

Catholic Church Updates: November 2009-12-01

(There are 13 updates)

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

CHINA 'Open' Church authorities postpone Catholic congress

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BEIJING (UCAN) -- A recent meeting of government-sanctioned Church authorities has unanimously agreed to postpone the next National Congress of Catholic Representatives to 2010.

About 80 standing committee members of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) decided to delay holding the eighth congress at a Nov. 25-26 meeting in Beijing.

The congress is the highest self-governing body of the CCPA and BCCCC, and elects officials for top positions in the two organizations. It is usually held every five years with the seventh congress held in 2004.

The eighth was supposed to have been held in the second half of this year.

Any decision to advance or postpone the timing of the congress, because of special circumstances, must be approved by the standing committees of the CCPA and BCCCC, according to the organizations' constitutions.

Some bishops who attended the recent meeting said they were told that Church authorities did not have enough time for preparatory work. This was because they were busy with relief efforts following the 8.0-magnitude earthquake in Sichuan province in May 2008, activities for the Beijing Olympics in August the same year and celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in October.

The exact date for the next congress has not yet been fixed.

Anthony Liu Bainian, a Beijing-based CCPA vice-chairman, told UCA News that participants at the recent meeting included most bishops in the government-approved Church and about a dozen bishop candidates who have not yet been approved by the BCCCC.

During the meeting, participants also listened to the two organizations' working reports.

Zhu Weiqun, deputy director of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China, and Wang Zuo'an, the new director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, also attended the meeting. They spoke to participants on the country's religious policies, according to Liu.

During a joint meeting of CCPA and BCCCC vice-chairpersons on Nov. 24, participants studied and confirmed methods for choosing congress representatives and allotment of the number of representatives from each diocese. Such proceedings are similar to those held

during the previous congress, Liu noted.

In 2004, about 300 bishops, priests, nuns and lay leaders from all over the country as well as government officials attended the seventh congress. They amended statutes and re-elected Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing as chairman of the CCPA and Bishop Joseph Liu Yuanren of Nanjing as president of the BCCCC. Neither prelate was recognized by the Vatican.

Both posts are now vacant following the death of Bishop Liu in 2005 and the death of Bishop Fu in 2007.

The eighth congress has attracted attention from Church people inside and outside China after Pope Benedict XVI indicated his disapproval of state-run Church agencies in his 2007 letter to Chinese Catholics.

Hong Kong Sunday Examiner
<http://sundayex.catholic.org.hk/>
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Vatican letter to China's priests stresses reconciliation communion

HONG KONG (SE): "We should not forget that, even from the start, the community of the disciples has known not only the joy of the Holy Spirit, the grace of truth and love, but also trials that are constituted above all by disagreements about the truths of faith, with the consequent wounds to communion," wrote the Vatican secretary of state, Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone, in a letter to the priests of China on reconciliation, dated November 10 and published on November 16.

Believed to have its origins in a March 30 to April 1 meeting of the Holy See Commission for the Catholic Church in China, the letter addresses the ministry of priests, difficulties in Church relations with the civic authorities and the divisions that exist between the official and unofficial Church communities on the mainland.

It refers to the letter written by Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholic People of the People's Republic of China dated 27 May 2007, but empathises "reconciliation within the Catholic community and a respectful and constructive dialogue with civic authorities, without renouncing the principles of the Catholic faith."

However, although it recognises the concrete difficulties faced in the every day life of the Church in China, it states that reports drifting back to Rome from communities scattered around the vast nation are encouraging and a source of hope.

It describes the Church in China as people living side by side with followers of other religions, as well as those who are hostile to the Church or at least indifferent to religion, calling it "a little flock in the midst of a great multitude of persons."

However, it points out that China is not unique in this aspect and that people can take courage from the example of the faithful in other parts of the world, who have remained

faithful and united in a variety of adverse circumstances. It also counsels priests especially, not to be disheartened by the magnitude of the challenge that they see ahead of them.

Cardinal Bertone says that we can be dismayed by problems like widespread hunger, but can find courage in the words of Pope Benedict at his Angelus on July 26 this year, “By taking in his holy and venerable hands the little that they are, priests, we priests, become instruments for the salvation of many, for everyone!”

Nevertheless, despite the daunting size of the challenge, Cardinal Bertone gives concrete examples of how priests can give effective witness to the salvific love that Jesus holds for his Church. He lists frequent visitation, of both Catholics and others alike, of villages, and showing concern for people’s needs. He stresses the importance of the role of the catechist as well, and points out to priests that they should work hard to ensure that they have good training and education and the resources necessary to fulfill their commission.

He also points to the importance of the Church mixing with society at large, pointing to the witness of charitable work, especially when directed towards the elderly and children, but also anything that can show the selfless giving of the members of the Church. He lists the part that Catholic literature can play, as well as social occasions and the sponsoring or organising of programmes to which Church members can easily invite their friends to take part.

The Vatican secretary of state says he is also conscious of the negative messages that the Church can put out into society. Although he does not describe or define them, he laments “situations which can never be sufficiently deplored, where the Church herself suffers as a consequence of infidelity on the part of some of her ministers.”

He says that then it is the world that is scandalised and gives reason for the Church to be rejected as a force for good in society. However, he counsels the priests of China to be upfront about what is wrong with their Church. “What is most helpful to the Church in such cases is not only a frank and complete acknowledgement of the weaknesses of her ministers, but also a joyful and renewed realisation of the greatness of God’s gift, embodied in the splendid example of generous pastors.”

Cardinal Bertone says that priests should not underestimate the power of their ministry and recognise that it should be identified with their person. “In Christ, this identification was total,” he notes, before quoting the Letter for the Proclamation of the Year of the Priest as saying, “In Jesus, the person and the mission tend to coincide; all Christ’s saving activity was, and is, an expression of his filial consciousness, which from all eternity stands before the father in an attitude of loving submission to his will.”

The Vatican official says that necessary reform should find its inspiration and fulfillment in the Eucharist. “The celebration of the Paschal Mystery reveals the agape, that is the love of God, that love that defeats evil and, therefore, changes evil to good, hatred to love.”

He adds that, as the summit of ecclesial life, the journey to reconciliation in the divided Church will be found in the Eucharist, because, “The Eucharist, even if celebrated in a particular community, is never the celebration of that community alone. A truly Eucharistic community can never retreat into itself, as though it were self-sufficient, but it must stay in communion with every other Catholic community.”

He concludes, “Every celebration of the Eucharist presupposes union, not only with the local bishop, but also with the pope, the order of bishops, all clergy and the entire people of God.”

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Vatican letter pushes all-round formation

HONG KONG (SE/Agencies): The need for better formation of priests and the ongoing formation of those in the ministry, especially the recently ordained, is pointed to as being an emerging need, in a letter penned by the Vatican secretary of state, Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone, dated November 10.

