by TSPM and CPA religious leaders in the main cities to the large numbers of foreign Christian delegations that have visited China over the last decade. Most do not speak Chinese, and are probably unaware that they have been quietly steered into official channels with little opportunity to talk privately with Christian pastors and believers who would often have given a less glowing account of religious realities away from official surveillance. The cultural and linguistic barriers, joined with the sophistication of Chinese control mechanisms and the euphoria and naivete of many Western visitors, have led most such delegations to paint the Chinese religious scene in a much more favourable light than that until recently existing in Eastern Europe.

The calls for reform from both within the TSPM and the CPA and as we have seen, even within liberal sections of the party itself combined in 1988 in a major attempt to re-formulate religious policy in a more liberal direction. The proposed drafting of a new national Religious Law offered such an opportunity. In April 1988, 'patriotic' religious delegates from all the major religions met in Shanghai under the auspices of the Religious Affairs Bureau to discuss drafting the new law.⁷ While some delegates cautiously reiterated past policies on

⁶I have translated the full text of this document into English and this is available from Christian Communications Ltd, P.O. Box No. 95364, Tsimshatsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

⁷Typed document of the Drafting Committee of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council dated April 1988.

registration and overall control by the party, some were much more radical. One delegate even suggested that 'whether religious places of worship are registered or not, so long as they carry out religious activities they should not be regarded as illegal' — a breathtaking innovation in China's tightly-controlled society. Others called for religious bodies to establish their own publishing houses and religious bookshops.

The most far-reaching calls for reform came from within the Protestant community and eventually from certain of the key TSPM leaders themselves, notably Bishop Ding. In late 1988 and early 1989 rumours from both TSPM and house-church sources received in Hong Kong reported that the position of the TSPM was itself under serious discussion and that there was a possibility that this organisation might be abolished, to be replaced by the China Christian Council. In a letter dated 26 September 1988 addressed to the RAB, Bishop Ding expressed his strong dissatisfaction with repressive religious regulations drawn up by the Guangdong provincial government in March that year. He defended the existence of the 'home meetings' giving the following reasons for their continued existence:

1. the lack of church buildings, which are overcrowded and too far away for many Christians to attend;
2. the feelings of many Christians that 'the TSPM and its pastors do not love the church, and have even betrayed the church';
3. their feeling that preaching in the TSPM churches does not accord with their faith;
4. their dissatisfaction with the TSPM leaders and the pastors in the TSPM churches and their way of doing things.

He strongly opposed control of the church by administrative means and claimed that thirty years of bitter experience had shown this to be ineffective, only driving the house-meetings further underground. He admitted that 'since the fifties the TSPM has done some things disliked by Christians and today in some places continued to do so'. He further opposed the approval of pastors by the government and restrictions in evangelism which went counter to Biblical teaching, and even accused the party of transferring party members from the Religious Affairs Bureau to be atheistic leaders of the church.⁸ In mid-February 1989 Bishop Ding was interviewed in Los Angeles by a Christian news agency and certainly gave the impression that the TSPM might be wound up within two years.⁹ A report received from

⁸Letter of Bishop Ding to the RAB dated 26 September 1988; see also *Bridge*, January-February 1989. Full Chinese text in *Bai Xing*, 1 March 1989.

⁹Interview with News Network International in February, 1989. See 'Bishop Ding Confirms that the Three Self Patriotic Movement will Be Dissolved', A. P. B. Lambert, in *News and Views*, Hong Kong Christian Council, March 1989.

a Christian leader in February 1989 spoke of something of a power struggle between a liberal faction headed by Bishop Ding in Nanjing and a more hardline, pro-marxist faction based at the TSPM'S national headquarters in Janjing. After his return to China Bishop Ding issued an official denial that the TSPM would be dissolved.¹⁰

In March 1989 a former TSPM pastor stated in a letter that the issue had rocked the TSPM to its foundations. In his view the campaign to abolish the TSPM was aimed at preserving the position of key TSPM leaders by distancing themselves from the TSPM's dark past and passing the blame for past TSPM crimes (e.g. fomenting 'accusation campaigns' within the churches which led to the imprisonment of many pastors for 10 or even 20 years). In his letter he said:

