

**Refugee Review Tribunal
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RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Is there any current information about the treatment of members of the unofficial Catholic Church in Tianjin? Are members being detained for attending the unofficial Catholic Church or for distributing printed materials eg scriptures and psalms?**
- 2. What are the worshipping practices of the unofficial Catholic Church? Do members attend in local houses or at church buildings? Are services usually conducted by a priest? Is a mass usually held? Are there particular prayers/ forms of worship usually conducted?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Is there any current information about the treatment of members of the unofficial Catholic Church in Tianjin. Are members being detained for attending the unofficial Catholic Church or for distributing printed materials eg scriptures and psalms?**

A search of the sources consulted found little current information about the treatment of members of the unofficial Catholic Church in Tianjin. Sources generally indicate, however, a degree of reconciliation between the unofficial Catholic Church and the government-approved Catholic Church in Tianjin and elsewhere within China.

The most recent US Department of State report on religious freedom in China made no specific mention of Tianjin, but noted “some efforts toward rapprochement between the Government and the Vatican” (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – China*, September – Attachment 1).

The following reports mentioning the “underground” Bishop Stephen Li Side of Tianjin appear illustrative. In 1994, Amnesty International reported:

Bishop Joseph Li Side, of Tianjin municipality, has reportedly been restricted to his home in Liangzhuang village, Tianjin municipality, since June 1992. He was previously detained on 8 December 1989 and spent over 18 months in detention before he was released in June 1991. He was briefly detained again in April 1992 (Amnesty International 1994, *China – Protestants and Catholics detained since 1993*, 17 June – Attachment 2).

In August 2007, it was reported that Bishop Stephen Li Side had that month been ordered by security officers to join the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA):

A Church source told UCA News that around Aug. 22, some security officers visited Bishop Stephen Li Side of Tianjin, who lives on a mountain, and Coadjutor Bishop Melchior Shi Hongzhen and ordered them to join the CPA. The officers took away a priest at Bishop Shi's place in the Tianjin area (“‘Underground’ Bishop Jia missing again, other Prelates pressured’ 2007, *UCA News*, 24 August – Attachment 3).

More recently, in an article dated 16 July 2008, it was reported that most priests within the Tianjin diocese of the official Church have now “pledged obedience to underground Bishop Stephen Li Side” and that more members of the underground Church are now attending mass at the official Xikai Cathedral. According to the report:

In Tianjin diocese, which has no open-Church bishop, most open-Church priests pledged obedience to underground Bishop Stephen Li Side of Tianjin earlier this year, according to Church sources. Bishop Li has allowed those priests to continue to administer their parishes.

Teresa, an underground Tianjin Catholic, told UCA News more underground Catholics are attending Masses in Xikai Cathedral at which open-Church priests preside, and fewer are praying at the Marian grotto outside. Previously, they refused to enter the cathedral.

However, another Tianjin underground Catholic complained the local Church is “still under the control” of clergy with links to the Catholic Patriotic Association (“‘Church observers see some positive results one year after Pope’s letter’ 2008, *UCA News*, 16 July – Attachment 4).

An article dated 12 January 2008, sourced from *Asia News IT*, mentioned that the official Catholic Church in Tianjin is experiencing an increasing number of people choosing to be baptised there (“‘Tianjin: more than 200 adults baptized just before Christmas’ 2008, *Asia News IT*, 12 January – Attachment 5).

An undated article on the ChinaCatholic.org website refers to the official Xikai Church in Tianjin preparing to welcome visitors during the Olympic Games. The article reports that the assistant priest of the parish had stated that the Olympics provided “the opportunity to introduce the Xikai church to the visitors, both foreign and local”. According to the article:

Assistant parish priest of Tianjin Xikai Church, Fr. Zhang Zhizhou pointed out that Tianjin, being one of the venues for the Olympics, will have many visitors, local and foreign. The local government suggested that Xikai Church be the church of welcome. Since the government has yet to specify the area of service for the church so only a broad outline of service and publicity is being worked out. Fr. Zhang said, “This Olympics will be an opportunity and a challenge for the Xikai church. We have the opportunity to introduce the Xikai church to the visitors, both foreign and local, enhance the development of the church’s ministry of evangelization and at the same time gather experiences for future publicity events (“‘Church preparing to welcome the Olympics: Dioceses of Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao and Qinhuangdao’ 2008, China Catholic website

<http://www.chinacatholic.org/english/FandL/2008425100107.htm> – Accessed 25 July 2008 – Attachment 6).