The cardinal says, “In China too, as in the rest of the Church, the need for an adequate ongoing formation of the clergy is emerging.” He appeals to the bishops of China to recognise that priests are subject to ever increasing pastoral challenges linked to the demands of the task of evangelising a society as complex as present day China.”

He quotes from the letter of Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholic people of China dated May 2007, saying, “It is particularly urgent today, not only because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions of individuals and peoples among whom priestly ministry is exercised, but also because of that new evangelisation which constitutes the essential and pressing task of the Church at the end of the second millennium.”

Cardinal Bertone calls for serious programmes of ongoing formation, especially among younger priests, whom he notes often have to survive and work alone from almost immediately after their ordination.

UCA News points out that almost half of the March meeting of the Holy See Commission for the Catholic Church in China was devoted to discussion on the formation of seminarians, priests and religious.

The Asian bishops’ news agency quoted Father John Li Hongwei, from Changsha in China, a priest in an official Church community, as calling the letter timely and useful in helping priests learn how to act according to the gospel. He said that in his diocese, priests tend to work independently with little cooperation among each other. “Such lack of unity has caused many problems,” he said.

Father Paul Bai, from Jilin, who teaches in an official Church seminary, said that he appreciated the remarks on reconciliation within the Catholic community. UCA News quoted him as saying that he believes bishops from both the official and unofficial Church communities should take the lead by contacting and accepting each other.

Three of my primary school mates became underground (unofficial) priests and we lost contact,” he said. “But now we telephone each other and meet up regularly.”

Father John Baptist, of the unofficial community in Mindong, said that he thinks that both priests and laypeople in China have become quite secular in their outlook on life. He said this highlights the need for spiritual formation. He added that most priests on the mainland are not well educated and some even lack proper seminary training.

However, he noted that as the older bishops are dying out and being replaced by younger ones, a different type of priest-bishop relationship is developing and the ways older bishops used to mentor young priests does not work today. A different kind of relationship

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

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CHINA

After 60 years of communism, Church in China faces most critical moment

by Anthony Lam*

Zero growth among Catholics; declining vocations; bishops too young. Meanwhile, Party and government control continues along the same lines of the past 60 years.

Hong Kong (AsiaNews) - The People's Republic of China is celebrating her 60th anniversary this year. It is a good time to evaluate the development of the Catholic Church in China during the last six decades.

Most people divide the sixty years of the Chinese Communist regime into two even parts. The first thirty years, from 1949 to 1978, were full of political campaigns. The government was always ideology-oriented. The communist party presented herself as a totalitarian government. All social non-government organizations, including the Catholic Church, were under severe control.

The third plenum of the 11th National Congress of the party in December 1978 marked the beginning of the second thirty years. During this latter thirty years market economy was re-introduced. The government is, relatively speaking, more tolerant towards the social and non-government organizations. Foreign correspondents are allowed to visit and interview in China. White Papers on Human Right as well as on Religious Freedom in China, and many other similar kind of document have been officially promulgated since the 1990s. China has tried hard to catch up with the universal standard in different social aspects. It gives the outside world an impression that things are all right in China. But what is the reality?

For me, I would like to say that the Catholic Church in China is facing the most critical moment in her modern history. It can be a good opportunity to enjoy further and promising development if people grasp the opportunity with great effort. But challenges is everywhere, and the Catholic Church in China will suffer greatly if she fails to deal with her current problems properly. She is facing the following serious problems.

No significant increase in Catholic population

According to the different sources, the Catholic population in China has not experienced any significant increase in the last ten years. The situation is even worse than that during the Cultural Revolution when the Church still recorded growth in population. It is true that every year there are some 150,000 new baptisms joining the Church, but this is just enough to compensate the natural loss of the Catholic population. On the other hand, a great number of Catholics, especially those moving from the rural area to the coastal urban area looking for jobs, are left unattended in the new emigrant city. Most of them become

“CEO” Catholics, that is, going to the Church on “Christmas and Easter Only”.

Shortage of all kinds of vocations

Following the decline of Catholic population growth is the decline in vocations. The absence of the tier of youth alone already causes great difficulty in recruiting priesthood vocation, not to mention the impact of materialism and One-child Policy.

More important is that in China the Church lacks all kinds of vocations. Sisters vocations are declining. Mature vocation is not well cared for. (Basically there is no institute taking care of mature vocations in China. If one wishes to join the priesthood after thirty, it seems that the only possible way is to join a congregation abroad.) Religious brother vocations and formation is still forbidden, at least not officially approved, in China. Twenty years ago, a late bishop in Central China told me that he would like to recruit some young men as brothers, but the government had never given them the green light. Vocation of permanent deacons has not yet been introduced to this country.

Bishops are too young

Contrary to the phenomenon of an ageing Church, the Episcopal class is getting younger and younger. Due to the closing down of the seminaries for more than twenty-five years from mid-1950s to early 80s, middle-aged priests were very rare in China at the time when the Church was re-opening her door to the outside world in 1980s. Even nowadays, middle-aged clerics are still a minority. Some bishops or bishopric candidates find themselves too young to take up the post. Through the last two years there is no open consecration of bishop in China. It may be attributed to many reasons, but we cannot deny that quite a number of candidates have turned down the proposal or appointment as bishops in China. The problem will be solved after a few years when the young tier becomes mature. The question is how to handle the existing Episcopal vacancy not at the cost of the diocesan development.

The control of the Party

To conclude this article, I think it is not appropriate to neglect the influence of political impact on the Church in China. Actually, the government has never given up her ambition of controlling the Church. They are still sticking to the strategy as they did in the first thirty years, but just doing it the other way round. New and advancing technology have not changed the government’s attitude towards the social and non-government group but just reinforcing their ability of control. It seems that the party and the government still do not trust the Church. In fact the control asserted by the government and the party is simply unnecessary. The government should not be afraid of the Church. Even without the government’s interference, the Catholic Church already has many difficulties to tackle. The government should show some mercy to the Church.

*** Expert from the Holy Spirit Study Center of the Diocese of Hong Kong**

November 12, 2009 | CH08207.1575

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- A former "underground" Chinese bishop says he decided to take a leading role in the government-approved Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) to foster unity in Baoding diocese.

Coadjutor Bishop Francis An Shuxin was made one of the five vice-chairpersons of the local CPA, a Church administration body, and director of the Church Affairs Committee (CAC) in July.

In one of the first discussions of his reasons since accepting the posts, the Baoding prelate told UCA News recently that he hoped it would help normalize Church life in the southern diocese in Hebei, the province that mostly surrounds Beijing.