The vast majority of preachers and believers in the 'open' churches have long ago lost all confidence in the Three Self and are half-hearted. Many pretend to agree with it, but secretly oppose and resist it. Since 1979, many apostates and people who betrayed the Lord and their brethren have been restored to positions in the TSPM and some bad characters have been appointed pastors. This has aroused strong dissatisfaction among the great number of good Christians and cries of discontent are heard everywhere. In this situation, the TSPM has been forced to 'rectify' the church to shift the blame for their crimes and to create a false image so that people will think that these TSPM leaders still love the church, and that they have truly repented of their past evil activities. In truth, the bad characters at the lower levels were the very ones they trained up as 'Three Self heroes' many of whom became party members between 1956-60. So that now the top TSPM leadership are passing the blame for their crimes onto these people who naturally are unhappy and are fighting back.¹¹

The publication of an article by a leading TSPM theologian, attacking a 'leftist' TSPM pastor in south-west China who was known to have persecuted other pastors in the fifties, goes some way to confirming the above interpretation.¹² On April 1989 the TSPM organ *Tianfeng* openly stated that at an internal TSPM conference in

¹⁰ See Press Release of the Amity Foundation dated 14 April 1989.

¹¹ Letter of 11 March 1989.

¹² See Wang Weifan, 'Fangxia Nide Bianzi!' ('Put Down Your Whip!') in *Nanjing Seminary Theological Review*, No. 9, November 1988. Wang wrote this during the high-tide for liberal reform. However, less than a year later he wrote a slashing attack on China's most respected independent Protestant leader, Rev Wang Mingdao (who had been imprisoned for 23 years for refusing to join the TSPM). This latter article was interpreted by many Chinese Christians that the authorities were planning a renewed crack-down on independent house-church Christians who refused to join the TSPM. In the light of subsequent events this interpretation seems correct.

Shanghai in December 1988 the possibility of the upgrading of the China Christian Council, and the corresponding diminishment of the TSPM's role as a political body were discussed. It stated that the ingrained habit of TSPM administration of the church should be changed and all the work of the church should be independently handled by the various levels of the China Christian Council and by the churches. All levels of the CCC should take appropriate measures to strengthen their leadership powers. Bishop Ding was even quoted as applying metaphorically to the relationship between the TSPM and the CCC the statement by John the Baptist that 'I must decrease, but He must increase.' (!) In a very Chinese way the stage was being set for the phasing out of the TSPM, or at the least a drastic reduction in its political role in controlling the church.

In retrospect, it seems that a variety of factors converged in convincing Bishop Ding and other TSPM leaders that some liberalisation was necessary:

1. the overall political climate calling for political and economic reform;
2. the grassroots dissatisfaction with continued political control of the church;
3. a genuine desire on the part of some Christian leaders for greater freedom of worship and evangelism;
4. a desire by some to shift blame for past political collaboration onto others;
5. a sense of *realpolitik* that only a more liberal religious policy would allow the party and the TSPM to continue to control effectively the church.

Following the June 1989 Beijing Massacre, the hardliners (now effectively in control of the government) proceeded to undo reform and liberalisation in every field. The overall political climate has hardly been conducive to proceeding with radical reform in the religious sphere. Although there was still some talk of reducing the role of the TSPM at the December 1989 TSPM/CCC conference in Shanghai all the signs point to the reality that such reforms have been shelved.

The Church and the Democracy Movement

The Christian church was faced with a moral dilemma regarding the upsurge of democratic protest in the spring of 1989. Should it stand aside and risk being viewed as irrelevant by Chinese intellectuals and students? Or should it participate, and risk drawing down the wrath of

the authorities? In fact, both responses were possible. In general, it is true to say that theological students at the TSPM-controlled seminaries and many high ranking TSPM/CCC leaders supported the democracy movement in its heyday, while independent house-church Christians largely remained aloof.

As many key TSPM leaders also hold office in the national People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that their actions in support of the students should be explained to a considerable extent in terms of internal party factional politics. The evidence suggests that they linked the fortunes of the church in terms of liberalisation of religious policy with those of the 'liberal' faction of the Communist Party led by Secretary General Zhao Ziyang. It was highly significant, that after Zhao Ziyang, the other prominent party leader most sympathetic to the hunger-striking students in Beijing was Yan Mingfu, Head of the Party's United Front Work Department which supervises all religious affairs. It was during Yan's tenure of office that the grassroots upsurge of opposition to political control of the church was allowed to express itself, and 'liberal' TSPM/CCC leaders were permitted (encouraged?) to vent their support for reform, as we have seen above.

