

# CATHOLIC CHURCH UPDATES- July 2010

13 updates

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**AsiaNews - [www.asianews.it](http://www.asianews.it)**

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**VATICAN - CHINA**

**Card. Zen: not true that “Beijing really wants Bishops appointed by the Pope”**

**by Card. Joseph Zen Zekiun, sdb**

There is still a long way to go in relations between Beijing and the Holy See on the appointment of bishops, which is not the result of an "agreement" but a "tug of war." The test of communion with the pope lies in the boycott of the Assembly of Representatives of Chinese Catholics. The tenacious cardinal of Hong Kong responds to an article by Gianni Valente of "30 Days".

Hong Kong (AsiaNews) - Gianni Valente, (once?) my friend, writes again on 30 Days (2010 No. 5) about the Church in China. I admire his interest for this Church so dear to us and his zeal in bringing it to the attention of his readers. I am sorry to say, however, that I cannot agree with the way he sees things in that very complex situation.

Appointment of Bishops

The title of the article says: “Beijing wants Bishops appointed by the Pope”. Such a title betrays an optimism not justified by facts. It is true that recent episcopal ordinations in China are recognized by both the Holy See and the Chinese Government. It is also true that two Chinese academics made affirmations which suggest a change of position on the part of the Government (those are affirmations made in China, which we should take them with a pinch of salt; by the way, academics are not part of the ruling establishment). Anyway, it is a far cry to conclude from these facts and these affirmations to a “Copernican Revolution”, as G. V. does.

Let us take up the question asked by G. V.: “How should we interpret the facts?”

First of all, I noticed a contradiction in what G. V. says. On p. 22, he talks about a new “conception” in the sense that the Chinese Government would have agreed to the Catholic doctrine about the ordination of bishops. Then, on p. 23, he says that the Government does

not care about doctrines, but accepts the fact that the bishops should be approved by the Pope, because otherwise they would not be accepted by the faithful people. So it is a pragmatically motivated acceptance. The latter analysis seems to be the true one. The Government has to compromise, facing the resolute faith of the people, obviously encouraged by the Letter of the Pope to the Church in China and by other authoritative pronouncements of the Holy See (like the Communiqué at the conclusion of the last plenary meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Church in China).

So, again, is it true that Beijing really wants bishops appointed by the Pope?

The quoted facts and pronouncements of the two academics do not seem to be

sufficient proof of that statement. However, relying on other sources (not available to us), G. V. tells us that there is a simple procedure for the nomination of bishops, which functions as follows:

a) There is a mechanism of local selection (by representatives of the parishes);

b) The names are then presented to the Government and approved;

c) The final choice is by consent between the two sides. Quoting Professor Liu Peng, G. V. says: “The list is submitted to the Holy See and the two sides make the choice jointly”. G. V. also says that “from political-diplomatic circles in China he came to know that a list of more than fifteen names of episcopal candidates has been sent to the Vatican and, it so happens that the names on the list almost correspond to those chosen independently by the Holy See” [Yes, it so happens that... What a surprise! We cannot resist asking: Is this a cry of joy on the part of G. V.? Or is he, unwittingly, making fun of himself?]

d) G. V. says that “the last binding word belongs to the Holy See”;

e) Towards the end of the article, G. V. even affirms that “the Chinese Government approves ordinations of bishops chosen on the basis of their approval by the Holy See”.

If this procedure reflected reality, we would have reason for rejoicing, because the authority of the Pope to nominate the bishops would be guaranteed, the Pope would have the first and the last word on the matter or at least the final choice would be made out of a cordial mutual understanding between the two sides.

But is it really so? From the pieces of information that we happen to gather here in Hong Kong, the reality is much less encouraging.

First of all, we have to note that points a) and b) above actually cannot really be distinguished, because the so-called “elections” are almost always manipulated by the Government through the Patriotic Association.

Then the whole process, as it takes place in reality, looks more like a tug-of-war than a “cordial mutual understanding”. The Government still puts so much pressure on the Holy See so that their candidates be approved (candidates they have nurtured for a long time!)

So, we do not even see a shadow of the so-called “Copernican Revolution”.

Remaining Obstacles?

After having presented as fundamentally resolved the problem of the nomination of bishops, G. V. points to possible obstacles on the way to a smooth journey ahead. These obstacles are:

- a) The problem of the underground bishops;
- b) The problem of the bishops under arrest;
- c) The solicitation (fortunately G. V. did not use the word “provocation”) from the Vatican when it invited the Chinese bishops to avoid taking part in the possibly coming Assembly of the Representatives of Chinese Catholics. G. V. is worried that a non-participation in that Assembly would put the Chinese bishops in great difficulty. He foresees that many of the poor bishops “will be exposed to the tirades of those who accuse them of capitulation in the face of interference by the civil authorities into the life of the Church”.

G. V. lists three reasons against the appropriateness of such a “solicitation”:

- a) He cites one of the Chinese bishops recently interviewed by UCAN who says that “the Assembly has nothing to do with the spirit of the Church, since it is a meeting convened by the Government” (is there anybody who can explain to us the logic of such a statement?)
- b) An eventual participation by many bishops in the Assembly would cause embarrassment to the Holy See (the implication is that it is unwise for the Holy See to risk its own prestige);
- c) A large-scale absence would offer a pretext of new criticism from those people in the Chinese leadership who have always been opposed to dialogue with the Vatican (so, according to G. V., the Vatican is playing in favour of its adversaries).

It is not difficult to realize that the purpose of the whole article is precisely in this “tail”, where G. V. feels it is his duty to criticize the Holy See for its firm and resolute position against the said Assembly.

I would like to ask G. V. whether he is aware of the nature of this Assembly. It pretends to be an act of democratic self-government on the part of the Church in China, while in reality it is nothing but a confirmation of the will to carry on an independent Church, totally subject to the Government, with the bishops humiliated and denied their rightful authority. After the

clear declarations of the Holy Father in his Letter to the Church in China on the apostolic nature of the Church, how can our bishops still subject themselves to such slavery? What is their conscience telling them?

Would the faithful accept from their bishops such an act of incoherence with their status of communion with the Holy Father?

G. V. maintains his optimism even in the face of a possible new impasse. He has confidence in the “tried capacity (of the Holy See?) to combine the clarity of statements of principles with flexible attention to the concrete situations”. G. V. seems to be saying to the Holy See: “Don’t treat too harshly the Chinese bishops, whatever their choice in respect to the said Assembly”. I am sorry to admit that Gianni Valente will probably not be disappointed in his hope. In fact, in not so far away past instances even the penalty of excommunication set down by Canon Law and recalled to mind by explicit authoritative statements, could nonchalantly be done away with.

May God save us from all evil.

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**Agenzia Fides - [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org)**

**VATICAN**

## **Letter to the Catholic Bishops and Priests of mainland China**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) – Cardinal Ivan Dias, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples and the Secretary of the same Congregation have addressed the following Letter to the Catholic Bishops and Priests of mainland China.

Dearest Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest,

Peace be with you!

Inspired by celebrations during the Year for Priests, recently concluded, I send to you cordial and brotherly greetings and a word of encouragement for your arduous pastoral duties as shepherds of the flock entrusted to you by the Lord in your noble nation. I long to say these things to you personally, to hear about your joys and your woes, about the hopes you nurture and the challenges you face every day. Your testimony and your messages received here at the Missionary Congregation fill us with consolation and spur us to pray fervently that the Lord may render you ever stronger in the faith and sustain your activity to propagate the Good News of Jesus Christ in your beloved country.

With our thoughts still set on the famous figure of Saint Jean Marie Vianney, Cure d'Ars, so often recalled during the Year for Priests, we acknowledge first of all - with deep humility - that we are called by Jesus to be “not servants, but friends” (cfr Jn 15, 15) not through our

own merits, but through His infinite mercy. He has conferred upon us the lofty dignity of being Alter Christus and ministers of his Word, his Body and Blood and his Forgiveness. May we always remember His words : “You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last;” (Jn 15, 16).

Precisely because the priest is Alter Christus — indeed, Ipse Christus —, he must be a Man of God and a Man for others.

Firstly, a Man of God: that is, a man who leads men and women to God and carries God to men and women. Therefore he must distinguish himself as a man of prayer and an austere style of life, profoundly in love with Christ and, like John the Baptist, proud to proclaim His presence amongst us, especially in the Most Holy Eucharist.

Secondly a priest must be a Man for others: a man entirely dedicated to the faithful, youth and adults, entrusted to his pastoral care and to all those with whom the Lord Jesus chose to identify himself or those towards whom He showed special kindness: sinners first of all, the poor, the sick and the excluded, widows, children, but also sheep who do not yet belong to His fold (cfr Jn 10, 16). An ecclesiastic will therefore resist any temptation to enrich himself with material goods or seek favours for his family or ethnic group, or nurture unwholesome ambitions of making a career for himself in society or in politics. These things are entirely foreign to the priestly vocation and would be a serious distraction from his mission to lead the faithful like the good shepherd on the path of holiness, justice and peace.

Allow me, my dearest Confreres, to dwell on the important role of a bishop or priest as an operator of unity within the Church. This task has a twofold dimension and entails communion with the Pope, the "rock" upon which Jesus chose to build his Church, and secondly union with all the members of the Church.

Firstly: communion with the Holy Father. We are all too aware of how some of you suffered in the recent past because of loyalty to the Holy See. We pay homage to each and all, certain that, as Pope Benedict XVI affirms, “ Communion with Peter and with his Successors is in fact a guarantee of freedom for the Church's Pastors and for the Communities entrusted to them... the Petrine ministry is a guarantee of freedom in the sense of full adherence to the truth, to the authentic tradition, so that the People of God may be preserved from errors concerning faith and morals” (Homily during Mass on the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, 29 June 2010). The exemplary and courageous loyalty towards the See of Peter demonstrated by Catholics in China, is a precious gift of the Lord.