Bishop An, 60, said he felt helpless over the "cruel" divisions in the Church community there and hoped that by taking positions in the government-sanctioned bodies he could "facilitate the diocese's development."

The coadjutor assumed the new positions almost three years after he was released from a decade of detention and allowed to work openly.

He had been under house arrest since 1996, when he was detained during crackdowns on the underground Catholic community, which rejects affiliation with government-approved administrative bodies for the Church.

His decision has generated controversy both within China and outside the country.

Pope Benedict XVI, in a letter to Chinese Catholics in 2007, said that "state agencies" exercising control over the Church independently of the Vatican is "incompatible with Catholic doctrine."

Bishop An maintains that even though the CPA is a state agency, the involvement of bishops and priests holding key posts will effectively bring it within the Church structure and help preserve the faith and the Church's interests.

"We remain obedient to the Pope in faith and Church doctrine. I did not promise anything except taking up the CPA position," he stated.

Bishops head the local CPA in most mainland dioceses.

"You cannot work normally if you don't get the government's recognition, as other bishops have found in their dioceses," the Baoding Church leader added.

Bishop An acknowledged that some "underground" priests and laypeople found it hard to understand his move.

"I refused to join the CPA at first after I was released in 2006," he recounted. "I changed my mind after reading the pope's letter."

The prelate pointed out that the letter leaves the matter of registering with civil authorities

to individual bishops to decide, in consultation with their priests and after evaluating the consequences.

According to Bishop An, he has reported to the Vatican from time to time on the diocese's situation and has received back affirmation from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples on his efforts for reconciliation in Baoding diocese.

Father Joseph Yang Yicun, chairperson of the Baoding CPA, told UCA News that local government officials have reported to the State Administration for Religious Affairs on the bishop's decision to join the CPA. He expects the prelate to be given lawful status soon.

About 30 open clergy recognize Bishop An's authority in the diocese. About 60 underground priests work covertly in its territory. Some secretly obey Bishop An, while the rest refuse his leadership now that he has joined the open Church community.

Bishop James Su Zhimin (Zhemin) of Baoding, 77, was detained in October 1997 and has not been released. He appeared briefly in a hospital in November 2003, but there has been no news about him since then.

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CHINA Baoding bishop explains departure from 'underground' Church

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CHINA - VATICAN

Underground bishop: I joined the Patriotic Association for the good of the Church

by Zhen Yuan

Mgr. An Shuxin says he was not pressured by the Vatican for his choice. In front of the division created in the diocese of Baoding, priests and experts are asking the Vatican and China to free the ordinary Bishop Su Zhimin, in prison for the past 13 years.

Beijing (AsiaNews) - "I joined the Patriotic Association (PA) for the good of the diocese and the urgent need to evangelize," so says Mgr. Francis An Shuxin, coadjutor bishop of Baoding. Speaking to AsiaNews he explains his decision to join the official Church and his acceptance of a post within the PA, after decades in hiding and 10 years of captivity in an unknown location, in the hands of police.

Mgr An made the choice in late July when he joined the government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) and the Catholic Church Administrative Commission (CCAC) of Baoding city. The bishop was released from prison in July 2006 and August 2006 had begun to carry out his ministry in the official Church. Speaking to AsiaNews by telephone, Mgr. An clarifies that his joining the two organizations did not involve the signing of documents, but only a verbal agreement.

Recently, some of his priests have expressed their grief and puzzles over the diocese's leadership and current situation. The Patriotic Association is an organization whose ideal is to build a Church independent from the Holy See and Benedict XVI himself, in his Letter to Chinese Catholics (June 2007), notes that objective as "incompatible with Catholic doctrine."

The purpose of his joining of CPA at a city level, he said, was to assume a position for a better management of the diocese so that the local Church can function normally, in accord with the country's religious policy of the country. "I hope the diocese can develop well" and meet the needs of the diocese to evangelize, he noted.

As a bishop, he wants to function openly, and those positions can help him better manage Church affairs, such as restoration of Church properties, he noted. Furthermore, he said, the Holy See has recognized many bishops on the mainland who have CPA titles, he noted. Prior to his joining the CPA, he did not communicate with the Holy See on this issue, he said.

Prior to this, sources in the Vatican and Baoding had told AsiaNews that the bishop had been pushed to the officer by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, which has categorically denied any these charges (See 29/10/2009 In Hebei, underground bishop joins Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association 03/11/2009 Sorrow and debate greet case of Msgr. An Shuxin).

AsiaNews asked Msgr. An whether he would attend the postponed National Assembly of the Catholic Representatives Conference in China once convened. In this assembly the national president of the PA and the chairman of the Council of Bishops (a sort of Episcopal conference of the official bishops not recognized by the Vatican) are voted for. Many bishops boycott it because the assembly is "incompatible with Catholic doctrine." The PA's intention is to make sure that the chosen candidate of obedient to its will and is waiting to bend the bishops under its control, so it continues to delay (by almost two years) the date of the meeting.

Bishop An said the assembly is for someone with titles, and he is not one of those.

However, many Catholics and Church-in-China experts disagreed to Bishop An's move to join the PA, regardless of his reasons and considerations, since it contravenes the principles laid down in the papal letter of 2007. "If necessary, I will quit the CPA," Bishop An said.

Resentment towards Mgr. An is heightened by the fact that the ordinary bishop of Baoding, Mgr. James Su Zhimin has disappeared in police custody since 1996. He was seen only briefly in a hospital in November 2003 and until a few days ago it was not even known if he was still alive. But exactly where he and some arrested priests are being held, is still unknown.

Some priests in Hebei (the region of Baoding) accuse Mgr. An of not having made his choice together with Mgr. Su. They point out that Mgr. An should have left hiding (and prison) only with Mgr. Su. But Bishop An says "I have no means to see him (Bishop Su). He is under strict house arrest".

To heal the divisions among Catholics in Baoding, some think Bishop. Su Zhimin must be freed. Anthony Lam Sui-ki, senior researcher of the Holy Spirit Study Centre, says it is "very unfortunate" that Bishop An joined the PA, particularly after the papal letter to Chinese Catholics. At the same time Lam told AsiaNews that the release of Bishop Su could restore the divided situation of Baoding diocese.

Likewise, an open-Church priest Joseph from Hebei, who was in the underground Church before, thinks "Bishop Su can comfort the heart of the underground community of Baoding and clear the name of Bishop An. Then the change can take place."

Father Joseph says that "mutual forgiveness and dialogue among Catholics in Baoding is what they must do. China-Vatican negotiators can only reach an agreement in negotiation times, this is very important of course, but this is external matter only. The China-Vatican authorities must come to agreement to let Bishop Su out first."