Bishop Ding issued a statement on 18 May 1989 supporting the 'patriotic activities' of the students, and called on the State Council leadership to enter into dialogue with them. On 19 May Zhao Ziyang himself went to Tiananmen Square to talk with the students. On 20 May the hardliners had won enough support within the party and army to declare martial law, and the latter soon surrounded Beijing. However, on 25 May, even after martial law, Bishop Ding and fifteen other TSPM/CCC leaders wrote a letter to Wan Li, Head of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (and himself reputedly a member of the 'liberal' Party faction) calling for an emergency NPC session to discuss the national crisis. The letter stated that they 'completely sympathised with the patriotic activities of the young students and the broad masses of the people'.

In a further public statement dated 23 May Bishop Ding stated in his capacity as President of the CCC and Chairman of the TSPM that 'we wholeheartedly affirm the student demonstrations in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities. . . I am glad that Christians are making their presence felt in these demonstrations.' While he and other TSPM leaders were engaged in political activity at the higher level, many Christian students at several Protestant and Catholic Seminaries took part enthusiastically in the student demonstrations. They also seized the opportunity to witness publicly to their faith. On 18 and 19 May I personally witnessed students from both the Catholic and Protestant

seminaries in Beijing marching around Tiananmen Square with large banners proclaiming their Christian faith. The Protestant students openly sang hymns in the centre of the square drawing many curious onlookers — the first time in forty years that Christians had dared to witness publicly to their faith in the centre of Beijing. I later learnt that this was done despite official warnings from the Religious Affairs Bureau in Beijing not to participate.

However, the largest manifestation of Christian support for the democracy movement was undoubtedly that of the Jinling Theological Seminary in Nanjing. Most of the faculty supported the demonstrations, and many teachers took part, but the vast majority of the Christian students participated in the orderly demonstrations. On one occasion they marched in front of members of the Communist Youth League carrying a banner with the Biblical text 'Let Righteousness Flow Down Like a River.' In Shanghai some Christian students from the East China Seminary also took part, although the teachers were not so supportive.

In contrast, although a few house-church Christians in Beijing were reported to have gone to Tiananmen Square, most independent house-church believers in China remained aloof from the student movement. Members of the large house-church in Guangzhou (Canton) when interviewed by a Hong Kong Christian magazine said:

Even in ordinary times they (the government) are looking for opportunities to give us trouble. If now, in connection with this movement we are perceived to do wrong, no matter how trivial, we are sure that they would take action against us at once.¹³

Another important reason for the non-involvement of the house-churches, apart from sheer survival, was theological: most espouse a warmly evangelical theology which eschews any direct participation in politics as 'worldly'. Yet another was the simple fact that the house-churches are strongest in the rural areas; and it seems undeniable that many peasants were unaware of the events convulsing Beijing and China's major cities last May and June.

Tiananmen — Its Effects on the Church

The Beijing Massacre of 3-4 June has had serious repercussions on the Chinese church. At its most obvious, overnight the 'leftist' hardline faction of the communist party consolidated its grip on power, shattering the power of the reformist faction with the purge and disgrace of its leader Zhao Ziyang. The political pendulum swung

¹³ *Bridge*, July-August 1989.

dramatically leftwards with a reversal of all political and economic reforms (despite lip-service to the contrary). Public, cultural and intellectual activity virtually ground to a halt with the arrest or dismissal of many senior economic advisers, university heads, writers, press correspondents etc. — all those in positions of influence who over the last decade had begun to pull China out of the morass of Maoism and neo-Stalinist repression. In the light of Chinese communist history it did not need prophetic vision to foresee repression - even persecution — again looming ahead for the church. For whenever a 'leftist' line has triumphed in China, the church, as a marginal and ideologically suspect sector of society, has always suffered. This was notably true in the mid and late fifties during the 'Anti-Rightist' and other campaigns, and later in the sixties during the Cultural Revolution. Most recently, in 1983, the 'Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign' led to the arrest (fortunately mostly temporary) of hundreds of 'dissident' Catholics and house-church Protestants. However, this movement was soon brought to a halt by the party 'moderates'. But following the Beijing Massacre, the 'moderate' faction has been totally driven from power. The reimposition of leftist, Maoist ideology, including such puerilities as the 'Lei Feng' Campaign (Lei Feng was a model Maoist soldier whose diaries were probably composed by party leaders for propaganda purposes) have suddenly created a political climate in which religious belief is regarded with hostility by party die-hards.

