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» 11/19/2013 16:45

CHINA - VATICAN

Two priests from underground Church in prison. Doubts about Xi Jinping's "unprecedented" reforms

by Bernardo Cervellera

The two young priests gave catechism classes to adults in Qinyuan . Faithful who helped them are fined. Some Catholics hope that the concentration of power in the National Security Council will lessen patriotic association's power and enhance religious freedom. Others fear the situation will worsen because reforms reaffirm the Communist Party monopoly of power.



Rome (AsiaNews) - Two priests from the underground Church are in prison since early October. They are "guilty" of having organized catechism classes for adults in the town of Qinyuan , near Baoding (Hebei ). The two men are Fr. Tian

Dalong and another priest whose identity is unknown to AsiaNews, both in their 40s. They were arrested and isolated in police barracks in Baoding, an area with one of the largest non-official communities. Four lay faithful, who helped the priests in their pastoral activities have been forced to pay a fine of 4 thousand yuan each (about 400 EUR ) , accounting for more than two months' salary of a skilled worker.

According to AsiaNews sources, there are at least 10 priests in similar conditions, some have even been sentenced to the lao jiao (forced labor camps for "reform through labor") for years. What is important about these latest arrests is that they took place just weeks after the Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party, a meeting which the leadership loudly proclaimed would produce "unprecedented" reforms.

The world media, coached by Xinhua's carefully controlled reports, have praised these possible reforms, focusing on the economic novelties: a gradual reduction of government influence in the economy; promotion of private investment and foreign tax reform, the elimination of mandatory residence visas ( hukou ) for migrants; reform of the one-child law, etc ...

AsiaNews has presented these aspects also showing the ambiguities (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

Chinese Catholics are wondering if the plenum will bring more hope of freedom for Catholics and for religious freedom in general. These questions focus on the future function of the new National Security Council launched by the Plenum as an example of the new reform .

According to Xinhua, the National Security Council ( NSC ) should "perfect the national security system and strategy, guaranteeing the nations security". The few explanations on how the NSC would function were given by Xi

Geographic areas



Editor's choices

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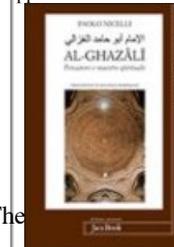
two young priests gave catechism classes to adults in Qinyuan . Faithful who helped them are fined. Some Catholics hope that the concentration of power in the National Security Council will lessen patriotic association's power and enhance religious freedom. Others fear the situation will worsen because reforms reaffirm the Communist Party monopoly of power. ITALY - PHILIPPINES [PIME launches a special fundraiser for Typhoon Haiyan victims](#)



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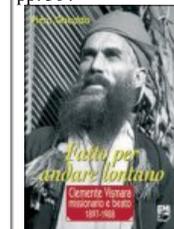
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Jinping, who stated that the new body should "strengthen the unity of the leadership in state security", making "national security and social stability preconditions for reform and development " (Xinhua , 15/11/2013 ) .

Several experts think that "the unity of the leadership in state security" means that the NSC will be a superior power to the army, the police, the intelligence services and the judiciary, which should ensure social stability and internal relations with foreign countries.

Some Catholics in the north and east of China believe this concentration of power in the hands of the central government , and perhaps the same Xi Jinping, will promote religious freedom. Very often, the imprisonments, the expropriation of church land, the arrests of priests and faithful depend on the decisions of local leaders, who have no qualms in ignoring national regulations on religion . In addition, strengthening central power could weaken the Ministry of Religious Affairs - currently among the most Stalinist government offices - and patriotic associations.

As proof of a certain relaxation of control in the peripheries, Catholics are quoted as saying that the police leave underground communities room to breathe, are concerned about the health of the bishops (for fear of having to face a more serious crises in the case of an appointment ) , maintain dialogue (perhaps to control) with underground priests .

Instead other believers in Beijing and central China say that "nothing has changed" and that the situation is always the same: underground priests are imprisoned (such as the two mentioned above); meetings among the faithful are banned; the Patriotic Association's control is absolute. If you add to this the list of bishops that have disappeared in police custody over the years, the bishop of Shanghai still under house arrest, control over other bishops (even official ones), their conclusion is understandable: "So far, nothing has

changed. We'll see in a few months time if there is a change of policy. Anyway, this will depend on the idea of reform that leadership has in mind : the concentration of all power in the hands of a few may even worsen the situation. "

According to the activist Hu Jia , the concentration of power "may be used against human rights defenders, those who support the universal values and freedom of speech and religion - people who the Party can not tolerate because they see them as a threat to government. "

This is confirmed by the Xinhua reports on the final document of the third Plenum (The final official version of which has yet to be released) reiterates that all the reforms serve to reinforce the Chinese Communist Party's monopoly of power.



MEDIAZIONI - ARBITRATI  
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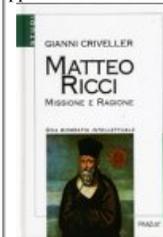
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by Bernardo Cervellera



gathering of 250 members of the Central Committee lasts until November 12, under strict media silence. Think-tanks put forward important propositions: provinces detached from the economy; reduction in monopolies; reform of residence certificate for migrants. However it is uncertain whether they will be taken into account. Party monopoly of power remains, like in the days of the Chinese empire . Xi Jinping also retreats after promising many reforms



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