

CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA UPDATES

NOVEMBER 2011

14 Updates

1.

Vatican denounces excommunicant

Says involvement in Yibin ordination has made 'canonical position' worse

UCA News

www.ucanews.com

1 December 2011

Alessandro Speciale

Vatican City

The Vatican yesterday strongly criticized an illicitly ordained bishop who took part in the episcopal ordination of Fr Peter Luo Xuegang yesterday in the Yibin diocese against the wishes of Rome.

Vatican spokesman Fr Federico Lombardi denounced the “disapproval and disconcertment” it created among Catholics and told journalists that Fr Paul Lei Shiyin’s standing within the Catholic Church was “worsened” by his decision to disobey an explicit request from the Holy See not to take part in the ordination.

Fr Lei was excommunicated after being ordained bishop of Leshan in June without papal mandate and was subsequently excommunicated.

Church law prescribes that the other bishops taking part in the rite – firstly, Bishop John Chen Shizhong of Yibin, the main officiant of the ordination – should have “absolutely excluded” Fr Lei, or they risk incurring “canonical consequences”.

Nevertheless, the Vatican spokesman added, “probably they could have not prevented it without grave inconvenience” and the Holy See will only be able to evaluate the matter properly when it has more detailed information on the events in Yibin.

Lombardi stressed that Fr Lei’s defiance of the Vatican was compounded by the fact that he was one of the consecrating bishops during the rite: “His continued disobedience of Church law unfortunately worsens his canonical position.”

The Vatican also noted that Fr Luo’s ordination with Rome’s approval was “certainly positive” after three unwarranted episcopal ordinations in mainland China in recent months.

“This will be appreciated not only by Chinese bishops and Catholics, but also by the universal Church.”

2.

Mandate to 179 extraordinary ministers of communion of Kai Xi Cathedral of the Diocese of Tian Jin

Agencia Fides

www.fides.org

1 December 2011

Tian Jin

ASIA/CHINA

There are 179 extraordinary ministers of communion at Kai Xi Cathedral of the Diocese of Tian Jin, who received the mandate during the solemn liturgy on November 19, presided

by the pastor Don Zhang Liang. According to reports from Faith of He Bei, the rite of the mandate of extraordinary ministers on the day of the Solemnity of Christ the King, on the eve of the new liturgical year has been celebrated in the cathedral of Tian Jin for 8 years. Those who receive the mandate follow a formation course, during which the Popes teachings have always been cited stressing the importance of the Eucharist in the life of the faithful.

During the mandate, the priest gave everyone the Cross and the identification card. In his homily, the priest acknowledged the merits of the previous extraordinary ministers, because "they fulfilled the mission of evangelization through this pastoral commitment, after an intense personal spiritual life, nourished by the reading of the Holy Scripture, the spiritual retreat and adoration" . In the past 7 years, the extraordinary ministers have given the communion to 14,256 sick parishioners, they have accompanied the priests for confessions at home 1,617 times and 1,882 times for the anointing of the sick. Finally, they have driven 212 vigils for the dead.

The Cathedral of Kai Xi , dedicated to St. Joseph, of the Diocese of Tian Jin, was built in 1914 in Romanesque style and can accommodate over 2,000 people. The mission of the Vincentians, was called "the French church" by locals. The parish now has more than 30,000 people, it is very lively and also uses modern technology and mass media to promote evangelization. It was among the first parishes to open a website and, recently, has also opened a blog on evangelization. The Diocese of Tian Jing is a large Catholic community, where Catholicism has had a remarkable development. And it is one of the most important Chinese cities under the direct administration of the central government, such as Beijing, Shang Hai and Chong Qing. According to the Guide to the Catholic Church in China 2008, the diocesan community has over 100,000 faithful, thirty priests and forty Sisters of the Community of Charity, as well as a few dozen seminarians.

3.