Regarding the difficulties that Baoding diocese faces, Bishop An stated he did not cause the problem and has no means to mend the situation. He said some priests cannot cooperate with him, probably because they "cannot put down their old concept" to accept the "new" ones to work openly and normally. Yet, he remains open but will neither find them nor "reject" anyone to return.

He sees the hope of Baoding rests upon the efforts of local Catholics to make the Church a better one and with deeper spiritual growth. "I pray for God's guidance everyday," he said, calling for prayers for Baoding diocese.

OPINION

Criticism leveled at bishop An Shu Xin of Baoding

I read the article of Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism on Bp. An Shu Xin with great interest. I could not agree more with the opinions and the attitude expressed in that article.

Very recently we, as Dutch pilgrims in China, were allowed an interview with Msgr. An

Shu Xin. I can still see his tormented face before me when he told us about his conscientious decision to take this step, and the reproach which some people, also from outside China, now level at him. We saw the pain in his face when he told us that he was being called a traitor. We were deeply impressed by his story. He looked at us with eyes in which a fear that we too would reproach him, could be seen. A brief silence followed. I was moved and did not know what to say. Perhaps it was the Holy Spirit that prompted me to say: “Monsignor, I respect your conscientious choice and I admire your courage to be willing to suffer for the sake of faith and of the church”.

What I learned in China, in meetings with quite a few bishops and faithful, is that choice for the underground church or the official church is not a choice for a life with or without suffering. Neither is the distinction between official or underground church a choice for or against fidelity to the world church and the pope. All the official bishops that we met professed their fidelity to Rome. I can still hear a bishop with conviction telling a large group of seminarians: “There is only one Catholic Church”. Several times during our journey did we experience what it means to have to live under Chinese circumstances of severe control. When asked about my judgment regarding the official bishops who became members of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, I regularly and consistently answered: “Who are we, as outsiders, to make judgments about conscientious decisions which the faithful, priests, and bishops have to make in such difficult and complex situations?”. Why the faithful out of fidelity to Rome sometimes opt for the underground church and at other times for the official church, is beyond our understanding, because we do not know the concrete circumstances in which they live and believe. The only thing we can show them is respect for their doubtless difficult decision of conscience. A choice for either of the two does demand enormous courage. Each criticism from outside China of such decisions of conscience increases their suffering and plays into the hands of the political leaders. The energetic official bishops that we met give me a solid trust in them to, in their own words: “solve their internal problems themselves”. Division creating criticism from abroad does not contribute to it, precisely because China is so sensitive to each foreign criticism.

What the Catholic faithful of both the underground and the official church expect from the Catholic faith community is to stand with them in unity and reconciliation, to respect their choices, and to be united with them in prayer.

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OPINION

by Fr Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm

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Respect and Prayerful Support for

Most Rev. Francis AN Shu Xin - Coadjutor Bishop of Bao Ding Diocese

Recently, there have been widely circulated and conflicting reports about the situation of Bishop AN Shu Xin, Coadjutor bishop of the Baoding Diocese in He Bei Province, China. Whether we agree or disagree with Bishop AN Shu Xin’s purported move to have recently

accepted membership in the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, [CCPA], as a zealous Pastor who has long witnessed his fidelity to the Holy See, Bishop AN deserves not only our prayerful support, but complete respect for his pastoral judgments. I doubt whether those outside China who criticize Bishop An have ever met him. I know the bishop personally well and had several long conversations with him in recent years. I have learned to respect him and to understand the complexity of his situation. In any case, before making any public criticism one should be better informed. Did Bishop An really sign any document? And if he did, what was the content of the document and how is “membership” in this case understood? The interpretation of this word in China is often quite different from what is understood in Italy or in other countries outside of China. We all are far removed from the harsh realities under which many Church leaders have lived in China for decades. At very least, we in the Sister Churches abroad must refrain from setting out our own non-negotiable terms and conditions for their ministry and thereby increasing the heavy burdens they already bear.

Since the time of Pius XII in 1958 and more recently since the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI's, all Chinese Catholics know very well that being a member of the CCPA is “incompatible with Catholic Faith”. They know this Association seeks to separate the Chinese Catholic Church from the Pope and in effect, to establish a Catholic Church in China completely independent of the Holy See. This is why all of us in the Sister Churches around the world admire the courage of Catholics in China, some of whom because of this incompatibility cited by the Holy Father, long ago opted to remain in “underground communities” enduring all the opprobrium and suffering entailed. This is the great and historically meritorious contribution to the Chinese Church of the so-called “unofficial bishops” and the faithful under their jurisdiction. It is also the road long followed by Bishop AN Shu Xin.

At the same time, also since 1958, Catholics inside of China have long sought yet another way to assure the viability and future of their Church. Some bishops opted to follow this third way and succeeded very well. They perfunctorily accepted to be members of the CCPA, not because they freely chose, but because they were compelled to do so. It was commonly understood that they paid mere lip-service to the Association in order to carve out space for the Church to not only re-emerge in open society, but to expand, grow and develop in every dimension – both as a community of faith and as an ecclesial institution. Without the courageous stand of the “unofficial Church community” on one side and that of the “official Church community” on the other the Church in China would not be what it is today; nor could it have offered to the Universal Church such a sterling witness of meritorious sacrifice and fidelity to the Universal Church. When speaking about the Church in China, one must always take into consideration this dual reality - thereby avoiding gross errors in judgment based on a biased and partial view.

In most cases, after being named Bishop by the PRC government, many priests who were appointed ‘official bishops’, succeeded in secretly securing validation and approval of their appointments from the Pope prior to Episcopal ordination. Among these so called “official bishops”, all per force members of the CCPA, were a few very highly respected and famous Pastors known to us all. It is unnecessary to rehearse their names here; we all remember “Bp X, Bp Y, Bp Z” ... and we remember them with respect. They were loved by tens of thousands of Catholics, by bishops and by many priests and religious. We need only recall reports of the thousands of Catholic faithful who filled cathedrals and even rural graveyards, to participate in each of their funerals! These Pastors gave a magnificent witness and service to their Church! It is also well known that even the recent Popes and

past and present officials of the Holy See, through these decades, admired the testimonies of both the “unofficial” and “official communities in China. Of course, it is inconceivable that the Holy See would ever have encouraged these official Bishops to freely become members of the CCPA. In the same way, despite questionable news reports of late, it is also inconceivable that the Holy See would have encouraged Bp. An Shu Xin of Baoding to accept membership in the CCPA. It is unjust and a grave failure in charity to spread such accusations in the media, thereby causing serious harm to the Chinese Catholic Church, and in effect, exacerbating its suffering and existing internal divisions.