Information on the China.org website provides the following brief information about Xikai Church:

Xikai Church – the Tianjin Catholic Church, is located in Dushan Road, Heping District, near Lida International Department Store. The church is comprised of two parts – a chief church and a cathedral, which were built by the French Catholic Church. The chief church was constructed in about 1913, while the cathedral in 1917. The cathedral is a 45-meter-high Roman-style building and the largest church in Tianjin.

In 1914, the chief church of Tianjin catholic parish moved from the Wang Hai Lou Church to the Xikai Church. From then on, the Xikai Church has become the center of Tianjin Catholics ('Xikai Church' 2007, China.org website, 26 July <http://www.china.org.cn/english/travel/218581.htm> – Accessed 25 July 2008 – Attachment 7).

The Xikai Church in Tianjin is also known as the Church of St. Joseph ('Catholicism' (undated), Show China website <http://www.showchina.org/en/China/abc/religion/200701/t105546.htm> – Accessed 28 July 2008 – Attachment 8).

2. What are the worshipping practices of the unofficial Catholic Church? Do members attend in local houses or at church buildings? Are services usually conducted by a priest? Is a mass usually held? Are there particular prayers/ forms of worship usually conducted?

An RRT Research Response prepared in March 2008 addresses the question of the tenets and practices of the underground Catholic Church in China, providing a brief overview (RRT Research & Information Service 2008, *Research Response CHN33047*, 12 March – Attachment 9).

An RRT Research Response prepared in May 2004 provides some information on differences between the official and unofficial Catholic congregations in China (RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response CHN16738*, 20 May – Attachment 10).

A further search of the sources consulted found no additional and detailed information regarding the worshipping practices of the unofficial Catholic Church in China, but generally indicated diversity between congregations in the level of training of their clergy and in the type of building within which worship takes place.

The US Department of State's 2007 report on religious freedom in China notes "a severe shortage of trained clergy for both the registered and unregistered religious groups" (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – China*, September – Attachment 1).

In September 2004, an article in the *South China Morning Post* referred to St Joseph's Cathedral (also known as Xikai Church) in Tianjin, and mentioned underground Catholics holding "their own liturgy at the Marian Shrine inside the compound, refusing to have anything to do with the official congregation inside the Church", whilst others travelled several hours to celebrate mass with the underground Bishop Li. According to the article:

A growing number of Catholics are now practising their faith in a grey area. Although a large number of underground Catholics have traditionally avoided any contact with the state church, more believers are floating between the two churches, attending a state service one week, an underground mass the next.

And in some areas where local authorities are open-minded or apathetic, the two groups use the same venues for services, albeit often separately. In one instance last year, official and underground priests in one diocese celebrated mass together. In another diocese, the official and unofficial bishops live in the same house, wearing different titles.

... [On Good Friday, 9 April 2004] 1,000 Catholics attended services in the official St Joseph's Cathedral in Tianjin. At the same time, another 200 underground Catholics held their own liturgy at the Marian Shrine inside the compound, refusing to have anything to do with the official congregation inside the church.

Their leader, Bishop Stephen Li, who was recognised by the state as a priest but not a bishop, was banished to a church in a remote mountain area. An overseas Catholic news service reported the unofficial group had been praying at the shrine for 10 years, and that the government was aware of the situation. "The community inside the church is run by communists," a man told a reporter from the Union of Catholic Asian News, adding that he believed the souls of Catholics who worship inside the church would go to hell. Hundreds of Catholics travelled several hours to the mountain church to celebrate the holiday with Bishop Li (Mooney, Paul 2004, 'Power of prayer; Clergy from Vatican-approved "underground" and state-approved "official" Catholic churches are gradually merging in a trend that worries Beijing', *South China Morning Post*, 2 September – Attachment 11).