The other dimension of unity among Christians is union among individual members of the ecclesial community. This important challenge you are already tackling , as you seek to strengthen unity within the Church herself. It would be helpful to enter, in spirit, the Upper Room where, after celebrating the Last Supper with his Apostles and ordaining them priests of the New and Eternal Covenant, the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father with these words “ May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be

in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. ” (Jn 17, 21). Three times Jesus insists on the unity of his followers as a sign of credibility that he has been sent by the Father into the world. My dearest confreres, let us heed this eloquent call for the unity of Christians coming from the Heart of the One who loved them, called them and sent them to work in His Vineyard.

In the above mentioned homily the Holy Father affirms: «Indeed if we think of the two millenniums of the Church's history, we may note as the Lord Jesus had foretold (cf. Mt 10:16-33) that trials for Christians have never been lacking and in certain periods and places have assumed the character of true and proper persecution. Yet, despite the suffering they cause, they do not constitute the gravest danger for the Church. Indeed she is subjected to the greatest danger by what pollutes the faith and Christian life of her members and communities, corroding the integrity of the Mystical Body, weakening her capacity for prophecy and witness, and marring the beauty of her face.». The Pope goes on to indicate the instigator of this evil situation and says: «one of the typical effects of the action of the Evil One is, precisely, the internal division of the ecclesial Community. Ruptures are in fact symptoms of the power of sin that continues to act in members of the Church even after the redemption. However, Christ's word is clear: "Non praevalerunt they shall not prevail" (Mt 16:18). The unity of the Church is rooted in her union with Christ and the cause of full Christian unity that must ever be sought and renewed, from generation to generation is also sustained by his prayer and his promise.».

Let us praise the Lord for your efforts, accomplished and ongoing, for unity within the Church, in faithful response to the indications given by the Holy Father in the Letter he addressed to you on 27 May, 2007, and for the results already obtained. May God bless your initiatives so that unity of ministers among themselves and between them and their flock may be ever stronger in Christ and in his Church “ad maiorem Dei gloriam”.

On this happy circumstance, I have the honour of assuring you of the closeness of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI; with paternal affection he blesses you and all those entrusted to your pastoral care and urges you to continue without fear on the path of holiness, unity and communion, as did the generations which have gone before you.

May Most Holy Mary, Help of Christians, venerated with tender, filial devotion by the Church in China at Sheshan, protect you and intercede that your resolutions to spread the sweet fragrance of the Gospel of her Son Jesus to every corner of your beloved homeland may bear fruit. In this important and demanding task may you be assisted by the luminous example of the unforgettable missionary to China, Fr Matteo Ricci S.J., of whom we recall with gratitude and affection the 400th anniversary of his departure for the Kingdom of the “Lord of Heaven ”.

Once again I assure you of our prayers,  
with brotherly greetings In Corde Mariae.

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## **‘Underground’ priest detained yet again**

**Published Date: July 28, 2010**

**By [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com), Beijing**

Officials in northern China’s Hebei province have rearrested Father Peter Wang Zhong of Xiwanzi moments before he could walk to freedom following a three-year prison term.

Sources told [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com) that Father Wang’s relatives and about 20 laypeople were waiting to pick him from Tangshan Jidong prison at around 4 a.m. on July 24.

They saw Father Wang walking toward the prison gates before three or four men grabbed him and dragged him to a nearby police car.

The gates closed while Father Wang was still struggling.

The gate reopened about an hour later and two police cars emerged.

Father Wang’s relatives and the laypeople then stopped the car with the priest inside to speak to him.

They also demanded to know why the government officials were detaining the priest again.

“Father Wang told us not to create any problems with the officials, that he was okay and asked us let them take him away,” a source said.

There was a short standoff, after which the Catholics backed down.

Hours later, Father Wang called his younger sister to say he was safe.

Local Catholics suspect the officials want the priest to “work openly” and accept the authority of the government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association.

Officials from Guyuan County asked Father Wang in May what he wanted to do after his release, they said.

Father Wang told the officials he wanted to return to Guyuan because Catholics there needed him, they added.

Sources believe the officials took action at the prison gates as they feared Catholics would protect and hide the well respected priest after he returns to the parish.

The priest was jailed for illegal assembly and for illegally making an official government seal to stamp documents in late 2007 after the consecration of a church in Guyuan.

Auxiliary Bishop Leo Yao Liang of Xiwanzi's underground community presided at the consecration Mass that was concelebrated by some 20 priests and attended by more than 7,000 people.

Bishop Yao, Father Wang the parish priest, and four other priests were arrested. The other priests were released shortly afterwards. Only Father Wang was sentenced while the bishop was put under house arrest for 30 months.\_

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**07/22/2010 15:44**

**VATICAN - CHINA**

## **China-Holy See: the mirage and religious freedom for the official and underground church**

**by Bernardo Cervellera**

After a series of Episcopal ordinations, many speak of a new era in relations between Beijing and the Vatican. But China's concessions are in reality forced decisions. For a true religious freedom the difference between legal (official) and illegal (underground) Church activities must disappear and the bishops and priests currently in prison set free. And perhaps even the Vatican should be more courageous ...

Rome (AsiaNews) - In recent months, since April until today, the Church in China has celebrated the ordination of six new bishops, as well as the official installation of a previously ordained bishop who had not been recognised by the government. What has been surprising is that all candidates were approved by the Holy See and recognized by Beijing. But even more surprising is that this wave of new Episcopal ordinations comes in the wake of two lean years, i.e. during which there were no consecrations despite the fact that there were about 40 dioceses of the official Church with octogenarian pastors, who needed replacement, or indeed vacant sees.

The newly ordained (as well as the officially installed bishop) - of which AsiaNews gave immediate news - are the pastors of Bameng (Inner Mongolia), Hohhot (Inner Mongolia), Haimen (Jiangsu) Xiamen (Fujian); Sanyuan (Shaanxi), Taizhou (Zhejiang), Yulin (Yanan, Shaanxi).

Bishops in communion with the Holy See attended all of the ordinations, with the exception of that of Bameng. Instead in Bameng, the patriotic bishop Ma Yinglin, illegally ordained in 2006, attended the celebration. He is considered the heir to Anthony Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the Patriotic Association, nicknamed the "Pope" of the official Church because of his power over the finance and bishops of the Church.

For at least three years, in internal documents of the police, the PA and the United Front, Ma Yinglin has been sponsored as the future President of the Council of Bishops and of the PA [1]. Both institutions are considered unacceptable by the Holy See because their statutes call for the construction of a Church that is "independent" of Rome and the Pope.

Ma Yinglin's absence from most ordinations and in particular the mass production of seven bishops, approved by the Holy See and the government, has cheered all Catholics. But some have seen something more: a change in China's religious policy towards the Vatican, the rediscovery of accord between political power in China and the Holy See, a fast track towards diplomatic relations.

Chinese politics: a breakthrough or a mirage?

Summer brings with it soaring temperatures and this summer is particularly torrid. Therefore mirages brought on by heat are by no means to be excluded. Some, in fact, see in the recent ordinations the mirage of "case closed", of a downhill journey, drawing a sigh of relief that finally China is preparing a new alliance between the throne and the altar.

AsiaNews is not so easily lured by illusions and our contact with Chinese official and underground Catholics leaves us neither optimistic nor pessimistic, simply realistic. And in order to be realistic and to really understand what is happening in China, it is worthwhile to make some points regarding this apparent "change" in China's religious policy towards Catholics.

1) It is true that Ma Yinglin, the illicitly ordained bishop, participated in only one ordination. But he had planned to participate in others. However the resistance demonstrated by Bameng Catholics (the candidate to the episcopate, priests, nuns and faithful), forced a change of program and the chief celebrant of the ceremony was neutralized in a corner, among hundreds of priests. But this is not a change of government or PA policy, it is simply the fruit of the resistance of the Chinese Catholic faithful who adhered to the instructions of the Holy See. Moreover, the series of ordinations - which had been blocked for years - took place because of government fear. Beijing was afraid of creating unmanageable tensions among believers who claimed the right to have a bishop for their community as an exercise of their right to freedom of religion (in theory advocated by the Chinese constitution). Down through these decades it has been the *sensus fidei* of these faithful, deeply attached to their relationship with the pope, that has persuaded many patriotic bishops take the bold step of seeking reconciliation with Rome.

2) It is true that the government gave the go ahead for these ordinations after a period of closure and it is true that Beijing is well aware and agree that these ordinations have the approval of the Holy See. The point is that now Beijing can not do otherwise, without the approval of the Holy See, a Chinese bishop can not celebrate, he is no longer respected by the faithful, if he presents himself in a church, the faithful leave. Ma Yinglin is the very proof of this. In his own diocese of Kunming, he has only a few dozen who follow him, most of whom are paid with money or favours to attend ceremonies.

By demanding that the bishops are not approved of by the Vatican, Beijing risks seeing the faithful flee en masse from the official churches to seek refuge among the underground church, thus losing control of the communities.

What in a mirage seems like an "agreement" between Beijing and the Holy See, in reality is the government's only choice (forced, but smart) if it wants to even hope to control the Church, showing that it accepts Holy See approval.

The freedom of the official Church

3) To verify that a change in policy has really taken place in Beijing, the question must be asked: after ordination, are the new bishops free to practice their ministry? In theory, old and new bishops of the official Church have great freedom. In practice they must receive permission (a "Red Book") by the Administrative Committee of the Church (a branch of the PA) in order to exercise their ministry. This permit is something contradictory in itself: the bishops are to belong to an institution that is unacceptable to the faith and their ministry, yet to fulfil their religious ministry they need the permission of the same institution.

This permit leads to them being rejected by underground Catholics who see the "little red book" as proof of their adhesion to the Patriotic Association and a betrayal of loyalty to the pope. Thus there is the real risk that the Holy See's approval of the ordination of an official bishop will be watered down in its significance and even become a boomerang against the Church because it serves Party aims to divide (and weaken) it even more.

In his Letter to Chinese Catholics, published in May 2007, Benedict XVI, in branding as "incompatible with Catholic faith" [2] the Patriotic Association's series of statutes, he does not ask any bishop to explicitly leave it. Instead he asks that it be verified whether or not it affects participation in the Episcopal ministry [3].

