

Press Release – November 13, 2015

The Cardinal Kung Foundation

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Father Pedro WEI HePing, an underground Catholic Priest in China, died in a very suspicious situation

Father Pedro WEI HePing (蔚和平神父), a young underground Catholic Priest in China, died a week ago on November 6. He was 41 years old. The Cardinal Kung Foundation has learned that Father Wei's body was found floating in a river in the City of Taiyuan (太原) in Shanxi (山西) Province. The cause of death was not determined, but the government authority claimed that it was a case of suicide. Knowing Father Wei for almost two decades since his student days, this foundation and many of his friends believe that it is out of his character to commit suicide. We appeal to the Chinese government to thoroughly investigate the cause of death of Father Wei and publish the findings quickly and truthfully.

Life of Father Wei

Born on Christmas Eve, 1974 in a Catholic family in Shanxi Province, Father Wei entered seminary in 1993. He was sent to Europe for advanced studies. He graduated with a Master's degree in Canon law of the Catholic Church. He was clandestinely ordained a priest on August 24, 2004 in China by an underground bishop.

Father Wei, speaking a couple of European languages, is a talented organizer who carried out many programs to increase vocations in the underground church. Grateful for his own opportunity for advanced education, he organized many events to share his experience and knowledge with those religious in China who did not have this opportunity. Since his return to China in 2007, he devoted himself totally in pastoral work, particularly in extremely poor and desolated areas. He gave many retreats and seminars at underground convents and seminaries. With a special focus on youth development, he started "Pilgrimage on Foot" and personally led many youth groups on pilgrimage, walking hundreds of miles as a way of faith formation and character building. His zeal in vocation led him to established an underground seminary, taught by priests with advanced overseas qualifications.

Fr. Wei, through his hardwork and organization skills, made great contribution in China church in less than a decade. He shared with us many of his future plans. He commanded the respects and cooperation of his contemporaries in other dioceses. Would such a zealous good shepherd with strong faith commit suicide? What was the true cause of his death? This myth must be solved.

The Catholic Church in China

The Catholic Church in China has been divided into two groups since 1957 when the communist government made the Roman Catholic Church illegal. Those believers who refused to renounce their fidelity with the Roman Pontiff in spite of severe persecution became known as the **underground Church**. Consequently, they continue to suffer severe repercussions, harassment and restriction. Another group, commonly known as the **open Church**, is founded and controlled by the Chinese government through the Catholic Patriotic Association which, as characterized by Pope Benedict XVI, is an organization "independent of the Holy See, in the religious sphere" and "is incompatible with Catholic doctrine". This group of bishops/clergy surrender the life of the church to the Chinese government authority. While doing this, a large number of these open church bishops had sought and received the Vatican approval, while continuing their roles in the Patriotic Association Churches.

What is the current policy of the communist government towards religion? The U. S. Congressional-Executive commission on China reported on July 23, 2015, "***The Communist Party continues to see religious groups as a potential threat, needing to be managed, controlled, or crushed.....President Xi Jinping said recently that religious groups must be free of 'foreign influence,' loyal to the 'socialist state,' and managed 'by the law.' No faith group is exempt from state control.***"

We believe that none of those acquainted with Fr. Wei would have believed such a suicide theory. Father Wei fully realized the risk of his vigorous pastoral effort, but continued to carryout his pastoral programs due to his deep love for the Church. Could Father Wei's tireless pastoral activities be deemed as "needing to be managed, controlled or crushed" by the Chinese authority? Please pray for Father Wei and his family. He has lived his faith heroically. May his life and work be an inspiration to the Roman Catholic Church in China.

A picture of Father Wei is attached

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Father Pedro WEI HePing (蔚和平神父)