An article from April 2005 in *The Washington Post* on the underground Catholic Church in Hebei province (which neighbours the municipality of Tianjin) mentioned unofficial masses being conducted in a "majestic brick cathedral" and other masses being conducted in people's homes by a visiting priest. The article noted that "many underground clergymen now perform their duties so openly that 'underground' seems a misnomer":

Off a muddy road in this rural village in China's northern Hebei province, near green fields of freshly planted wheat, police stood guard around a majestic brick cathedral, blocking visitors from entering. But after nightfall, when villagers carrying flashlights began arriving for Mass, it was possible to slip inside.

Julius Jia Zhiguo, 71, a bishop in China's underground Catholic Church, was waiting. A slight smile crossed his wrinkled face as he explained that police have restricted his movements for more than a decade. "They have never stopped trying to control the underground church," he said.

Then Jia changed into white robes and celebrated Mass in the cathedral, which was built with the tacit approval of local officials two years ago. Hundreds of villagers joined him, as they do every night in Wuqiu, and the police did nothing to stop them.

... Though police continue to harass and imprison priests and bishops in the underground church, several have been allowed to operate openly. At the same time, the Vatican has slowly infiltrated the government's official church, winning over many of its clergymen and exerting unprecedented influence over its operations.

... All but nine of the 70 bishops in the government's official church have secretly declared their loyalty to Rome and are now recognized by the Vatican, according to Ren Yanli,

China's leading scholar of the church. And almost all of the new bishops approved by the government in the past five years were secretly named in advance by John Paul, said one of the bishops, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The government knows we only ask them to approve a bishop after the pope has signed off first," he said. "They aren't happy about it, but they don't have a choice. They know the people won't accept a bishop that hasn't been named by the pope." In effect, Ren said, "the government has lost control of the patriotic church."

The government's efforts to crush the underground church have also faltered. Especially here in Hebei, home to about a quarter of all Catholics in China, many underground clergymen now perform their duties so openly that "underground" seems a misnomer.

In recent years, priests ordained by Bishop Jia have built spacious new churches in several nearby villages, some of them larger than government-approved churches. Local officials look the other way because they sympathize with worshipers or want to collect fees and fines from them, priests said.

...Another underground priest, a wiry 80-year-old who asked to be identified only by his Christian name, Joseph, travels by motorcycle through his parish, celebrating Mass in a different village every night of the week, usually in a worshiper's home but almost always with the government's knowledge ('Up From the Underground' 2005, *The Washington Post*, 29 April <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/04/28/AR2005042801665.html> – Accessed 24 July 2008 – Attachment 12).

An article dated 3 July 2007 from *UCA News* reported that '[t]he Holy See had previously granted special faculties that effectively allowed underground bishops to ordain other bishops and to ordain priests without formal theological education" but that these had recently been revoked. According to the article:

"Underground" Bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar and a few other Church leaders told *UCA News* they are grateful to the pope for his concerns about the China Church.

Bishop Wei, based in Heilongjiang province, northeastern China, noted that the letter provides practical guidelines for Church life and evangelization in China, and gives directions for the China Church to move forward.

...Bishop Wei said he completely agrees with the pope, especially on the revocation of past faculties and directives given the changed situation.

The Holy See had previously granted special faculties that effectively allowed underground bishops to ordain other bishops and to ordain priests without formal theological education. It also urged Catholics to avoid receiving sacraments from bishops or priests who belonged to the Catholic Patriotic Association, a government-approved structure to administer the "open" Church in China ('China: Mainland Church Leaders Welcome Papal Letter, Say They Need Time to Digest And Circulate It' 2007, *UCA News*, 3 July, <http://www.ucanews.com/2007/07/03/mainland-church-leaders-welcome-papal-letter-say-they-need-time-to-digest-and-circulate-it/> – Accessed 25 July 2008 – Attachment 13).