In the first few months following the massacre the government was too concerned to maintain political control of the country to pay much attention to religion. However, Christians I spoke to in Shanghai in September 1989 feared an imminent clamp-down. Signs of this have not been lacking.

In the first place, all the 'patriotic' religious organisations have had to make 180 degree turns and express full support for the repression of the 'counter-revolutionary turmoil' in Beijing. On 27 June 1989 the TSPM/CCC Committees issued a statement calling on all Christians to 'study Comrade Deng Xiaoping's important speech to martial law troops in the capital'. However, while Bishop Ding and others who supported the student movement have publicly expressed their support for the hard-liners (failure to do so could have catastrophic consequences for the entire Christian church in China) careful reading of their statements reveals a studied reticence to affirm wholehearted compliance. Bishop Ding's statement on 1 July 1989 at the National People's Congress emphasised the need of the government to crack down on corruption (which is endemic within the party to the very highest levels) while studiously avoiding mention of the tragic events

in Beijing.¹⁴ That the more liberally-inclined leadership of the TSPM have been reluctant to go the whole way with the new, repressive party line was suggested by the absence of mention of the TSPM at all in a *People's Daily* article at the end of June in which representatives of all the other 'patriotic' religious organisations (Buddhist, Muslim, Daoist and Catholic) extolled the hard-liners in fulsome tones, and that the TSPM was conspicuous by its absence at an official tea-party held for all the 'patriotic' religious representatives over Chinese New Year in 1990. Bishop Ding himself has reportedly made a 'self criticism', but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he, and other Christian leaders who supported the student movement, are now under a political cloud. In the spring of 1990 Yan Mingfu, the 'liberal' head of the Party's United Front Work Department was finally dismissed from office, so it seems that the higher echelons of the UFWD and Religious Affairs Bureau are now again firmly under the control of hardline elements which bodes ill for the church.

Renewed Persecution of House-Church Protestants

At the local level Maoist cadres often have had a free hand to persecute independent house-church Christians who refuse to accept TSPM (and thus government) control. It is difficult sometimes to distinguish this ongoing, spasmodic persecution at the local level from a definitive change in party religious policy at the centre. However, reports from a number of provinces since last May show that this is being implemented in a much more restrictive fashion.

Within a day or two of the declaration of martial law in Beijing on 20 May 1989 two house-church leaders were arrested in a city in western Inner Mongolia.¹⁵ In July, Mr Liu Qinghe, a noted house-church evangelist who had built up twenty independent house-churches in Moguqui, eastern Inner Mongolia, with a membership of 3,000, had been arrested and sent to a labour camp for re-education. The director of the Religious Affairs Bureau in Inner Mongolia stated on 31 December 1989 that 'the number of Christians in our region has doubled in the past five years, and in some districts this increase has been five-fold. This has created confusion in the church and harmful effects on society.' Such a statement is blatantly 'leftist' and means that any growth of the church must be suppressed by party organs. The local TSPM dutifully passed a resolution a few

¹⁴ Note of Bishop Ding's comments at the NPC passed to Hong Kong Christian leader.

¹⁵ Report by a Christian from the city concerned whom I interviewed in July 1989.

days afterwards forbidding 'non-clerical personnel' from making converts.¹⁶

Here we should note that the rapid growth of the church at the grass-roots level had already drawn the attention of party bureaucrats even before the Beijing massacre. In January 1989 a major mainland magazine stated in an article headlined 'Understanding Christianity "Fever"', that 20,000 people had been baptised in Shanghai between 1986-88, many of them young people and professionals.¹⁷ An internal report of the same period stated that in Henan province alone there are at least 2,600 independent house-churches and over 500 independent house-church evangelists.¹⁸ (This shows how unreliable government and TSPM public statements are which have often virtually denied the existence of large-scale independent house-churches in China.) An even more startling report surfaced a year later: whereas the number of those applying for party membership had decreased drastically between 1987-1989 compared to the previous three year period, the number of those becoming Christians in major cities over the same period had increased two-, three-, or even six-fold.¹⁹ Following the Beijing massacre reports have come from many cities of large numbers of students and intellectuals becoming Christians and flocking to both TSPM- and house-churches. This Christian revival cannot but alarm the elderly party leadership who, in the face of growing dissent, are tightening political indoctrination not only among the population at large but also in the TSPM-controlled churches.