It is a fact that sometimes it does have effects. An example: in early July, the United Front and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (namely: the State Administration of Religious Affairs) brought together dozens of new bishops for a four-day meeting in Beijing. The theme, of course, was the integrity of the government's religious policies. On other occasions these meetings have lasted months. The poor bishops forced to accept these "warm invitations" not only can not exercise their ministry in their dioceses, but are subject to continual brainwashing to appreciate increasing government control on the Catholic religion.

In recent years the opportunities for "brainwashing" have multiplied. This is partly due to the need to counter the papal letter, still taboo in China, partly because the Patriotic Association is preparing the National Assembly of Representatives in which Catholics are to vote for the President of the Council of Bishops and the President of the PA.

The National Assembly of Catholic representatives is the highest authority that governs the Catholic Church in China. Its statutes define it as the "sovereign body". It is a "democratic" structure in which the bishops are a minority. The body has power to decide the national ministry, church activities, the appointments of bishops and even questions of theology. Its superiority to the bishops makes it incompatible with the doctrine of the Church Catholic.

For some time now the PA has been trying to organize the Assembly to vote for the new president of the council of Chinese bishops and the president of the PA. The two posts have been vacant for years: the Patriotic Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan, elected PA president in '98, died in 2007, Mgr. Joseph Liu Yuanren, patriotic bishop of Nanjing, elected President of the Council of Bishops in 2004, died in 2005.

In all these years, the assembly has always been "postponed" in 2008 because of the earthquake and the Olympics, in 2009 for the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic, in 2010 for the Shanghai Expo. But the real reason is that the PA wants to be sure Ma Yinglin will be elected (see footnote 1). In practice, however, many official bishops do not want to participate because it really is "incompatible" with Catholic faith.

Just a few months ago the Vatican Commission for the Church in China issued a statement asking bishops attached to the pope to avoid "make gestures (such as, sacramental celebrations, Episcopal ordinations, attending meetings) that contradict communion with the Pope. "

The indication took some bishops by surprise, used to harbouring inner loyalty to the pope and outward loyalty to the PA. They complain that in this way they risk being accused of being "unpatriotic" because they "love the Church (and the Pope)"[4]. The slogan "aiguo; aijiao" (love the Motherland, love the Church) is used as a refrain by the PA to demand obedience to it, generating the suspicion that loving the Church and the pope means hating their country.

In the fears of these bishops and the abused chorus we see how the thought of the PA and the government are still tied to the old Marxist and nationalist nomenclature, which led to the persecution of these decades branding the Vatican and the pope as foreign institutions that conspire for the Fall of China.

Freedom of underground Catholics

A change in attitude is also necessary to ensure religious freedom for underground Catholics, often imprisoned as common criminals (because they are beyond the rules of control) and as "enemies of the country" because they support the Pope.

If the mirage of the policy change were true, two underground bishops have disappeared for years would now be free (Mgr James Su Zhimin of Baoding, Mgr. Mgr Cosma Shi Enxiang Yixian) as well as priests who are still held in solitary confinement or forced labour without ever being sentenced by a court.

But even on this point China's policy has not changed. They accuse the underground Church of "not loving their country" and not joining the PA because they obey to a foreign Pope. In reality, the underground Catholics affirm that love of pope in no way excludes love of country, but they can not waive this bond, according to the PA demands, which for 52 years has been trying to build an "independent" Church.

The facts prove that the underground Church is not a "terrorist" organization that conspires against the Chinese government: 60 years of communism, and despite all the persecution, no Catholic has ever taken part in an act of violence, planted bombs, fired at police, burned or destroyed something.

In addition, several underground bishops and priests sought to be recognized officially by the government, even accepting its control. But the answer was always that they must bend to join the Patriotic Association, repudiating the pope.

Perhaps, after all, what the Party really seeks is not only control over Christians, but continuing division between them. A underground priest went to the police several times asking to be registered, without belonging to the PA. He stressed several times that it would be to the police advantage to know what he was doing and how to control him. The officer laughed in his face: "Better for us that you stay divided- he said – we would be more worried if you were united".

Real change in Chinese policy toward the Catholic Church is not allowing the ordination of official bishops approved by the Holy See, rather it is guaranteeing religious freedom and freedom of practice by eliminating the division between "normal activities" and "illegal activities". The UN has been calling on China to eliminate this discrimination since 1994 and Beijing still has not changed!

This is the goal that Catholics worldwide should also keep in mind, in line with what Benedict XVI called for in his Letter to Chinese Catholics, namely, promoting unity and reconciliation among official and underground communities. But for them to reconcile, we must help them survive and grow and therefore demand the release of prisoners and the abolition of the division between normal and illegal Church activities!

Some underground communities are still suspicious of their relationship with the "official" church, but it is also true that many 'official' bishops are not overly friendly (much less brothers in the same faith) with their colleagues and the children of the underground community.

This should elicit greater attention from the Vatican which, according to many underground priests "forgets" about their church. Over the years – since timid relations first started between Chinese representatives and members of the Secretariat of State in 2005 - the Holy See has spoken less of the underground communities [5]; if one of them (bishop, priest, layman) is in prison, the Vatican rarely calls for their release. On 7 July Mgr. Jia Zhiguo, underground bishop of Zhengding was released after 15 months of detention by the police. Card. Ivan Dias, prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, with great courage, wrote him a message of "welcome back to service." But maybe he thought that it was not yet time to also include the word "prison" or "isolation" to make the world understand that the bishop had not returned from a vacation, but a period of abolition of his rights.

[1] All these documents agree on supporting the campaign for his victory, which should take place during the Eighth Assembly of Catholic representatives. The documents explain that until Ma Yinglin's election as president is not certain, the Eighth Assembly will not be launched.

[2] See Letter ..., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 27, 2007, n. 7 and footnote 36.

[3] In recent history, some official bishops have left the PA. Among them was very famous Mgr. Philip Ma Ji, bishop of Pingliang (Gansu), who also made public a document stating that being a member of the PA is against the Catholic faith.

[4] See Vatican advice leaves China bishops in a bind, in Ucanews.com, 14 aprile 2010

[5] Cardinal. Joseph Zen has even denounced the attempt to eliminate the underground Church by false interpretations of the papal letter to Chinese Catholics: see AsiaNews.it, 24/07/2007 Cardinal Zen warns against confusion surrounding the Pope's letter to Chinese Catholics

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## **A Visit to China's Largest Catholic Village**

**Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D. | July 12, 2010 | Ignatius Insight**

Editor's Note: Dr. Anthony E. Clark, Assistant Professor of Asian History at Whitworth University (Spokane, Washington), has been traveling and researching in China this summer. The following was written in Shanghai on July 8, 2010.

Traveling through China's poorer provinces one often sees blue coal trucks, mule-driven carts brimming with freshly harvested vegetables, squatting peasants smoking long-stemmed pipes, or dilapidated roadside hovels with exposed light bulbs hanging precariously from crumbling ceilings. Occasional pavilions or temples might be seen, though these were largely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Catholic churches suffered two major periods of destruction, the Boxer Uprising (1898-1900) and the Cultural Revolution. The anti-foreign Boxers, called the Fists of Righteous Harmony, swept through China's northern provinces attacking churches and Christians, and when the Red Guards were told to destroy the "four olds" – old ideas, old customs, old habits, and old culture – they attacked not only anything that seemed traditional, but also anything that was foreign or religious. Being old, traditional, foreign, and religious, Catholic churches, orphanages, seminaries, and hospitals suffered widespread destruction through the Maoist era.

Despite these two historical events Chinese Christianity has grown at a meteoric rate in recent decades, swelling from around four million faithful in 1949 to over fifty million today. The current government has behaved quite openly to this growth compared to its previous intolerance, though the situation in China remains unsteady, and present signs suggest increased control over Catholic activities by the central authorities. Surveillance cameras monitor church entrances and the Religious Affairs Bureau has become more rigid in its stance against Roman "interference" in Church affairs in China. Papal authority, abortion, and the election of bishops continue to be sensitive topics, though the level of intensity of these conflicts differs from province to province.

One of the most astounding Catholic success stories in China is the village of Liuhecun, located an hour's drive outside of the economically poor capital city of Shanxi, Taiyuan, the center of what is China's most Catholic diocese. Liuhecun is difficult to find without help, and it is best accessed through the introduction of one of the local priests. On the way to the village one of Shanxi's largest secrets unfurls; church after church dot the landscape and high steeples rise above small villages as they do in southern France.

Passing through a narrow side road one arrives at Liuhecun and is welcomed by three great statues at the village entrance: St. Peter holding his keys is flanked by Saints Simon and Paul. Thirty minutes before Mass the village loudspeakers, once airing the revolutionary voice of Mao and Party slogans, now broadcasts the rosary. Winding through the village, the large church with its imposing edifice and towering dome loom above, and once you arrive you are greeted by a curious admixture of Romanesque architecture, yellow plastic palm trees, and streaming colored banners. Shanxi has its own peculiar tastes, and almost every church contains two large grandfather clocks (no-one could tell me the origin of this curious tradition) and lines of colored flags in and outside the sanctuary.

Liuhecun is China's largest Catholic village. Attending one of the church's Sunday Masses, which draws nearly three thousand faithful, is dizzying. Before Mass the priests and faithful kneel to intone the rosary in an old Shanxi-style chant – it is a loud affair, broadcast over loudspeakers. In what is only a very modest village by Chinese standards – around seven thousand people – more than ninety percent are Catholic. One of the reasons for its strong commitment to its Catholic faith, villagers say, is the village's endurance through the two terrible anti-Catholic persecutions.