Most all Chinese Catholics - [and even government officials!] - know in their hearts that these so called “official bishops” have remained faithful to the Holy See; as admonished by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, they strive to be good Chinese citizens, patriotically serving their country. Those outside of China, who truly have the cause of the Catholic Church in China at heart, need to walk in the shoes of their Chinese sisters and brothers in the Faith, to listen with their hearts, to see with their eyes to open their minds to understand from their perspective, the reasons why these bishops took the path they did.

As we all respected and admired the well known “official” Bishops who went before him so too Bishop AN Shu Xin deserves our respect and admiration. Naturally, just as we never agreed that “Bps X, Y and Z“ should be members of the CCPA, so too at this juncture, we cannot agree in principle - [if reports are true] - that Bishop AN has joined the CCPA as a condition of his being openly recognized by the PRC authorities. At the same time we question the wisdom of certain articles in the media quoting “Vatican sources” without further specifying them. Nonetheless, whoever would venture to speak publically about the Church in China must take into account the merits of both China Church communities [“underground and “official”] and the harsh reality in which both sides have been forced to live for many, many years. Whoever professes to follow the instructions of Pope Benedict XVI – seeking to foster reconciliation and unity in the Chinese Catholic Church -- must understand the extreme ambiguity in which this Church lives. In solidarity and in union of prayer, we must all respect the judgments and ecclesial decisions of these courageous Pastors in China who bear the heat of the day. Above all, we must refrain from imposing our own judgments on situations and people of whom we cannot have first-hand knowledge. Once again it is the letter of Pope Benedict XVI to the Church in China which shows us the way as he discusses such situations (cfr Par. 7): “...all this should be lived out in communion and in fraternal understanding, avoiding judgments and mutual condemnations....” and “..in order to evaluate the morality of an act it is necessary to devote particular care to establishing the real intentions of the person concerned, in addition to the objective shortcoming. Every case, then, will have to be pondered individually, taking account of the circumstances.” “Judge not and you shall not be judged”. That is the spirit of Pope Benedict XVI’s letter. That letter and its compendium remain the guidelines which we all follow.

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Agenzia Fides - www.fides.org
VATICAN

Press Release of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In recent days, news has circulated regarding the situation of the Diocese of Baoding (Hebei), mainland China, especially regarding Coadjutor Bishop

Francis An Shuxin.

These news speak of a letter addressed to the Prelate from the Holy See, in regards to his concelebration with an illegitimate bishop and attributes the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples with having authorized the concelebration and of having pressured Bishop An to emerge from a clandestine condition, registering himself with the Patriotic Association.

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples completely rejects such affirmations as deprived of any foundations whatsoever. Vatican City, 31 October 2009. (Agenzia Fides 3/11/2009)

**Agenzia Fides - www.fides.org
ASIA/CHINA**

“Best Evangelizers” awards distributed on Mission Sunday at the parish of Wu An, Diocese of Han Dan; missions mandate conferred in parish of Liu He, Diocese of Tai Yuan

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – The awards for the “Best Evangelizers” and the conferring of the missions mandate to transmit the Light of evangelization of the Lord Jesus, were part of the celebrations that marked World Mission Sunday in many Chinese Catholic communities throughout the world. According to information sent to Agenzia Fides, October 18 was celebrated with great missionary enthusiasm, in accord with the Pope's Message on the occasion, entitled “The nations shall walk in its light.”

The parish of Wu An, of the Diocese of Han Dan, Province of He Bei, gave out awards to the “Best Evangelizers of the Year” on the day. Some 70 people, of all different ages, received a Cross and a prize, for a mission well done. According to the priest director of the missions in the Diocese, “we are now going to improve our catechesis, to improve the quality of evangelization.”

The parish of Liu He, in the Diocese of Tai Yuan, in the Province of Shan Xi, has renewed its missions mandate on Mission Sunday. During the Mass that day, the priest called for further missionary zeal among the faithful, that “each one of us may assume his own missionary responsibility. There are still to many people thirsting for Jesus, for His saving message.” After the conferring of the missions mandate and the imposition of the hands by the concelebrants, the group was sent on its way to evangelize and transmit the Lord's Light. To respond to these concrete demands of the local mission, the community has collected over 200,000 Yuan (nearly 22,000 Euros) to build two chapels: one of 70 sq. meters for a village that had nothing and another in the village of Dong Mu Zhuang, which is about to be finished. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 21/10/2009)

**To all the Priests
of the Catholic Church
in the People’s Republic of China**

N. 6190/09/RS From the Vatican, 10 November 2009

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,

The Year of the Priesthood, a gift of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, which we are celebrating on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the “Dies Natalis” of John Mary Vianney, prompts me to address you, the priests of the Church in China, in a particular way.

1. An invitation to hope. In the Letter that the Holy Father addressed to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful in the People’s Republic of China on 27 May 2007, a number of guidelines are indicated for the future journey of the Church. Among those I wish to emphasise reconciliation within the Catholic community and a respectful and constructive dialogue with the Civil Authorities, without renouncing the principles of the Catholic faith. In this regard, despite the persisting difficulties, the information that has come from different parts of China points also to signs of hope.

To face the present ecclesial and socio-political situation in which you are living, and to make progress on the path of reconciliation and dialogue, it is urgent for each of you to draw light and strength from the sources of priestly spirituality, which are the love of God and the unconditional following of Christ.

At a distance of only two years since the publication of the Papal Letter, it does not seem that the time has come to make definitive evaluations. Using the words of the great missionary of China, Father Matteo Ricci, I believe we can say that it is still more a time of sowing than of reaping.

Perhaps some of you were surprised by the Letter of the Pope to the Church in China. I assure you that the Holy See is aware of the complex and difficult situation in which you find yourselves. When he opened the Year of the Priesthood the Holy Father invited all the priests of the world to “welcome the new springtime which the Spirit is now bringing about in the Church”. This is true also for you: the new challenges, which the Chinese people must face at the beginning of the Third Millennium, ask of you to open yourselves with confidence to the future and to continue trying to live the Christian faith integrally.