Particularly since September last year, there has been an increase of reports from China detailing harassment and persecution of unregistered house-churches. In September a reliable report from Christians in Henan province stated that police raided a house-church, arrested about 100 participants and fined them 250-450 yuan each. Those not able to raise the sum (a considerable amount for country people) were jailed.²⁰ In October-November 1989 it was reported that house-churches throughout North China associated with the Seventh Day Adventists and the 'Little Flock' (an indigenous group founded by Watchman Nee) were being forced to close down because they refused to join the TSPM.²¹ On 9 December a well-known house-church in Shanghai was prohibited, and since then others have reportedly been forced to

¹⁶ *Bridge*, September-October 1989.

¹⁷ *Liaowang*, 20 January 1989.

¹⁸ Internal party news-sheet received in January 1989; undated, but as it appears to be the basis for the *Liaowang* article probably written slightly before.

¹⁹ *Zhengming*, April 1990.

²⁰ *China News and Church Report*.

²¹ Letter from former house-church leader in Shanghai dated 19 March 1990.

close down.²² Also in Shanghai, Mr Xu Guoxing, a young house-church evangelist who had returned from the United States, was arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment in labour camp.²³ In Anhui certain itinerant house-church evangelists were reported to be under police investigation in November.²⁴ Also in the same month several Christians caught secretly printing devotional and Christian discipleship training books in Zhejiang province were arrested.²⁵ In December some 50 meeting-points in East China were reportedly closed down, while in another part of the country a house-church with over 1,000 people was prohibited.²⁶

However, the clearest signal from the government that it had decided to clamp down on all unregistered congregations was the sudden arrest of Pastor Lin Xiangao in Guangzhou on 22 February this year. Pastor Lin, who had already been in prison for over twenty years since the mid-fifties, after his release built up a thriving church in the heart of the city. In 1980 the first two converts were baptised. By 1990 over 1,700 had been baptised and the church attracted a weekly congregation of nearly 1,000 Christians meeting on practically every day of the week because they could not all be accommodated in Pastor Lin's small home. Pastor Lin had resolutely refused to join the TSPM, and carried out a wide range of evangelistic activities forbidden in the TSPM churches. He welcomed foreign visitors and in 1988 Dr Billy Graham spoke at his home. President Reagan had also sent personal greetings. The arrest and interrogation of Pastor Lin for 21 hours and the prohibition of his church was a clear signal sent by the Chinese government, both within China and overseas, that it would no longer tolerate such independent religious activities. The disregard for negative publicity overseas revealed an intransigence which, again, bodes ill for the Chinese church.²⁷

Repression of Roman Catholics

The Roman Catholic church in China has also suffered increased repression in recent months. Even before the massacre the government and the Catholic Patriotic Association were showing signs of taking a firmer line with 'underground' congregations, priests and bishops

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Letter from Xu's relative dated January 1990.

²⁴ Letter from former Shanghai house-church leader (as above).

²⁵ *China News and Church Report*, 1 December 1989.

²⁶ *China News and Church Report*, 15 December 1989.

²⁷ These details are based on a personal interview I had with Pastor Lin three weeks after his arrest, and on his extensive Chinese notes describing his interrogation. See my article in *News Network International*.

who continued to affirm their loyalty to the Pope rather than the CPA. In February 1989 Beijing issued a policy directive for 'Strengthening the Work of the Catholic Church in the Present Situation' which called for underground priests to be 'exposed and severely punished'.²⁸

These repressive measures were implemented two months later in a Catholic village in Hebei province with a brutality only surpassed by the Beijing Massacre in June. About 5,000 armed militia and Public Security police surrounded the village of Youtong in Lecheng County at 8am on 18 April and proceeded to beat up the villagers, sparing neither children nor young people. More than 100 people were seriously injured and, reportedly, two died. The 'crime' of these villagers appears to have been sheltering an 'underground' priest and erecting an unauthorised tent for worship to replace their church which had been torn down during the Cultural Revolution.²⁹

Following the Beijing massacre, the authorities have taken concerted action to clamp down on underground Catholic activities. According to Catholic sources in China more than thirty bishops, priests and lay leaders loyal to the Vatican, were arrested in the two months December 1989-January 1990. The following names of those arrested have been published:

Bishop Zhang Liren of Hohhot in Inner Mongolia.

Bishop Matthias Lu Zhensheng of Tianshui, Gansu.

Bishop Bartholomew Yu Chengti of Hanzhong, Shaanxi.