Popular local stories circulate about how Liuhecun village survived the ravages of the Boxer Uprising. In a meeting with the church's lively pastor, Fr. Zhang Junhai, one of these stories was recounted. The residents say that as the Boxers approached the village during the summer of 1900, the Virgin Mary appeared above the church's bell tower in flowing white robes; her hands were extended in prayer before her. They say an army of angels surrounded her as she prayed, and whichever direction she faced pointed toward the direction from which the Boxers were approaching. Thus, with Mary's help the stronger men of the community were able to prepare in advance to ward off the Boxer attack. Several times the Boxers approached, and each time Mary appeared above the church praying in the direction of their advance. The Catholics of the village also attribute to Mary's assistance the fact that the Boxer cannons backfired on the attackers as they fired on the village. Today, the village's devotion to Mary is tangible; traditionally each family prays an evening rosary and displays an image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in their home.

Nearly seven decades after the violent Boxer Uprising, the Cultural Revolution disturbed the peaceful rhythms of the village. The church was stripped of its pews, the altar lay bare, and revolutionary slogans covered the walls and columns. Like all China at that time, Liuhecun's church was closed and the faithful were compelled to either join the radical fervor of the Red Guards or suffer under the revolution for remaining Catholic. Some of the villagers erected tents for Mass where the priest courageously offered the Holy Sacrifice on a makeshift altar. One elderly man, in his nineties, quite openly recounted for us the arrest and beating of his Franciscan uncle during the turbulence of the Maoist era. The priest was "struggled against" several times, which included pulling his hair, physical beatings, and cruel forms of restraint. In the end, the priest suffered from a head injury and died. Stories of Mary's assistance and the sacrifices of such holy people as the Franciscan who died in 1969, strengthen the resolve of the village to remain committed to its faith.

Fr. Zhang informed me that there are new struggles today, less related to persecution than the burgeoning wave of materialism that prevails in modern China. While the youth are in the village they commonly attend catechism, in addition to a rich schedule of liturgical rites and parish events. Since nearly all of the villagers are active Catholics, those who remain in the community are little affected by the consumerism and secular views of China's majority. Less than three percent of China is Christian, so there is scant spiritual support for those who leave the village for study or employment outside the community. The villagers can rely on each other for support and encouragement; they are willing to bear the monetary fines when

having more than one child since their Catholic neighbors support and assist them. But it is more difficult to resist official policies and pressures when away from the community. Liuhecun remains China's largest Catholic village largely because it has formulated strategies for having multiple children, who are subsequently raised in devoted Catholic households. Attending Mass in the immense church, one is bewildered by the number of children whirling through the aisles before the service, a unique sight in one-child-policy China.

Just over two centuries ago, Liuhecun was little more than a sequence of agricultural fields; today it is a Catholic success story in a country with a long history of anti-Catholic persecution. When asked about the village's dedication to the Pope, Fr. Zhang noted its fierce loyalty to the Holy Father and its commitment to following his teachings. I noticed the proudly-displayed papal blessing and photograph of Benedict XVI near Fr. Zhang's desk as he answered this question. "We are a very traditional Catholic community," he said, "not like in other countries." I could not help but think that despite the irregularity of the Chinese Church's relationship with Rome, in many ways it retains a stronger Catholic identity and commitment than many other countries.

Liuhecun is an extraordinary Catholic village, and it enjoys comparative freedom from governmental interference, perhaps due to its remote location. It is also extremely poor, and the lure of material comforts continues to draw villagers away. Not all of those who leave the village strain to retain their faith, however. Liuhecun is one of the principal springs from which vocations emerge in all of China. It seems that in almost every diocese one encounters a young priest who tells you he is from Liuhecun, and there can be little doubt that most of China's Catholics have heard of this wellspring of faith and vocations.

The faith of China's largest Catholic village is passionate, for the very name of their small village alludes to God's role in synchronizing all existence. From ancient times China has believed in the harmonious relationship between the "five directions," north, south, east, west, middle, known as the "Five Harmonies" (Wuhe). Not long after the Catholics of this region settled, they named their new village "Six Harmonies Village" (Liuhecun) because they believe there can be no harmony without God, the "sixth direction."

As I departed from Liuhecun after attending a Mass that felt almost like Mass at St. Peter's, Fr. Zhang, his assistant priest, and the church manager stood near the gate, waving goodbye. Hundreds of old men and women stood near the church door watching the foreign guests leaving the village. And it seemed like a thousand children ran past us laughing and playing with each other. I imagined that many of those young boys and girls, God willing, someday will serve the Church as priests and nuns. I wondered also how many non-Chinese Catholics have heard of this astonishing village, tucked inconspicuously in the arid scenery of Shanxi province.

Looking back at the enormous church I reflected on the catholicity of the Catholic Church; a Western-style church surrounded by all things Chinese. Most Westerners would not recognize the tunes of the chanted prayers, or the language, or the way people interact. But any Christian would readily admire the deeply pious faith of Liuheacun's humble Catholics, who have not only survived two persecutions, but in fact grown from them as a seed from watered soil.

\* Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Asian History at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington.

He completed his doctoral studies at the University of Oregon, where he studied Chinese history, literature, philosophy, and religion. His current research centers on the history of the Church in China, and he has recently finished a book on the Catholic martyrs saints in China. His other interests include East/West religious dialogue, especially between Catholic and Buddhist ideas of faith and salvation. Dr. Clark has written several academic books and articles on the topic of Chinese history and has been a guest on "EWTN Live," "Catholic Answers Live," and Relevant Radio to talk about Catholicism in China. He is also a contributing editor for This Rock magazine.

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NPR - National Public Radio, USA

## China's Divided Catholics Seek Reconciliation

by Louisa Lim

July 20, 2010

Listen to the Story: [http://public.npr.org/anon.npr-mp3/npr/atc/2010/07/20100720\\_atc\\_05.mp3?dl=1](http://public.npr.org/anon.npr-mp3/npr/atc/2010/07/20100720_atc_05.mp3?dl=1)

For decades, China's Catholics — estimated at more than 12 million — have been bitterly divided. Some worship in China's government-sanctioned Catholic churches, others in "underground" churches loyal to the Vatican.

But three years ago, Pope Benedict XVI sent a letter to Chinese Catholics — the first from a pope in more than a half-century — urging reconciliation. Yet China's Catholics have struggled to follow these instructions.

Early morning in Sheshan, on the outskirts of Shanghai, Catholics kneel on the ground in front of the pilgrimage shrine to the Virgin Mary, known as the Marian shrine. A cacophony of prayer rises as different groups of pilgrims conduct their services, singing hymns of praise almost loud enough to drown each other out.

Many of these groups of believers refuse to enter the government-sanctioned church nearby. They are part of the "underground" church, even though on this day they are worshipping openly and unimpeded. Some of these believers refuse to take Holy Communion from Beijing's officially appointed bishops, and instead follow bishops chosen by the Vatican.

On this day, members of the government-sanctioned church are also out in force, holding an official procession up the hill at the Sheshan basilica, a cavernous, red-brick building with stained-glass windows, which was built in 1935.

As choirs of white-robed priests sing hymns to the Virgin Mary, priests carry a statue of Mary out of the church, incense wafting over it, while nuns shower it with flower petals.

The clergy in this procession belong to China's official Catholic church, sometimes known as the open church. In a bid to assert authority over China's Catholics, Beijing cut ties with the Vatican in 1951 and began the practice of ordaining its own bishops, some without the approval of the pope.

These parallel acts of worship take place side by side on May 24, which Pope Benedict XVI has designated as the international day of prayer for China. It's a measure of what it means to be a Catholic in China that in the past this pilgrimage spot has been the subject of intense security by police and security forces, sometimes stopping pilgrims from entering.

This year, however, there is little overt security, signaling a thaw. And that is echoed in some parts of China, where government-sanctioned believers and underground communities are taking steps to bridge that divide.

### \*\*\* One Diocese Closes Divide

In Tianjin, 85 miles southeast of Beijing, the Rev. Zhang Liang wears purple robes and celebrates Mass inside an imposing domed cathedral, a state-sanctioned church whose pews are packed with worshippers on a weekday morning. He says the papal letter three years ago was a turning point.

"In the past, [the] Tianjin diocese was divided into above-ground and underground Catholics," he explains. "The two factions argued, and it was awkward when they met. But Pope Benedict XVI issued a papal letter, and now we in Tianjin have reconciled with each other."

During Mass, all priests in Tianjin publicly name Stephen Li Side as their bishop; he is a Vatican-appointed bishop unrecognized by Beijing. But in 2008, after the papal letter, the underground bishop himself urged his flock to worship in the state-sanctioned church.

Zhang believes Chinese Catholics should take responsibility for healing the divisions themselves, instead of blaming the government.

"Why do you blame the government? It's like blaming the sun for not shining on you. If you take one step forward, there's the sunshine," he says. "It's like saying, 'Will the government let me open this door or not?' " Zhang says. "The government doesn't care whether you open

the door. You just think they care. Everyone is so busy prejudging, they don't dare do anything."

### \*\*\* Still, Some Priests Pay Heavy Price

Just 25 miles away in the suburbs of Tianjin, another priest labors in very different circumstances. The small makeshift church where 83-year-old Melchior Shi Hongzhen has held Mass for the past 20 years sits beside a trash-filled ditch, accompanied by the roar of traffic from a busy highway.

This is a place of exile for Shi, a coadjutor bishop — a rank similar to an auxiliary bishop — recognized by the Vatican in 1982 but not by the Chinese government.

He has paid a heavy price for belonging to the underground church, including 28 years working in a factory at the time of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and early '70s, when religion was outlawed. Other underground bishops have suffered, too, spending years, even decades in prison or under house arrest.

Slightly deaf but cheerful, Shi spends his days reading in his book-filled study. He says he supports the steps toward reconciliation, but he will not join the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, a quasi-governmental organization that controls the Catholic church in China.

"The patriotic association is an organization of the country, like the Communist Party. You are free to join or not. I didn't. What I've been doing doesn't harm the country in any way. I just give Mass, baptism and the last rites. That's all," Shi says.

Despite the recent moves toward reconciliation in Tianjin, Shi's personal situation hasn't changed. He is under a kind of house arrest, effectively a prisoner in his compound. Believers can come and worship with him, but Catholic clergy reportedly cannot. If he wants to leave, he has to ask the police for permission — even, sources say, to administer the last rites.