Bishop approved by Pope ordained in southwest China

A fourth Chinese bishop has been ordained with the Pope's approval this year

Vatican Insider
Gerard O'Connell

30 November 2011
Rome

<http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/world-news/detail/articolo/china-vatican-ordination-10377/>

Six bishops, including one who is under excommunication, laid hands on Father Peter Luo Xuegang on November 30, and ordained him coadjutor bishop of Yibin diocese in southwestern China

Some one thousand people, including 61 priests, 35 nuns, 800 lay faithful, government officials and representatives of other religions, attended the ceremony in the century old St Mary's church in the city of Yibin, in Sichuan Province, according to UCA News agency.

The ordination took place in a tense atmosphere. Many police officers, security officials, and police dogs kept the church under strict surveillance throughout the ceremony. People were not allowed to take cell phones or cameras inside the Church, and those

attending had to arrive three hours in advance, the news agency reported.

Bishop John Chen Shizhong, the 95 year-old head of Yibin diocese who is recognized by Rome and Beijing, presided over the ceremony.

Five bishops assisted him, and concelebrated the mass. Four are recognized by Rome and Beijing: Paul He Zeqing of Wanzhou, Joseph Li Jing of Ningxia, John Baptist Yang Xiaoting of Yulin and Coadjutor Bishop Paul Xiao Zejiang of Guiyang.

The fifth, Paul Lei Shiyin, was declared excommunicated by the Holy See after being ordained bishop of Leshan, without the pope's approval, on June 29.

Lei, who was ordained priest with Lou on 30 November 1981, showed contempt for Church law by participating in the ordination ceremony. The law forbids an excommunicated priest or bishop from such participation. The Director of the Holy See's Press Office, Father Federico Lombardi, had pointedly recalled this norm in a public statement on the eve of the Yibin ordination.

The other five bishops who took part in the Yibin ordination have also have not respected Catholic Church norms by participating with Lei in this ceremony. It remains to be seen how the Holy See will react to these latest violations of Church legislation.

The 47 year-old Bishop Lou is now coadjutor of Yibin diocese which has 7 priests and 30,000 Catholics. Expected to succeed the elderly Bishop Chen soon, he has chosen as the motto for his coat of arms: "Jesus is the Good Shepherd."

Lou is the third Catholic bishop to be ordained in China with the approval of both Rome and Beijing in 2011. A fourth bishop was ordained with the papal mandate last June, but because this was done in secret to avoid the participation of an illegitimate bishop in his ordination, the Chinese authorities have not given him their recognition yet.

Two other priests were ordained bishop without the papal mandate (on June 29 and July 14) but they were subsequently declared excommunicated by the Holy See. Lei Shiyin was one of them.

While some 40 dioceses are currently without bishops in mainland China, six priests have already been elected as candidates to be bishops and are awaiting ordination. All six have Beijing's approval, but two lack the Pope's approval and risk excommunication if they present themselves for ordination without it.

4.

China says "sincere" with Vatican ahead of ordination

Reuters

29 November 2011

BEIJING

China said on Tuesday it was sincere about better ties with the Vatican, a day before the planned ordination of a bishop that will be a test of whether the two sides can rein in tensions over control of religious life.

The Vatican and Beijing agreed to allow Father Peter Luo Xuegang, serving alongside an aged and more senior "ordinary" bishop, to be ordained in Yibin diocese in southwest China, according to reports. That would mark a break with a cluster of controversial

appointments made without the Pope's approval.

The ordination of bishops is a key test in dealings between China and the Vatican, because it sets the Communist Party's role in policing religious life against the Catholic Church's traditional hostility to interference from secular authorities.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei did not comment directly on the ordination of Father Peter in Yibin, a small city in Sichuan province, southwest China.

"We have always been sincere about improving relations with the Vatican," Hong told a daily news briefing in response to a question about the scheduled ordination.

The Vatican spokesman, Father Federico Lombardi, said that if the planned ordination happens, "it would be of a candidate who has been approved by the Holy See."

