



NEWS REPORT

from Fides News



Underground Priests Subject To Sexual Blackmail

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Beijing (Fides) - Fr Li Qinghua has been arrested and since November 29th has been detained in a prison in Xushui county, near Baoding (Hebei). We have been informed that like many other Catholic priests detained in Chinese prisons, Fr Li Qinghua is undergoing a sort of brain-washing to undermine his priestly formation and vocation.

The brain washing consists of severe interrogation and physical and psychological torture at the hands of a male and female "special unit". "Female service personnel" (actually prostitutes) are sent into the cells to do the daily chores, but in actual fact to tempt the priests into engaging in sexual relations. Hidden video-cameras are used to film the priest's reactions, to blackmail him into admitting his connection with other underground priests and force him to join the Patriotic Association. The report was sent into Fides by priests who have suffered the same abuse.

Fr Li Qinghua aged 31 was ordained a priest in 1993 for the diocese of Yixian (Hebei). Since 1997 he had been working in Gu an county. On November 15th he was arrested at the house of a Catholic layman in Weizhuang. The police, who arrived in four cars at one o'clock in the night, confiscated religious books, videos for catechesis and other personal items as well as a motorbike belonging to the lay man, and arrested the priest. The following day they arrested six parish lay leaders threatening the families of those arrested. Five days later the six were released after paying a fine of 7,000 Yuan (about US\$ 900 14 months' salary for a workman). The police

demanded 3,000 Yuan to release the motorbike. The priest and his belongings were detained and on November 29th Fr Li Qinghua was transferred from Guan to Xushui.

In recent years the Provincial government of Hebei has established in Xushui County a "special unit" which has the duty to "change the mind of the priests". Underground priests arrested anywhere in Hebei are brought in Xushui where a special guest-house has been transformed into prison: the corridors along the rooms are barred with iron grills, with no escape. According to some priests who have been detained there, they undergo to a double pressure: from the police officers and their interrogations and from the prostitutes. "These girls - say one witness - try all means to establish with you a love relationship, submerging you with flood of words and signs to lead you into temptation". Sometimes policemen and prostitutes take the priest to karaoke bars and discos to make them slip defenseless into their arms.

This brain-washing to undermine the vocation of priests is not new in China. During the Cultural Revolution priests and nuns were obliged to marry. Much earlier Chinese Emperors sent girls to sleep with Buddhists monks to try and induce them to abandon the monasteries.

The psychological pressure on the priests is continuous: also those who resist are obliged to receive the visits of the girls who try to embrace or kiss the priests. "If in that moment you are slow to reject them, say another witness, the picture taken by the video-camera gives the idea that you have gone along".

Today, the priests who resist the temptation and refuse to accept the police's conditions risk being sent to "re-education camps", or put under long term house arrest, or sent back to the local police who will deal with them as they want.