Despite the efforts of reconciliation, China's government still fears the influence of the Vatican, and this frail old man is evidently viewed as a threat. He is not keen to talk about the politics of the church in China, but it's notable that he praises Thomas More, the 16th-century Catholic martyr who was tried and executed for treason for denying that Henry VIII was the supreme head of the church in England.

"You know why Thomas More was sentenced to death?" Shi asks. "Because of his Catholic faith. And he asked the executioner to thank the king for allowing him to be killed by decapitation, instead of being hanged. How amazing to have such love for Catholicism."

### \*\*\* Secret Papal Approval For Beijing's Priests

But even before the papal letter, things had been quietly changing for China's Catholics. A reconciliation of sorts has been going on unnoticed, as the vast majority of Beijing's patriotic bishops have secretly contacted the Vatican and received Rome's approval.

That was done through emissaries such as the Rev. Michel Marcil. Now in charge of the U.S. Catholic China Bureau, a church-sponsored initiative to foster contacts in China, he has traveled to China more than 30 times since the early 1980s.

"We were meeting priests and bishops who had been consecrated bishop without the permission of Rome," he says. "They were telling us [that] this kind of condemnation by Rome was the greatest pain they had in all of that. It's really painful. Some of them would say, 'I'd like to write to the pope; would you give a letter?' So this is what a lot of us were doing; we were kind of messengers."

Now, Rome has recognized 90 percent of Beijing's open bishops. And since the papal letter, despite the lack of any formal ties, all seven candidates picked by China to become new bishops have also been acceptable to Rome.

"This practice is new," Marcil says. "Only the test of time will tell if this is a new gentlemen's agreement between the Vatican and China's Communist Party. It is not the result of negotiations, but the fruit of having negotiated together and understood better [each other's] positions."

It's significant, too, that despite the lack of any official ties, Pope Benedict's letter was sent to the Chinese government before being issued to the faithful.

Sister Janet Carroll is a Maryknoll nun who has worked with Chinese Catholics for many years.

"There was a very careful consideration on the part of the Vatican, the Holy See, to make the letter available to the authorities in China, letting them know it would be disseminated among the faithful," she says.

"That really was a gesture among the Holy See and Vatican officials to relate to the Chinese government and to let them know that they weren't trying to do any rousing up of the faithful against their own country," she adds.

\*\*\* 'Ball Is In The Vatican's Court'

All agree that the Vatican and China are inching closer — even the man some see as the Vatican's nemesis. Anthony Liu Bainian has been called China's pope. A former seminarian, this layman is vice chairman of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association — an organization that Benedict described as "incompatible" with Catholic doctrine in his papal letter.

But Liu sees his post in lofty terms, saying he believes he was chosen by God.

"The Lord needed a bridge between the church in China and those holding political power," he says. "And I'm a tool sent by the Lord to be that bridge."

He blames the Vatican for splitting China's church. China's position is that the Vatican must cut its diplomatic ties with Taiwan and establish relations with China. He says it should also avoid interfering with China's internal affairs, including its religious decisions.

His view is that the ball is in the Vatican's court.

"China is getting stronger and richer, and the Vatican can't get away from politics. The Vatican is isolated over China's diplomatic recognition," Liu says.

"The problem of ordination of bishops doesn't stem from the Chinese church. If there are no diplomatic ties and we want to choose bishops, how could we report back to the Vatican? If you want to solve the problem, you should have already established diplomatic ties," he says.

When asked why priests like Melchior Shi Hongzhen remain under house arrest and other underground bishops remain in detention for years, Liu replies, "The country's laws very clearly say that no matter which faith or organization it is, you need to register with the government. ... I'm not the public procurator. But we believe the government deals with these cases according to the law."

### \*\*\* Obstacles On Road To Reconciliation

Politics aside, reconciliation is easier said than done. In Tianjin, one believer in the underground church criticized the moves being made by the divided communities to edge closer together as empty words, calling them "cheating." Her understanding of the deal among Tianjin Catholics was that the clergy should quit the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, which no one has yet done.

There is great confusion about what the pope's letter actually intended. Some senior clerics, including the influential Cardinal Joseph Zen in Hong Kong, have released their own interpretations of the letter. Others mention financial obstacles to reconciliation, particularly problems over the restitution of church property confiscated under communist rule.

In Hebei province, a stronghold of the underground church, an underground nun who didn't want to give her name expressed her doubts.

"I'm not sure whether the pope understands the situation of underground church people like us. If we all suddenly came out into the open, then it would be out of control. It would cause chaos for the church," she says. "If you don't know what reconciliation means, then it's better not to reconcile."

Yet the lines between the underground and open churches are blurring. And China's divided Catholics are groping toward reconciliation, even if that process is slow and painful.

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**Agencia Fides - [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org)**

**ASIA/CHINA**

### **New Bishop of Xiamen ordains first deacons: diocese collects funds for flood victims**

Xiamen (Agenzia Fides) – “The solemn ordination of three deacons is a sign of the unity of the people of God, communion in the diocese of Xiamen in Christ and with the universal Church”. This was the most widespread comment among Catholics in Xiamen following the ordination of deacons presided by Bishop Giuseppe Cai Bing Rui, of Xiamen (Hsiamen/Amoy), himself ordained a Bishop in May 2010 with the approval of the Holy See. These first ordinations presided by the new Bishop took place on Saturday 17 July with massive participation of faithful from different dioceses in Fujian province and other areas. According to information sent to Fides, the three new deacons came from the dioceses of Mindong and Minbei. The Mass was concelebrated by 15 priests from the dioceses of Xiamen, Mindong and Minbei. In his homily Bishop encouraged the new deacons who studied at She Shan seminary in Shang Hai and Xian Seminary with these words: “with the grace of the Holy Spirit, you are ordained to assist the Bishop and the priests in the tasks of preaching, administering the sacraments and performing works of charity at the service of the people of God”.

Despite the joy for the new Bishop and the ordinations, the local Catholic community did not forget the victims of recent floods. The Catholic community was among the first to offer aid and assistance (see Fides 22/06/2010; 24/06/2010). On 17 and 18 July, the diocese of Xiamen organised a fund raising auction in aid of flood victims. A group of 50 young Catholic volunteers collected more than 2,500 euro in two days. The most widely read local newspaper Xiamen Daily, reported the news, demonstrating that the Catholic Church is an indispensable force for promoting harmony in society and fostering the spiritual growth of the person. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 20/07/2010 - righe 27; parole 323)

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**Hong Kong Sunday Examiner**

**<http://sundayex.catholic.org.hk/>**

**Sunday 18 July 2010**

**Editorial - Commentary**

**The martyrs of China a decade after canonisation**

Last Friday, July 9, the universal Church celebrated the feast of the Blesseds and Saints of China. This year, marks the 10th anniversary of the canonisation of 121 Chinese martyrs, the youngest was seven-years-old and the oldest 79, by the late Pope John Paul II, and we are called to consider the development of the Church in China in the intervening time.

The 87 Chinese, 34 expatriate missionaries—including six bishops, 24 priests, eight brothers, seven religious sisters—and 76 laypeople, were martyred between 1648, the Qing Dynasty, and 1930, the period of the Republic of China, and were beatified between 1893 and 1983.

The canonisation, on 1 October 2000, brought the Holy See and the Chinese government into conflict, in part because the Holy See chose the same date as China's National Day. Despite the explanations from the Holy See and the Churches in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the mainland government took offence, insisting that it was an intentional provocation to hurt the Chinese people.

This did not help already-fragile China-Holy See relations, which had been rocked by the illicit ordination of five bishops in Beijing—in the face of its strong objections—earlier that year, on January 6, the Feast of Epiphany. This further saddened the Chinese faithful.

Ten years have passed. We need to consider whether anything was learned from these unfortunate disputes or did those 121 martyrs die in vain? Martyrdom is not merely an event of the past, but something that can inspire us today. On the mainland, many local Churches still struggle to be in communion with each other. The faithful suffer because of misguided political ideology and pressure to reject revealed truth. However, past experience has taught the Church that in every era, the presence of martyrs only strengthens the fidelity of the faithful towards the Church. The martyrs of China gave the ultimate witness to the gospel with courage. Their faithfulness echoes the Confucian ideal of sacrificing oneself for a noble cause.

As the early Christian apologist, Tertullian (ca. 160-220AD) wrote, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.” Certainly, this seed of faith will bear fruit in China.

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**\_\_AsiaNews - [www.asianews.it](http://www.asianews.it)**

**07/15/2010 16:13**

**CHINA – VATICAN**

**New bishop of Yulin (Yan'an), a PhD graduate from Rome**

**by Zhen Yuan**

Mgr Yang is the new, Holy See-approved bishop coadjutor. Nine prelates, all in communion with the Pope, were present at the ceremony. The new bishop is also vice-rector of Xi'an seminary. Most Catholics in the diocese are from farming communities, dispersed across the plateaus of northern Shaanxi. Yan'an has a glorious place in China's Communist history. At the end of the Long March, it was for a while the stronghold of the Revolution.

Yan'an (AsiaNews) – Mgr John Baptist Yang Xiaoting, 46, coadjutor bishop of Yulin (Yan'an, Shaanxi), is among the first new bishops to have a doctorate in theology. What is more, he earned it from the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Roma, near the Vatican.

Mgr Yang's ordination was approved by the Holy See and recognised by the Chinese government. The investiture ceremony was held yesterday in the courtyard of Xiaoqiaopan Catholic Church in Jingbian County, 130 kilometres from Yan'an, and drew more than 6,000 Catholics, 110 priests and 80 nuns.

All nine bishops present were also Vatican-approved and Chinese government-recognised. Bishop Aloysius Yu Runchen of Hanzhong was the consecrator. Bishop Dang Mingyan of Xi'an and Bishop Han Yingjin of Sanyuan acted as his co-consecrators.

The ordinary of Yulin (Yan'an) Bishop Tong Hui, 76, who has been paralysed since March 2009, concelebrated the ordination Mass for a short while before leaving because of poor health.