"I hope, obviously, that if the ordination takes place, the norms of the Catholic Church will be respected, that is, that the faithful are informed about the Holy See's approval of the candidate and that no illegitimate bishops attend the liturgical celebration," he said in a statement.

Chinese Catholics number between 8 million and 12 million, and are divided between a state-sanctioned church that has installed bishops without the Vatican's approval and an "underground" wing long wary of associating with the Communist Party-run Patriotic Catholic Association.

Pope Benedict has encouraged the two sides of the divided Chinese church to reconcile, and engaged in a low-key dialogue with Beijing about political ties.

But from late last year Chinese authorities appointed three bishops without the Vatican's approval, igniting strains in relations.

Beijing and the Vatican broke formal diplomatic relations shortly after the Chinese Communists took power in 1949.

The Holy See is one of the few governments to preserve formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan -- the self-ruled island that mainland China deems an illegitimate breakaway -- and Beijing has pressed for the Pope to shift recognition to it.

In July, the Vatican said it had excommunicated a Chinese bishop ordained without papal approval, and Pope Benedict said he "deplored" the way Communist Party authorities have treated Chinese Catholics faithful to Rome.

AsiaNews, an online service that reports on Catholic affairs, however, reported earlier that the ordination in Yibin is "taking place with the permission of the Holy See and the consecrating bishop has long been in communion with the Pope."

In past years, the two sides have also quietly reached agreement on appointing bishops. The Vatican has also absolved bishops appointed through government channels who it determined had gone along under coercion.

But AsiaNews said an excommunicated bishop from nearby Leshan diocese is likely to participate in the ceremony, potentially bringing tensions into the event.

"Several bishops of neighboring dioceses, who thought to participate in the ordination, are

now afraid to participate," because of the excommunicated bishop's presence, it said.

(Reporting by Chris Buckley, Additional reporting by Philip Pullella in Rome,; Editing by Yoko Nishikawa)

5.

Planned ordination 'encouraging'

Vatican-approved bishop in Yibin could be good for Chinese Catholics

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

Alessandro Speciale, Vatican

29 November 2011

Vatican City

The planned ordination of a new Vatican-approved bishop in the Chinese diocese of Yibin could be "encouraging" for Chinese Catholics, provided that no bishop ordained without Rome's approval will attend the ceremony, a Vatican spokesman said yesterday.

Fr Federico Lombardi told reporters that the forthcoming ordination of Fr Peter Luo Xuegang as coadjutor bishop of Yibin in Sichuan, would take place tomorrow.

He said the ordination was "approved by the Holy See" and hoped "no illegitimate bishop will participate in the ceremony."

Fr Paul Lei Shiyin, who was ordained without a papal mandate in June as bishop of Leshan and subsequently excommunicated by the Holy See, has said he plans to attend the ceremony.

"I have seen this story in the media," said Fr Lombardi. "If the ordination were to take place, [Fr Luo] would be a candidate approved by the Holy See."

He added, however, that the ceremony must respect "the laws of the Catholic Church; that is, that the faithful are informed of the Holy See's approval of the candidate, and that no illegitimate bishop will participate at the ceremony."

Only then, Fr Lombardi said, "would the event be encouraging for the Catholic community."

6.

Fr. Lombardi: "The episcopal ordination that will take place on 30 November in China is approved by the Holy See"

Agenzia Fides

www.fides.org

29 November 2011

Vatican City

VATICAN

With regards to the news that on November 30 the episcopal ordination of rev. Luo Xuegang, in the Diocese of Yibin, Sichuan Province will take place in China, the Director of the Vatican Press Office father Federico Lombardi, said: "I had seen this news circulating in the media. If that were to happen, it would be a candidate approved by the Holy See. I hope of course - he added - that if the ordination takes place the norms of the Catholic Church will be respected, namely that the faithful are informed about the approval of the candidate by the Holy See, and that no illegitimate Bishop participates in the liturgical

ceremony. In the norms are respected, the event would be an encouragement for the Catholic community".