2. Proclaiming Christ. Dear Brother Priests, you are pastors of the People of God in a geographically and demographically vast country. As the little flock in the midst of a great multitude of persons, you live side by side with the followers of other religions and with persons who are indifferent or indeed hostile towards God and towards religion. Do not think that you are alone in having to face such a problem. In fact, you share the same situation of many of your brothers in other parts of the world, who “even amid difficulties and incomprehension, remain faithful to their vocation as “friends of Christ”, whom he has called by name, chosen and sent” (Letter for the Proclamation of the Year of the Priesthood). The observation of Pope Benedict XVI also holds for you: “There are also, sad to say, situations which can never be sufficiently deplored where the Church herself suffers as a consequence of infidelity on the part of some of her ministers. Then it is the world which finds grounds for scandal and rejection. What is most helpful to the Church in such cases is not only a frank and complete acknowledgment of the weaknesses of her

ministers, but also a joyful and renewed realization of the greatness of God's gift, embodied in the splendid example of generous pastors, religious afire with love for God and for souls, and insightful, patient spiritual guides" (Letter for the Proclamation of the Year of the Priesthood). And for you in China "How can I fail to recall, in this regard, as an encouragement for all, the shining examples of Bishops and priests who, in the difficult years of the recent past, have testified to an unflinching love for the Church, even by the gift of their own lives for her and for Christ?" (Letter to the Church in China, n. 13). Often, when we look at the world around us, we are dismayed. How many people there are to feed! Where can we find the bread for all this people? How can I, with all my limitations, help Jesus in his mission? Once again the Holy Father, in commenting on the text of the Gospel of John (6: 1 – 15) reminds us of the response of the Lord: "By taking in his 'holy and venerable' hands the little that they are, priests, we priests, become instruments of salvation for many, for everyone!" (Angelus, 26 July 2009). There are various practical ways in which you can make your valuable contribution: for example, by visiting Catholic and non-Catholic families frequently, as well as villages, showing your concern for people's needs; by increasing efforts to prepare and train good catechists; by fostering greater use of charitable services directed especially to children and to sick and old people, in order to show the Church's unselfish charity; by organising special gatherings where Catholics could invite their non-Catholic relatives and friends in order to become better acquainted with the Catholic Church and Christian faith; by distributing Catholic literature to non-Catholics.

3. The priestly virtues. In the school of Saint John Mary Vianney we must learn to identify ourselves with the ministry we have received. In Christ, this identification was total: "In Jesus, person and mission tend to coincide: all Christ's saving activity was, and is, an expression of his 'filial consciousness' which from all eternity stands before the Father in an attitude of loving submission to his will" (Letter for the Proclamation of the Year of the Priesthood). It is from the identification with his own ministry that all the virtues necessary for every priest originate.

The saintly Curé of Ars knew how to dialogue with everyone, because he was a man of prayer: the art of dialogue, at whatever level, is learned in the dialogue with God, in continual and sincere prayer. He lived poverty with extreme rigour, because he held that everything he received was for his church, his poor, his most disadvantaged families. Also he saw his chastity as required of a priest for his ministry: it was the chastity appropriate for one who habitually had to touch the Eucharist. We also know how tormented he was from the thought of his own inadequacy for the parochial ministry and by the desire to escape: only obedience and the passion for souls succeeded in convincing him to remain at his post. The golden rule for an obedient life seemed to him to be this: "Do only what can be offered to the good Lord".

4. The Eucharist. In this Year of the Priesthood, I wish to remind you of the source where you can find the strength to be faithful to your important mission. And I wish to do so with the words of Pope Benedict XVI: in the Church "every great reform has in some way been linked to the rediscovery of belief in the Lord's eucharistic presence among his people" (Letter to the Church in China, n. 5, note 20).

The celebration of the Paschal Mystery reveals the agape, that is, the love of God, that love that defeats evil and, therefore, changes evil to good, hatred to love. Through the sharing in

the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist - the Holy Father has reminded us – that divine energy “comes to us corporally to continue his working in us and through us” (Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est, n. 14). United to Christ in the Eucharist, we become agents of the true transformation of hearts (cf. Deus Caritas Est, nn. 13-14). As the saintly Curé of Ars said: “all the good works together are not equal to the Sacrifice of the Mass, because they are the works of men, while the Holy Mass is the work of God.

The Eucharist, sacrament of communion, source and summit of ecclesial life and evangelisation, is at the centre of your journey of reconciliation. The Eucharist, even if celebrated in a particular community, is never the celebration of that community alone. A truly Eucharistic community cannot retreat into itself, as though it were self-sufficient, but it must stay in communion with every other catholic community. In fact, every celebration of the Eucharist presupposes the union not only with the local Bishop but also with the Pope, the order of Bishops, all the clergy and the entire People of God.

Saint Paul, writing to the Christians of Corinth, showed how their divisions, which were made manifest in the Eucharistic assemblies, were in contrast with what they were celebrating, the Supper of the Lord. Consequently, the Apostle invited them to reflect on the true reality of the Eucharist, in order to bring them back to the spirit of fraternal communion (cf. 1 Cor 11: 17-34).

Pope John Paul II reminded us that the Eucharist creates communion and teaches communion. And Benedict XVI, echoing this teaching, has given some directives concerning the reception of the Sacraments in the present situation of the Church in China (cf. Letter to the Church in China, n. 10). These directives are rooted “in the promotion of communion” and in “charity, that is always above all”: they are also recalled in the “Compendium” of the same Papal letter which was published by the Holy See on 24 May 2009.

5. The Word of God. May I also remind you once again, dear Priests, of the words of the Holy Father Benedict XVI: “In today’s world, as in the troubled times of the Curé of Ars, the lives and activity of priests need to be distinguished by a determined witness to the Gospel. As Pope Paul VI rightly noted, ‘modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses’. Lest we experience existential emptiness and the effectiveness of our ministry be compromised, we need to ask ourselves ever anew: ‘Are we truly pervaded by the word of God? Is that word truly the nourishment we live by, even more than bread and the things of this world? Do we really know that word? Do we love it? Are we deeply engaged with this word to the point that it really leaves a mark on our lives and shapes our thinking?’. Just as Jesus called the Twelve to be with him (cf. Mk 3:14), and only later sent them forth to preach, so too in our days priests are called to assimilate that ‘new style of life’ which was inaugurated by the Lord Jesus and taken up by the Apostles” (Letter for the Proclamation of the Year of the Priesthood).

6. The task of Bishops. Dear Priests, at this point allow me to address a few words also to your Bishops, who have received the fullness of the priesthood. To you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I would like to recall that your priests’ journey towards holiness has been entrusted to your attentive pastoral care. If one thinks of the social and cultural conditions of today’s world, it is easy to understand how the danger of dispersion in a great number of

different tasks weigh on priests.

Daily experience shows that the seeds of disintegration among people are deeply rooted in humanity as a result of sin, but the Church can offer in response the power of the Body of Christ to bring about unity. The Second Vatican Council has identified pastoral charity as the bond that gives unity to the life and activity of priests.

7. Pastoral activity in favour of priestly vocations. As the Holy Father reminded you, “during the last fifty years, the Church in China has never lacked an abundant flowering of vocations to the priesthood and to consecrated life. For this we must thank the Lord, because it is a sign of vitality and a reason for hope. [...] this flowering is accompanied, today, by not a few difficulties. The need therefore emerges both for more careful vocational discernment on the part of Church leaders, and for more in-depth education and instruction of aspirants to the priesthood and religious life. Notwithstanding the precariousness of the means available, for the future of the Church in China it will be necessary to take steps to ensure, on the one hand, particular attention in the care of vocations and, on the other hand, a more solid formation with regard to the human, spiritual, philosophical-theological and pastoral aspects, to be carried out in seminaries and religious institutes” (Letter to the Church in China, n. 14).