Bishops Tong Changping of Weinan, Han Jide of Pingliang, Li Jing of Ningxia, Zong Huaide of Sanyuan and Huo Cheng of Fenyang were the other bishops who concelebrated.

The new bishop, who is vice-deputy rector of the Xi'an Seminary, told AsiaNews that he wants to focus on unity and on educating to the faith priests and believers, most of whom come from rural areas in northern Shaanxi.

Mgr Yang, who is originally from Zhouzhi Diocese, has already been working in his new diocese for the past few weeks. Last month he visited 70 per cent of the 40 parishes, gathering ideas to develop the diocese.

"Church life in the countryside is quite different," Bishop Yang noted. "Local Catholics are scattered and mostly reside in the mountains. Priests usually go to their villages to administer sacraments," he said. "Only about 10 per cent are churchgoers," he noted.

Yulin diocese is home to some 60,000 Catholics served by 21 priests and 29 sisters.

Mgr Yang is famous because he was the first Chinese priest ordained after seminaries were re-opened in the 1980s. He studied abroad for a decade, getting a doctorate in 1999.

Born in a Catholic family in Zhouzhi County in 1964, Yang studied at the Zhouzhi seminary in 1984-1989. He was ordained a priest in 1991 when he was studying in Shaanxi universities.

In 1993-1999, he studied and earned a licentiate and a doctorate in theology from Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome.

In 2002, he graduated with a master's degree in religion-sociology and became a doctoral candidate at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC.

After that, he returned to Zhouzhi diocese to serve in a parish where he founded a centre for training and research. He is now vice-rector and dean of studies of Shaanxi seminary in Xi'an.

"I will continue to teach at the seminary, but will focus more on my diocesan matters," he said.

Catholicism was introduced into Yan'an by Spanish Franciscans in 1911. In 1924, the first apostolic vicariate of Yan'an was erected and elevated to a diocese in 1946.

The Yan'an diocese was renamed Yulin diocese 17 years ago.

Yan'an has an important place in the history of Chinese Communism. It is here that Mao ended his 'Long March'. Until the victory of the revolution, the city was a hotbed of revolutionary activities.

In 1982, it was classified as a historical and cultural city. The city's Qiao'ergou Church, once used for meetings of Communist leaders, was listed as an historic monument.

Former bishops of Yulin (Yan'an) include Franciscan Caelestinaus Aparicio Ibanez (1924-1949), Li Xuande (1951-1972) and Wang Zhenye (1991-1999).

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**[UCA News - www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com)**

## **Vatican and Beijing agree on new bishop**

**Published Date: July 15, 2010**

**By ucanews.com reporter, Jingbian**

Holding degrees from US and pontifical universities, Father John Baptist Yang Xiaoting, 46, was ordained coadjutor bishop of Yan'an (Yulin) diocese on July 15 with both papal approval and government recognition.

The new bishop obtained a doctorate from a pontifical university in 1999, the first mainland priest to attain such a qualification since religious activities were revived in the late 1970s.

Bishop Louis Yu Runchen of Hanzhong presided over the ordination, which took place at the rural Xiaoqiaopan church, Jingbian county in the presence of seven Vatican-approved bishops.

They are Bishops Anthony Dang Mingyan of Xi'an, Nicholas Han Jide of Pingliang, John Huo Cheng of Fenyang, Joseph Li Jing of Ningxia, Joseph Tong Changping of Weinan and Joseph Han Yingjin of Sanyuan and his predecessor retired Bishop Joseph Zhong Huaide.

Bishop Francis Tong Hui of Yan'an who suffers from Alzheimer's disease also made a brief appearance.

Three thousand tickets were distributed for the ceremony while thousands of others watched from outside.

Yan'an, which was once an important Communist revolutionary base, has two bishops, 20 priests and 24 nuns to serve 40,000 Catholics scattered over an area of 80,000 square kilometers.

Newly ordained Bishop Yang Xiaoting greeting Catholics

Since his nomination in late 2009, Bishop Yang has visited all parishes of the diocese.

Local Catholics are frank and hospitable, he told ucanews.com.

But "their devotion and Church-going habits are weak" as churches are often distant. Cold winters and spring sandstorms also make it difficult, he added.

The ancestors of local people were so-called "farming Catholics," who joined the Church for a piece of land, Bishop Yang explained.

Today, most young people only attend church for weddings and funerals. Only one-third attends Mass on major Church feasts, a lower ratio than in other parts of China, he said.

Bishop Yang told ucanews.com that he will give priority to laity formation during the non-harvest seasons when farmers are free.

He said he plans to create a formal structure for the diocese and to build a hospice for elderly and sick clergy including current Bishop Tong Hui, 76, whose health has deteriorated dramatically since March 2009.

Profile of Bishop Yang:

\* Born in April 9, 1964

- \* Ordained a priest of Zhouzhi diocese, also in Shaanxi, in 1991
- \* Studied in Italy from 1993 and obtained a Doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Urban University in Rome in 1999
- \* Studied in the United States from 2000-02 and obtained a Master's degree in socio-religious studies
- \* Taught and served as deputy rector at the regional seminary in Xi'an from 2002 until his ordination. He also did research on relations between religion and society.

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## **\_\_ Vatican Information Service**

### **CONSECRATION OF A BISHOP IN CHINA**

VATICAN CITY, 14 JUL 2010 (VIS) - On Saturday 10 July, Msgr. Antonio Xu Jiwei, aged 75 and a priest for the last 25 years, was consecrated as bishop of Taizhou in the province of Zhejiang, China, according to a note released by the Holy See Press Office.

The bishop had guided the diocese as diocesan administrator since 1999, and was approved by the Holy See as bishop of Taizhou. The government authorities also approved his episcopal ordination.

The liturgical celebration was presided by Bishop Giuseppe Li Mingsu of Qingdao, Giuseppe Zhao Fengchang of Liaocheng, Giuseppe Xu Honggen of Suzhou and Giuseppe Han Yingjin of Sanyuan. These prelates are all in communion with the Holy See and recognised by the government.

About a thousand faithful, who had also come from Shanghai and Ningbo, participated in the consecration of the new bishop, who is the second ordinary of the diocese which has been vacant since 1962. The ecclesiastical circumscription currently has some six thousand faithful, around fifteen priests and ten nuns. There are about twenty-five churches and other places of worship.

Bishop Xu noted that his diocese is facing various challenges, but he is optimistic about a revival of evangelisation and a growth of the Catholic community.

OP/ VIS 20100714 (220)\_

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**30 Giorni, Italy**  
**N.5 - 2010**

**Below is the translation into English of an article by Gianni Valente that has been published in the Italian review "30 Giorni".**

**You may download the original article with pictures in a pdf.version  
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**at [http://users.online.be/~rikdg/doc3/china/cina\\_30G2010-5.pdf](http://users.online.be/~rikdg/doc3/china/cina_30G2010-5.pdf)**

**\*\*\* Beijing wants bishops appointed by the Pope \*\*\***

How and why ordination of Chinese bishops can usher in a change of pace in the relations between the Holy See, the Church in China and the Chinese government on the issue of episcopal appointments

by Gianni Valente

On the long haul in the relations between the Catholic Church and China, important changes of pace have often taken place quietly, made known only by events ignored or dismissed without appropriate explanation even by specialized agencies, used to loud tones. Certain recent happenings beyond the Great Wall hint, in their sui generis ordinariness, at a possible, imminent and decisive shift in the issue of the appointment of bishops, the sore point, the most sensitive issue among the anomalies experienced by the Chinese Catholic Church for nearly sixty years.

**\*\*\* The facts**

Since December 2007, despite the numerous vacant diocesan seats or those still led by bishops over eighty, there have not been any episcopal ordinations in China. The shutdown came to an end last 18 April, with the consecration of the forty-seven year old priest Paul Meng Quinglu as bishop of the diocese of Hohhot in Inner Mongolia, followed closely by those of forty year old Joseph Shen Bin, ordained bishop of Haimen (Jiangsu Province) on 21 April, of forty-four year old Joseph Cai Bingrui, ordained bishop of Xiamen (province of Fujian) on 8 May, and of fifty-two year old Joseph Han Yingjin, ordained bishop of Sanyuan (Shaanxi Province) on 24 June last. All four young bishops had received the papal mandate and the recognition of the Chinese authorities. In addition to their four ordinations there was also the official inauguration ceremony on 8 April for Mattias Du Jiang as head of the diocese of Bameng. The bishop was consecrated as early as 2004, with the approval of the Holy See, but the civil authorities had never authorized the public expression of his episcopal status. Over time, the political orientation of local officials has changed, to the point of giving full recognition to Bishop Du as head of the diocese, it too in Inner Mongolia.

Some details and the background of the inauguration and of the four new episcopal ordinations merit attention. In the liturgies of consecration, the consecrating bishops were all legitimate, in full and declared communion with the Bishop of Rome. At least in one case, the notion that the principal consecrant would be an illegitimate bishop – Vincent Zhan Silu, bishop without papal mandate of Mindong, who did attend the consecration in Xiamen –

proved wrong on the occasion of the rite. Another illegitimate bishop – Joseph Ma Yinglin, vice president of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association – took part in the inauguration ceremony of the Diocese of Bameng, but in that case, the clergy, nuns and lay people present had negotiated with government officials that he would not be the principal celebrant of the Mass, and during the celebration, Bishop Ma Yinglin, took a place among the priests. At the Mass for the ordination in Xiamen Monsignor Joseph Cheng Tsai-fa, Archbishop Emeritus of Taipei, a native of Xiamen itself, which lies on the Chinese coast opposite the island of Taiwan, also participated among the celebrants. It was the first time that a Taiwanese bishop, Monsignor Cheng, participated in an episcopal ordination celebrated on mainland China. The see of Xiamen had been vacant for twenty years.