An article dated September 2007 from the *South China Morning Post* reported an ordination "approved by both the Holy See and Beijing". The article reported that the Pope had also "tried to resolve divisions between the official and unofficial Catholic churches on the

mainland by urging the underground faithful... to reconcile with followers of the official church". According to the article:

Paul Xiao Zejiang was yesterday ordained coadjutor bishop of Guizhou diocese, the first ordination approved by both the Holy See and Beijing following the publication of Pope Benedict's letter to mainland Catholics on June 30.

It is widely believed that the ordination, free of any complications from both sides, reflects Beijing's desire to avoid derailing a dialogue with the Vatican.

In his letter, the Pope tried to resolve divisions between the official and unofficial Catholic churches on the mainland by urging the underground faithful, whom he praised greatly, to reconcile with followers of the official church. He also expressed hope that the Vatican and Beijing could agree on a way to appoint bishops, an issue over which both sides have been at loggerheads for years ('Double approval for new bishop' 2007, *South China Morning Post*, 9 September – Attachment 14).

The 'Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China' may be accessed on the Vatican website ('Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China' 2007, *Libreria Editrice Vaticana* http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china_en.html – Accessed 25 July 2008 – Attachment 15).

List of Sources Consulted

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US Department of State website <http://www.state.gov>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org>

Human Rights Watch website <http://www.hrw.org>

Topic Specific Links

Epoch Times website <http://en.epochtimes.com>

AsiaNews.It website <http://www.asianews.it>

China Catholic website <http://www.chinacatholic.org/english/search.asp>

China.org website <http://www.china.org.cn/english>

Human Rights without Frontiers website <http://www.hrwf.net>

Cardinal Kung Foundation website <http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/> –

Catholic World News website <http://www.cwnews.com/>

Center for Religious Freedom website <http://crf.hudson.org/>

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Holy Spirit Study Centre website <http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/> .

International Coalition for Religious Freedom website <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/>

Persecution.org website <http://www.persecution.org>

Union of Catholic Asian News website <http://www.ucanews.com>

Vatican website <http://www.vatican.va>

Voice of the Martyrs (Australia) <http://www.persecution.com.au/>

Search Engines

Copernic search engine

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – China*, September.
2. Amnesty International 1994, *China – Protestants and Catholics detained since 1993*, 17 June.
3. “‘Underground’ Bishop Jia missing again, other Prelates pressured’ 2007, *UCA News*, 24 August. (CISNET China CX184006)
4. ‘Church observers see some positive results one year after Pope’s letter’ 2008, *UCA News*, 16 July. (CISNET CX205803)
5. ‘Tianjin: more than 200 adults baptized just before Christmas’ 2008, *Asia News IT*, 12 January. (CISNET China CX191287)
6. ‘Church preparing to welcome the Olympics: Dioceses of Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao and Qinhuangdao’ 2008, China Catholic website <http://www.chinacatholic.org/english/FandL/2008425100107.htm> – Accessed 25 July 2008.
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9. RRT Research & Information Service 2008, *Research Response CHN33047*, 12 March.
10. RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response CHN16738*, 20 May.
11. Mooney, Paul 2004, ‘Power of prayer; Clergy from Vatican-approved “underground” and state-approved “official” Catholic churches are gradually merging in a trend that worries Beijing’, *South China Morning Post*, 2 September. (FACTIVA)

12. 'Up From the Underground' 2005, *The Washington Post*, 29 April
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/04/28/AR2005042801665.html> – Accessed 24 July 2008.
13. 'China: Mainland Church Leaders Welcome Papal Letter, Say They Need Time to Digest And Circulate It' 2007, *UCA News*, 3 July,
<http://www.ucanews.com/2007/07/03/mainland-church-leaders-welcome-papal-letter-say-they-need-time-to-digest-and-circulate-it/> – Accessed 25 July 2008.
14. 'Double approval for new bishop' 2007, *South China Morning Post*, 9 September.
15. 'Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China' 2007, *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china_en.html – Accessed 25 July 2008.