May the celebration of the Year of the Priesthood be therefore an occasion to launch initiatives to support the life of your seminarians. Thereby, dear Bishops, you will be able to devote particular attention to their formation by visiting them in the seminaries and showing deep concern about the training that they receive there, both on a spiritual and academic level. Besides, your paternal solicitude will suggest to you, according to the possibilities and conditions of each diocese, suitable initiatives for promoting vocations to the priesthood, such as prayer days and meetings or the opening of places where priests and faithful, especially the young, can come to pray together under the guidance of expert and good priests acting as spiritual directors.

8. Ongoing formation. The Holy Father Benedict XVI realises that “in China too, as in the rest of the Church, the need for an adequate ongoing formation of the clergy is emerging. Hence the invitation, addressed to you Bishops as leaders of ecclesial communities, to think especially of the young clergy who are increasingly subject to new pastoral challenges, linked to the demands of the task of evangelizing a society as complex as present-day Chinese society. Pope John Paul II reminded us of this: ongoing formation of priests «is an intrinsic requirement of the gift and sacramental ministry received; and it proves necessary in every age. It is particularly urgent today, not only because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions of individuals and peoples among whom priestly ministry is exercised, but also because of that ‘new evangelization’ which constitutes the essential and pressing task of the Church at the end of the second millennium»” (Letter to the Church in China, n. 13).

Every Bishop, in communion with his brother Bishops of neighbouring dioceses, should concern himself with organising and personally following serious programmes of ongoing formation. Particular attention should be paid to young priests, who frequently have to work alone soon after ordination. They often feel isolated, with heavy responsibilities. Bishops should attend not only to their ongoing formation but also should ensure that they are welcomed and helped by the older clergy. Moreover, it would also be useful if Bishops and priests could find frequent occasions for personal contacts among themselves, and increase both official and informal meetings in order to plan diocesan activities together, share their experience and help one another in solving personal and pastoral difficulties.

9. Eucharistic worship. The saintly Curé of Ars teaches us that the worship given to the Eucharist outside of Mass is of inestimable value in the life of every priest. This worship is closely joined to the celebration of the Eucharist. It is your task as Pastors to encourage Eucharistic worship, either by personal testimony or by organising a weekly hour of adoration, processions, etc, on both the diocesan and parish levels. In this way, the faithful could gather around the Eucharist and experience ecclesial communion.

To this proposal I would like to remind you of what Pope John Paul II left us almost by way of a testament: “It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the «art of prayer», how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brothers and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support!” (Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 25).

10. The spiritual reconciliation of hearts. What can you do in the face of the enduring divisions and miseries also present within the Catholic community? If we are united in the Eucharistic Christ, all of the miseries of the world echo in our hearts to implore the mercy of God. In the same way, we raise up a hymn of praise and thanksgiving for all the beautiful things of creation, for the good works of men and for the countless gifts of grace which the Lord pours out on humanity: the heart opens wide to a greater love, which takes on the breath of that of Christ who died and rose from the dead.

We should not forget that even “from the start the community of the disciples has known not only the joy of the Holy Spirit, the grace of truth and love, but also trials that are constituted above all by disagreements about the truths of faith, with the consequent wounds to communion. Just as the fellowship of love has existed since the outset and will continue to the end (cf. 1 Jn 1:1ff.), so also, from the start, division unfortunately arose. We should not be surprised that it still exists today” (Letter to the Church in China, n. 6).

In the first letter to the Corinthians, regarding the divisions existing in its communities, Saint Paul wrote: “For there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognised.” (1 Cor 11:19). Everything forms part of God’s plan, so that all may serve his omnipotence, which is wisdom and infinite love. At this time may no one hesitate to seek reconciliation with concrete gestures, to extend the hand to the brother who “has something against you” (cf. Matt 5:23-24). In order to obtain it, there is an urgent need to pay attention also to the human formation of all the faithful, priests and sisters included, because the lack of human maturity, self-control and inner harmony is the most frequent source of misunderstandings, lack of cooperation and conflicts within Catholic communities.

11. The agencies of communion. In the perspective of the “ecclesiology of communion”, the central and fundamental thought of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, it seems opportune to draw your attention to what canonical legislation provides for the fostering of the pastoral task of Bishops and the growth of the diocesan community: “Every diocesan Bishop is invited to make use of indispensable instruments of communion and cooperation within the diocesan Catholic community: the diocesan curia, the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, the diocesan pastoral council and the diocesan finance council. These agencies express communion, they favour the sharing of common responsibilities and are of great assistance to the Pastors, who can thus avail themselves of the fraternal cooperation

of priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful” (Letter to the Church in China, n. 10). When the entire diocesan curia cannot be set up due to the shortage of priests, Bishops should at least start to diversify the roles by gradually appointing a vicar general, chancellor, procurator, etc, in order to have someone at hand for consultation and cooperation in making juridical and pastoral decisions.

I wish to conclude my letter by expressing and entrusting to the Most Blessed Virgin the wish that your priestly life may be guided more and more by those ideals of the total giving of oneself to Christ and to the Church which inspired the thought and action of the saintly Curé of Ars.

United with you in prayer and in the hope that your pastoral work will bear a rich harvest, I remain,

**Yours in the Lord
Tarcisio Card. Bertone
Secretary of State**

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

CHINA Mainland clergy welcome Vatican letter

November 18, 2009 | CH08233.1576

BEIJING (UCAN) -- Priests in mainland China say they appreciate the Vatican's recent letter to them, while pointing out at the same time the challenges faced by the "underground" and government-approved Church communities.

Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone's letter, written for the Year for Priests, was published in the Vatican's Fides Service and Vatican Radio websites on Nov. 16. It was believed to be a result of the meeting of the Holy See's Commission for the Catholic Church in China in late March.

Half of the meeting was devoted to the formation of seminarians, priests and Religious.

The document, dated Nov. 10, reiterates the importance of reconciliation within the Catholic community and reminded the clergy to find strength from the Eucharist. It also advised bishops to ensure adequate formation for their priests.

Father John Li Hongwei of Changsha, from the "open" Church community, said the letter was timely and useful in helping priests learn how to act according to the Gospel.

Since Changsha diocese has had no bishop for nine years, his fellow priests have tended to work independently with little cooperation among themselves. Such lack of unity has caused many problems, he said.

Father Paul Bai Chunlong of Jilin, also from the open Church community, appreciated the cardinal's reminder to bishops to pay "particular attention" to young priests working alone soon after ordination.