With significant alacrity, just days after the mini-sequence of new episcopal ordinations, two prominent Chinese academics were interviewed by the Global Times – an English-language newspaper that serves to make the views of the Chinese Communist Party known abroad – on the ordination of bishops in the context of relations between China and the Vatican. In addition to repeating some classic issues of government religious policy, the two intellectuals, Chinese Party members, also diverged decisively from the classical scenario. Zhuo Xinping, director of the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Social Sciences, after making a comparison between the "historical conflicts" that had arisen in the past between the European States and the Church on the mechanism of appointing bishops, declared that the "minimal" request of the Chinese government was "that the bishops appointed by the Vatican be approved by the government, as was the case historically for other religions", when instead "the Vatican firmly maintains the idea that the ordination of bishops is a matter of religious freedom". Whereas according to Liu Peng, Director of the Pushi Institute for the Social Sciences, he too interviewed by the Global Times, the recent evolution in relations between China and the Vatican shows that "the Chinese government respects the beliefs of Catholics more, and better understands that the Vatican's appointment of bishops is a key element of the Catholic tradition". In Sino-Vatican relations the very question of episcopal appointments now tops the list of unresolved issues. "But it is", Liu suggested, "a religious rather than a political matter. And if a bishop can be recognized by both the Vatican and the Patriotic Association, then that Bishop will have more religious authority".

\*\*\* What the facts suggest

In its decades of power in the People's China, the communist regime's religious policies aimed at eliminating all legal-canonical ties between the Church in China and the Apostolic See, depicted in propaganda as an imperialist body. Even after the bloodiest phases of persecution – as when Christians, along with multitudes of their countrymen, suffered during the Cultural Revolution – the patriotic bodies of "democratic" self-management inspired by the Party (with the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association in the forefront) were there to ensure that the Church should proceed along the path of the "three autonomies" – independence, self-determination and self-financing – also in the procedures for the appointments of bishops, to be made in total independence from the Holy See. In 1958 the consecration of bishops without papal consent began. As the Ucanews agency wrote last 21

April, even after the “reopening” policy inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping at the end of the seventies, “China did not allow any candidate to be ordained bishop, if it was known that he had the papal mandate”. The communion of the bishops with the Pope could only take the shape of an inner conviction without any canonical expression. Not least for this reason, an “underground” episcopal network was rapidly structured from the early eighties on, with bishops in communion with Rome ordained outside all government control.

Against that background the new scenario outlined by the recent behavior and words of the Chinese leadership represent a kind of Copernican revolution. What filtered through the statements of the two Chinese academics was, that for the first time, the papal appointment of bishops is explicitly recognized as a *condicio sine qua non*, an indispensable element in the dynamic of the legitimate episcopal ordinations of the Catholic Church. A conception already at work in the recent appointments, and in those that might come. In political-diplomatic circles it is said that a roster of more than fifteen names of possible candidates for the leadership of an equal number of vacant episcopal sees has arrived in the Vatican from Beijing. And it so happens that the young priests mentioned in the list from China correspond largely to those already identified by the Holy See as possible future bishops.

In this sense, the recent ordinations of bishops and those in the near future can be read as a test of a possible *pro tempore* framework agreement between mainland China and the Vatican on the question of episcopal appointments. In his interview with the *Global Times* Professor Peng Liu spoke of bishops “approved by both parties” and hinted at the guidelines of such an agreement: “When China decides to approve the ordination of a bishop”, the Chinese academic said, “it sends a list of possible candidates to the Pope through some private channel, and then they choose them together”. A simple scheme, that through local selection mechanisms such as that entrusted to representatives of the parishes, brings forward the names of candidates approved by the government and then submit them to the Holy See which would have the last, binding word. Thus the frightening specter of a do-it-yourself Chinese Church, a haunting possibility for a long time now, would be tacitly exorcized forever. And the possibility of further illegitimate episcopal ordinations would be definitively excluded.

\*\*\* Between saying and doing

If the potential road map for a gradual solution of the episcopal appointments snag seems outlined, it is not to be taken for granted that things will run smoothly all along the way. No agreement could come into force without guarantees for the so-called “underground” Catholic communities, that the civil authorities and the police forces sometimes tolerate and sometimes put under pressure, considering them outside the legal framework. The cases of bishops and priests still subject to forms of detention or obligatory residence should also be resolved beforehand. And friction might arise partly because of a possible upcoming Committee of Catholic representatives. This assembly is the greatest sphere of the application of the regime’s religious policy towards the Catholic Church. It is the meeting ground of delegates from all the dioceses registered with the state administration and is periodically

convened to designate posts in the official bodies of the Chinese Church, including the College of bishops (a body not recognized by the Holy See and consisting only of bishops recognized by the government), which has been without a president since the death of Joseph Liu Yuanren, the illegitimate bishop of Nanjing who died in 2004. The new fact is that at the end of its annual meeting on 25 March last the Vatican Commission on the Church in China issued an official statement which urged the Chinese bishops to avoid “making gestures (such as, for example, sacramental celebrations, episcopal ordination, attending meetings) that contradict communion with the Pope, who appointed them pastors, and that create difficulties, sometimes very distressing, within their ecclesial communities”. Now many of the bishops approved by the Pope may find themselves in difficulty due to the Vatican’s solicitation, should they be summoned as representatives of their dioceses to the next Committee. In mid-April, three of them anonymously confided to the Ucanews agency that the wish expressed by the Vatican Commission had put them “in a difficult position”. They noted that participation in an illegitimate ordination cannot be equated in gravity to eventual presence at a national congress “which has nothing to do with the spirit of the Church” since summoned by the government. “The officials will accuse you of not loving the country if you don’t take part in the meeting, and the work of the Church in all fields will become very difficult in the future”, said one of them. And another has admitted his intention to participate in passive fashion, should he be summoned, so as “to gain space for pastoral work and so as not to embarrass local officials”, adding that “it would be unrealistic not to go”.

Yet again, some of the Chinese bishops, though in full communion with the Bishop of Rome, might be exposed to the tirades of those who accuse them of capitulation and lack of reaction in the face of interference by the civil authorities in the life of the Church. Their numerous participation in a future meeting of the National Committee of Catholic representatives could also embarrass the Holy See. While a large-scale absence could provoke further motivation for retaliation from those sectors of the Chinese nomenclature who are against the line of dialogue opened with the Vatican.

\*\*\* Ways to avoid a new impasse

Even if a future convocation of the Committee were to open yet another critical phase in relations between Beijing and the Vatican, the proven ability to combine the clarity of directives and declarations of principle with flexible response to the shifts and changes in concrete situations and conditions on the ground in the given conditions, may help steer clear of this further obstacle.

It is precisely in this that the changed emphases of the Chinese leadership about the appointment of bishops suggest implications of notable import.

If the heirs of Mao and Deng have changed their minds and now take into serious account the papal appointment of bishops, this development cannot be attributed to courses of ecclesiology unlikely to have been taught to party cadres. The new decision-makers have merely taken heed that an illegitimate bishop has no authority among the faithful. “The last bishops appointed without papal mandate”, said the Chinese academic Ren Yanli in 30Days, “are isolated and no one wants to take the Eucharist from their hands during mass”. The

Chinese leaders aim to maintain a certain social control over church activities. It is better for that purpose to deal with bishops who are socially respected and followed, rather than featureless and isolated puppets in the hands of the Religious Affairs section of the Party. The stated purpose of the Chinese leadership is not to interfere with or threaten the sacramental and apostolic nature of Chinese ecclesial reality: those things don't interest them, nor do they seem to want to understand them very much. But this very neglect by the regime of the only things on which the Church is founded and which nourish it ("since it possesses no other life than that of grace", Paul VI, Credo of the People of God) could now show itself to be a paradoxical ally in the gradual solution of yet unresolved problems in the relationship between mainland China and the Holy See. From Cyrus the Persian onwards, the whole history of salvation is strewn with the ironic conduct of civil powers who in pursuing their own worldly interests unintentionally facilitate over time the journey of the People of God. By approving the ordination of bishops chosen on the basis of their approval by the Apostolic See, even the Chinese government – in its own way and in what falls within its sphere of competence – can help implement the pastoral suggestions that Benedict XVI set out in his Letter to Chinese Catholics in May 2007. So that that in the rapidly developing China of today and tomorrow, the children who adhere to the faith of the martyrs of the twentieth century may easily enjoy the treasures of grace and "live peaceful and quiet lives with all devotion and propriety" (1 Tim 2, 2).

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Photo Legend (see original article)

Dida1

On the left, the episcopal ordination of Paul Meng Quinglu as bishop of Hohhot, 18 April 2010; right, two girls during a Christmas performance before midnight mass in a Beijing church

Dida2

The Wangfujing market in Beijing

Dida3

Above and left, Chinese faithful in Beijing

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**ASIA/CHINA**

## **Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of the Diocese of Zhengding released**

Zhengding (Agenzia Fides) – Yesterday, July 7, Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo, the legitimate non-official Bishop of the Diocese of Zhengding in the Province of He Bei in mainland China, was released. Age 75, Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo is well known and is a key figure of the

Chinese Church for his steadfastness in the faith and for his clear position on the life of faith and politics.

His abduction had occurred March 31, 2009, coinciding with the meeting that was held at the Vatican for the Commission on the Church in China (see Fides 02/04/2009). Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo was born on May 1, 1935, was ordained a priest on June 7, 1980, and was consecrated Bishop of the Diocese of Zhengding on February 8, 1981. (Agenzia Fides 8/7/2010)

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## **Catholic faithful to celebrate witness of 120 Chinese Martyrs**

CNA STAFF, Jul 4, 2010 / 05:03 am (CNA).- On Friday, July 9, the Church will celebrate the feast of the 120 Martyrs of China. Religious persecution has a long history in China, especially persecution of Christians, thousands of whom have died for their faith in the last millennium.

On October 1, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized 120 men, women, and children who gave their lives for the faith in China between the years 1648 and 1930. The martyrs include 87 native Chinese and 33 foreign missionaries. The majority were killed during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900.

“Chinese men and women of every age and state, priests, religious and lay people, showed the same conviction and joy, sealing their unfailing fidelity to Christ and the Church with the gift of their lives,” said the Holy Father during the canonization.

“Resplendent in this host of martyrs are also the 33 missionaries who left their land and sought to immerse themselves in the Chinese world, lovingly assimilating its features in the desire to proclaim Christ and to serve those people.”