Bishop Philip Yang Libo of Lanzhou, Gansu.

Bishop Anthony Zhang Guangyi of Sanyuan, Shaanxi. (83 years old)

Bishop Guo Wenzhi of Qiqihar, Heilongjiang, arrested on 14 December 1989.

Bishop Peter Joseph Fan Xueyan of Baoding (under house-arrest).

Bishop Peter Liu Guandong of Yixian, Hebei.

Bishop Joseph Li Side of Tianjin.

Fathers Shi Wandu, Su Zhemin and lay-leader Wang Tongsheng, all of Baoding, Hebei.³⁰

²⁸ 'Zhonggong Reng Yenmi Kongzhi Zongjiao Huodong' ('The Chinese Communist Still Tightly Control Religious Activities'), an interview with Father L. Ladany in *Xin Bao*, 5 January 1990.

²⁹ Appeal to the Pope from Youtong Village dated 10 April 1989; partial text translated in Overseas Missionary Fellowship, *Pray for China*, July-August 1989.

³⁰ Numerous international press reports. See, in particular, *Sing Tao Daily News*, 21 December 1989; *Hong Kong Standard*, 15 January 1990; *Asia Focus*, 27 January 1990; and *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 February 1990. It was later reported in April 1990 that three of the bishops had been released but were still under house-arrest, effectively curtailing their activities. It seems many of them had been setting up an 'underground' college of bishops loyal to the Pope in direct opposition to the CPA.

It appears that the long and painful process leading to rapprochement between the Vatican and the Chinese government has been seriously dislocated, and that the Catholic church in China faces a winter of repression as long as the present hardline regime continues to exist.

Conclusions

The present repression of dissident Protestant and Catholic activities in China is the inevitable concomitant of the general return to ideologically rigid policies by the government. However, another factor is clearly the ferment in Eastern Europe. It has not escaped the notice of the Chinese authorities that the Christian church, whether Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, has played a crucial role in the restoration of democracy in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and East Germany. Although the Christian church is still a small minority in China, it has nevertheless become an increasingly attractive haven for young people and intellectuals disillusioned with Marxism. Although the majority of Chinese Christians appear to be apolitical, the enthusiastic endorsement by some TSPM leaders and many seminary students of the democracy movement must have come as an unpleasant surprise to the government who views the 'patriotic' religious organisations as mere organs for the implementation of party policies among the 'religious masses'.

A further factor is the continued isolation of the regime, and its sensitivity regarding subversion from overseas. A high level internal document issued to leading cadres at the beginning of March 1990 spoke of 'even greater pressure being exercised on us by the Western camp headed by America and by other hostile international forces'.³¹ The liberalisation of religious policy over the last decade was part of China's overall 'open door' policy and desire to develop friendly relations with the United States in particular. Conversely, hardline Marxists in China have seen the Catholic church as linked with a reactionary political power (the Vatican) and the Protestant church as linked with the United States (even though the growth of the Chinese church over the last two decades or so has been almost entirely due to indigenous factors). If relations with the West, and the United States in particular, continue to deteriorate, then this may indirectly affect Chinese leaders' perception of the place of Christianity in Chinese society and lead to further repression.

The immediate future for both Protestant and Catholic believers in China, therefore, looks none too bright. Whether or not religious

³¹ *Bai Xing*, April 1990, pp. 6-8.

policy is changed on paper, the implementation of existing party regulations for the control of the church is likely to become increasingly restrictive. However, on a deeper level the church offers spiritual solace to millions of Chinese from every level of society. It remains to be seen whether, as in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, the Christian church in China can — or dare — move out of its traditional ways of thinking to present a viable spiritual foundation for new political and social structures to emerge to replace those existing Marxist ones now only held together by military force. Such a way forward would be costly, not to say dangerous.

However, for the first time in 70 years (since the 4 May Movement of 1919 when China's intellectuals largely rejected the Christian faith and began to move towards Marxism) the Christian church has the opportunity to win the allegiance of Chinese intellectuals and students. The cultural and political obstacles are formidable. However, the hearts of the people are more open to the Christian message than ever before. There has already been a significant movement of students into the Christian church since the Beijing massacre in many cities with Christian student groups meeting quietly on campus. If these young, educated Chinese Christians are able to grapple seriously with the many problems in Chinese society from a fully Christian standpoint they will provide the trained leadership for a burgeoning grass-roots church in the midst of a society desperately in need of spiritual and moral regeneration.