"Sometimes when attention and care are inadequate, priests can face many temptations," said Father Bai, who teaches at the diocesan seminary in northeastern China.

The priest, who is in his 30s, said he welcomed the section in the letter asking priests to emulate the dedication of Saint John Mary Vianney, patron of parish priests, to his priestly ministry.

Commenting on the letter's emphasis on "reconciliation within the Catholic community" in China, he believes bishops from both Church communities should take the lead by contacting and accepting one other. "Three of my primary schoolmates became underground priests and we lost contact. But now we phone each other and meet up regularly," he said.

Father John Baptist of Mindong diocese's underground community said he was touched by the cardinal's concerns for priests in China.

He observed that both clergy and laypeople have become very secular in outlook, thus they especially need spiritual formation. Most mainland priests are also not well educated and some even lack proper seminary training.

However, he noted that the older bishops lack the energy to mentor the younger priests, while the younger bishops find it hard to command the same kind of respect from priests in the same age group.

CHINA-PRIESTS Nov-16-2009 (670 words) xxxi

Church in China is showing signs of hope, cardinal tells priests

**By Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service**

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- While there are signs of hope for Catholics in China, today is still "more a time of sowing than of reaping," said the Vatican secretary of state in a letter to priests in China.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone said efforts for reconciliation within the Catholic community and for "a respectful and constructive dialogue" with government authorities in China have led to signs of hope despite the "persisting difficulties."

However, even two years after the publication of Pope Benedict XVI's letter to the Church in China, "it does not seem that the time has come to make definitive evaluations," wrote the cardinal. "I believe we can say that it is still more a time of sowing than of reaping."

To help mark the Year for Priests, Cardinal Bertone sent a letter to all priests of the Catholic Church in China. Dated Nov. 10, the letter was released to journalists by the Vatican Nov. 16.

The cardinal touched on the many duties and challenges facing priests and how pastors in China could better minister to their people and continue efforts for reconciliation with Catholic clergy who are recognized by the government but have not requested recognition from the pope.

Catholics in China are "a tiny flock" among a large number of people who either believe in other religions or are indifferent or even hostile toward God and religion, he wrote.

It can be easy for clergy to be overwhelmed by all that they must do, the letter said.

Yet there are some very practical ways priests can make a valuable contribution, he said, for example:

-- "By visiting Catholic and non-Catholic families frequently, as well as villages, and showing your concern for people's needs.

-- "By increasing efforts to prepare and train good catechists.

-- "By fostering greater use of charitable services directed especially to children and to sick and old people in order to show the church's unselfish charity.

-- "By organizing special gatherings where Catholics could invite their non-Catholic relatives and friends in order to become better acquainted with the Catholic Church and Christian faith.

-- "By distributing Catholic literature to non-Catholics."

In his letter, Cardinal Bertone told priests that the Eucharist is a crucial source of strength for carrying out their ministry and is "at the center of your journey of reconciliation."

"The Eucharist, even if celebrated in a particular community, is never the celebration of that community alone," he wrote.

A truly Eucharistic community is not a closed, self-sufficient community but "must stay in communion with every other Catholic community," the letter said.

"In fact, every celebration of the Eucharist presupposes the union not only with the local bishop but also with the pope, the order of bishops, all the clergy and the entire people of God," Cardinal Bertone wrote.

The cardinal's remarks elaborate on a point made in the May 2009 Vatican compendium to the pope's letter to Chinese Catholics concerning the wide latitude individual Catholics have in deciding whether or not to receive the sacraments from bishops and priests who are recognized by the government but have not requested recognition from the pope.

The compendium said if Catholics cannot find pastors in communion with the pope and if they feel they need the sacraments at that moment for their spiritual good, the final decision on whether or not to receive them is up to the individual.

In his letter to Catholic priests, Cardinal Bertone said the church has experienced internal

divisions since its very beginnings.

"Everything forms part of God's plan, so that all may serve his omnipotence, which is wisdom and infinite love. At this time may no one hesitate to seek reconciliation with concrete gestures, to extend the hand to the brother who 'has something against you,'" he wrote.

There is an urgent need to help the faithful, including religious, deepen their Christian formation "because the lack of human maturity, self-control and inner harmony is the most frequent source of misunderstandings, lack of cooperation and conflicts within Catholic communities," he wrote.

END

From: Janet Carroll*Temp* <Janet.Carroll*Temp*@shu.edu>

Date: Fri, 13 Nov 2009 15:14:50 -0500

Subject: RE: AsiaNews: After 60 years of communism, Church in China faces most critical moment

To: ChinaInfoDoc:

Response to Anthony LAM: AsiaNews 11/13/2009

I am grateful to Anthony Lam for his insights on the Church in China in what he terms this "most critical moment". However, I would suggest the challenges facing the Church in China are not only external forces. There are internal forces also. For example, the sad divisions illustrated by the recent controversy surrounding the courageous decision of Bishop AN ShuXin of Baoding to come out to work in the open Church. [cf. InfoDoc CH08207.1575 of 12 November 2009.]

The four points Lam cites to illustrate his concerns while well taken, lack adequate documentation to support his opinions. **Re: the first problem cited: declining number of Catholics: truly, only God knows how many Catholics there are in China. However, the pastoral issue of ministry to internal migrants is a real challenge calling for strategic response.**

We would all also benefit by much more nuance of the other three problems cited.

Second: shortage of vocations: no one should be surprised that the vocation bubble burst in China - as it has in the West. The challenge is the nurturing vocations by serious attention to on-going formation. This is already recognized and steps are being taken to address it in the so called "official" Church communities; but it needs to be attended in every community.

Thirdly, in my experience, I do not find that "the Bishops are too young" In today's society, leaders in most sectors are men - [almost always men!] - in the same age cohort as many of China's more recently ordained Bishops. An added compensation is that many of these younger men have had much more sophisticated theological education, priestly formation and pastoral training to carry on their responsibilities. [I am unclear on the meaning of the last sentence here: "... how to handle existing episcopal vacancies not at the

cost of the diocesan development" ??

Fourth, very careful nuance is necessary to address the problem of "control of the Party". There has been significant movement in recent years - somewhat by the Party, but more importantly by the local churches, in their capacity to maneuver within given realities. We all realize astute accomodation is a legendary and dominant trait of Chinese people. So too, China is moving ever closer to incarnating a fully authentic Roman Catholic Church - with Chinese characteristics - ever more eager to proclaim the Gospel to all its peoples.!

The Catholic Church in China, as elsewhere, faces many problems ..often a sign of a vital and living organism. It needs the prayer and support of all its Sister-churches. We in turn, stand in need of their witness and richness to renew the universal Church and the face of the earth!

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