Of the 33 foreign-born missionaries, most were priests and religious, including members of the Order of Preachers, Friars Minor, Jesuits, Salesians and Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

One of the more well-known native martyrs was a 14-year-old Chinese girl named Ann Wang, who was killed during the Boxer Rebellion when she refused to apostasize. She bravely withstood the threats of her torturers, and just as she was about to be beheaded, she radiantly declared, “The door of heaven is open to all” and repeated the name of Jesus three times.

Another of the martyrs was 18-year-old Chi Zhuzi, who had been preparing to receive the sacrament of Baptism when he was caught on the road one night and ordered to worship idols. He refused to do so, revealing his belief in Christ. His right arm was cut off and he was tortured, but he would not deny his faith. Rather, he fearlessly pronounced to his captors, before being flayed alive, “Every piece of my flesh, every drop of my blood will tell you that I am Christian.”

Augustine Zhao Rong was the first native Chinese priest to become a martyr. Born in 1746, he was served as one of the soldiers who escorted Bishop John Gabriel Taurin Dufresse to his martyrdom in Beijing. The witness of the bishop led Augustine to seek baptism at age 30. He was ordained a priest five years later and was martyred in 1815.

During the canonization Mass, Pope John Paul II thanked God for blessing the Church with the heroic witness of the 120 martyrs, whom he called “an example of courage and consistency to us all.”

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**ASIA/CHINA**

### **Three dioceses in the Province of Hu Bei celebrate ordination of 5 priests**

Yi Chang (Agenzia Fides) – Three dioceses of the Province of Hu Bei have gathered the fruits of the Year for Priests, ordaining 5 new priests. On the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, June 29, at the Cathedral of the Diocese of the Yi Chang, in the Province of Hu Bei, 5 deacons belonging to the Dioceses of Yi Chang, Ji Zhou, and Xiang Fan were ordained priests. According to information sent to Fides, Bishop Lu Shou Wang, Bishop Ordinary of the Diocese of Yi Chang (anointed with the approval of the Holy See) presided over the solemn celebration with ninety concelebrants. Over 500 faithful and many religious took part in the ceremony, along with relatives and friends of the new priests. Except for one, who studied at the Seminary of Shaan Xi, the other four newly ordained priests were all formed in the seminary of Zhong Nan (south-central China). According to a priest of the Diocese of Yi Chang, with these new priests, the diocese now has 22 priests, 11 religious, and 16 parishes serving about 20,000 faithful. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 02/07/2010)

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**ASIA/CHINA**

### **Seminarians from Regional Seminary of He Bei conclude 7 years of studies**

Shi Jia Zhuang (Agenzia Fides) – "The degree is not the final goal of a vocation; indeed it is the true beginning of a vocation. We are ready for change in our life dedicating ourselves to pastoral work and evangelization through service, sacrifice, and dedication." These were the words of one of the 22 seminarians of the Regional Seminary of He Bei who have recently completed their studies. According to information received by Fides, the morning of Thursday, June 30, in the Aula Magna of the Seminary, there was a solemn graduation ceremony for these 22 seminarians from the 5 dioceses of He Bei, who finished their 7 years

of study and priestly formation. The Rector of the seminary, several bishops of their dioceses, formators, and donors attended the ceremony, which was also an emotional moment seeing these young fruits from the vocational path reach such an important goal. In addition to thanking the Lord, the representative of the seminarians also recalled all those who have accompanied them on their vocational journey: priests, trainers, family, friends, and faithful ... The graduating seminarians also wanted to give a small contribution of about 80 Euros each, the result of their savings, to the Ding Han Foundation to support vocational studies.

As the Vice-Chancellor of the Seminary recalled, "since its opening in 1984 until today, the Regional Seminary of He Bei has formed 472 seminarians. Of these, 420 were ordained priests, 3 are bishops, and 2 others will soon receive episcopal consecration." The priest said, "Our biggest success is not so much in the scientific or intellectual, but above all in the many good workers who love Christ, love the Church, love the faithful..."

According to statistics provided by "Faith" of He Bei, among the 10 Regional Major Seminaries on the mainland, only those of He Bei and Shang Hai have had graduates from among their 40 seminarians. The other eight seminaries must wait until next summer. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 01/07/2010)

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America Magazine, USA

## Could Matteo Ricci Have Done It Today?

Posted at: Wednesday, July 07, 2010 08:51:59 PM

Author: Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

Cambridge, MA. As you know from my last blog, I am way behind on current events (insofar as I ever catch up), due to a very busy June and most recently my retreat near Dublin. Much that I would have written can be allowed to pass without observable loss. However, I did want to return to the item noted in the press back in May, "Pope praises Father Matteo Ricci, 16th-century missionary to China," on the 400th anniversary of his death. See also the America's fine May 4th cover story, by Jeremy Clarke, SJ, a China expert.

The Pope spoke to visitors from Fr. Ricci's hometown of Macerata in Italy. His brief remarks, which can be found at the Vatican website, serve well to honor the occasion but — since I always expect greater insights from this Pope in particular (whether he actually composed his comments or not!) — there is more we can learn from what we read. Here I will just highlight a few points, by way of gentle arguments, with respect to the possibility of ventures such as Ricci's in today's Church; don't trust this as a summary of the Pope's speech, be sure to read his comments for yourself at the Vatican website.

First, “Fr Ricci is a unique case of a felicitous synthesis between the proclamation of the Gospel and the dialogue with the culture of the people to whom he brought it; he is an example of balance between doctrinal clarity and prudent pastoral action.” This is easy to say in retrospect, but in that day and age, Fr Ricci and other early Jesuits in China had to find their way experimentally, taking risks that others disapproved of, often going too far, in the judgments of their more cautious Catholic contemporaries, in making the Gospel at home in China. Clarity and prudence were easier to see with hindsight!

Second, Fr Ricci’s perspective “consisted of a humanism that viewed the person as part of his context, cultivated his moral and spiritual values, retaining everything positive that is found in the Chinese tradition and offering to enrich it with the contribution of Western culture and, above all, with the wisdom and truth of Christ.” This too is a wonderful insight, and very true, but it is, I would guess — since I am not a China-expert — hard to prove in practice. How for instance does the foreigner, living for but a few years in China, decide what is “positive” in Chinese culture? Surely there must have been positive elements — e.g., in Chinese Buddhism, or in the more arcane parts of the Tao, or in popular religion — that Fr. Ricci missed. So too, it is tricky to distinguish where “the contribution of Western culture” ends and “the wisdom and truth of Christ” takes over. Even today, Asian theologians struggle to decide which parts of the heritage of the West can be left behind as not essential to the Gospel.

Third, the Pope nicely quotes Fr. Ricci, “For more than 20 years, every morning and every evening I have prayed with tears to Heaven. I know that the Lord of Heaven takes pity on living creatures and pardons them... The truth about the Lord of Heaven is already in human hearts. But human beings do not immediately understand it and are not inclined to reflect on such a matter,” and the Pope adds that in this way Ricci was making the Gospel known, that is to say, making God known. My guess again is that things are a bit more complicated, since the reading of the human heart is not an easy thing to do, particularly far from one’s native culture, and since the move from the “Lord of heaven” — a term with rich resonances in Chinese culture — to Jesus Christ and the Gospel really requires a wisdom that discovers or makes connections in a way that is not heavy-handed or pompous, a facile identification of “their” best values with “our” best values. I mention this neither to criticize Fr Ricci nor to disagree with the Pope, but to point out how breath-taking a move it was, and is, to make such connections in a non-colonizing or patronizing way. Do we give our theologians room for these adventures today, when Rome is not a year’s sea journey away, but a quick phone call or email?

Four, the Pope points out that in Fr Ricci’s ministry “the encounter motivated by faith also became an intercultural dialogue.” Here I am a little puzzled. Wouldn’t the intercultural dialogue, with all the patience that requires, come first and then become, open the way to, a subsequent encounter in faith? This is not a major issue, of course, but has to do with

intentions and cultural skills: how do we begin to make Christ known when we are strangers in a strange land?

Fifth and finally, the Pope rightly recollects Fr Ricci's Chinese companions, particularly Xu Guangqi, "a native of Shanghai, a literary man and a scientist, mathematician, astronomer and agricultural expert who reached the highest ranks in the imperial bureaucracy, an integral man of great faith and Christian life, who was dedicated to serving his country and occupied an important place in the history of Chinese culture," and Li Zhizao, who "helped Fr Ricci in completing the last and most developed editions of the world map that were to give the Chinese a new image of the world." This is a wonderful corrective to missionary narratives that give all the credit to the Western missionary, and see natives as passive recipients of our wisdom. I would just add that Fr Ricci surely learned a great deal from Chinese intellectuals who did not become Christian, who resisted the logic of Fr Ricci's cultural and religious arguments, and who, in their resistance, taught him something of the difference of China, how he could never quite understand it or make it fit perfectly with his expectations. Every missionary should have room to thank those who take him or her seriously — but still do not convert!

Think about it. The real point, I am suggesting, is that the very fact that we honor Fr Ricci 400 years after his death — just as in 2005 we honored Fr Roberto de Nobili 400 years after his arrival in India — is no safe thing. They were pioneers who took risks, put together things that never had been put together before, and hoped and prayed that all the religious and cultural pieces would hold together, so as to convince both the people they visited, and Church officials back in Europe. We honor Fr Ricci and Fr de Nobili most honestly, I think, by creating spaces for similar experiments today, letting novel efforts bear fruit, or not, over a longer rather than shorter period of time — being patient enough to wait, assessing their work only after a good period of time has passed.

Can we honor Fr Ricci, then, by celebrating today the fact that right now all kinds of new and uncharted interreligious encounters are coming to birth, such as require us to figure out how to connect the Gospel to our culture/s? (This needn't be taken merely as a rhetorical question, implying a negative answer. Perhaps we do leave open this space for the interreligious imagination. But in that happy circumstance, the point is to make sure that we keep the space open, lest we kill our prophets and then later on honor their graves.)

Francis X. Clooney

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