7.

Vatican urges China to respect Church norms in next ordination

The Vatican has sent a clear message to China, urging authorities to respect Catholic Church norms during the ordination of Fr. Peter Luo Xuegang on 30 November

Vatican Insider

Gerard O'Connell

28 November 2011

Rome

The Vatican has called on the Chinese authorities to respect "the norms of the Catholic Church" at the ordination of Father Peter Luo Xuegang as coadjutor-bishop of Yibin diocese, southwestern China, on November 30. In particular, it asks that the faithful be informed that he has the pope's approval, and that no illegitimate bishop participates in the ceremony.

Father Federico Lombardi, the Director of the Vatican Press Office, made the Holy See's position clear Monday afternoon, November 28, when asked by journalists if he could confirm that Father Lou would be ordained bishop on the said date.

He said he had "seen this news circulating in the media". This suggests that China has not officially informed the Vatican that the ordination was about to take place.

UCA News reports that the ordination will take place in the century-old St. Mary's Church, in the city of Yibin, Sichuan Province, south-western China, and that the 95 year-old bishop of Yibin diocese, John Chen Shizhong, - recognized by both Rome and Beijing - will ordain Father Lou as his coadjutor (and so his successor as head of the diocese) on the date mentioned.

"If that were to happen", Lombardi said, "It would be a candidate that is approved by the Holy See." This was the first public confirmation by the Vatican that Father Lou has the papal mandate.

Then, going to the main purpose of his comment and using words that sought to convey clearly the Vatican's position without appearing to dictate, Lombardi said: "Obviously, I hope that if the ordination takes place the norms of the Catholic Church will be respected, namely that the faithful are informed about the approval of the candidate by the Holy See, and that no illegitimate bishop participates in the liturgical ceremony."

If those norms were respected, Lombardi added, "The event would be an encouragement for the Catholic community."

The Vatican's statement came in the wake of news that the excommunicated bishop of Leshan, Paul Lei Shiyin, would participate in the ordination ceremony. Ordained on June 29 without the pope's approval, the Holy See on July 4 declared that he had incurred excommunication. Consequently, he is prohibited by Church law from participating as a bishop in the liturgical ceremony.

Lei Shiyin is the Chairman of the Catholic Patriotic Association in Sichuan province and, obviously not wishing to lose face, confirmed that he had received an invitation to the ordination ceremony and will attend. But, he added, he did not know if he would serve as

a co-consecrating bishop, UCA News reported on 28 November.

News of Lei's intended participation sparked much discussion and debate in Catholics blogs and websites in mainland China, and many hoped the Vatican would clarify its position before the event. Fr. Lombardi's statement does just that.

8.

Ordination of new bishop in China with Pope's approval on November 30

**Benedict XVI has approved the ordination of Father Peter Luo Xuegang as
coadjutor bishop of Yebin, a diocese in southwestern China**

Vatican Insider
Gerard O'Connell

25 November 2011
Rome

A new bishop will be ordained in mainland China on November 30 with the approval of Pope Benedict XVI and of the authorities in Beijing.

Father Peter Luo Xuegang, 47, will be ordained as coadjutor bishop of Yebin, a diocese in the province of Sichuan in southwestern China that has 30,000 Catholics and 8 priests. The news was broken by UCA News.

This is the first ordination of a Catholic bishop in the mainland since the illicit ordinations on June 29 and July 14, and the subsequent declaration by the Holy See that those so ordained had incurred excommunication.

The 95-year old Bishop John Chen Shizhong, who has governed the Yibin diocese since 1985 and is recognized by both the Holy See and Beijing, has been designated by the state-approved Church community to preside at the ordination. It is not yet publicly known who the co-consecrating bishops will be.

Father Luo was ordained priest for the diocese of Leshan on 30 November 1991. His uncle, the late Matthew Luo Duxi, was bishop of this diocese from 1993-2009 and had wanted him to succeed him as bishop but the Chinese authorities had already designated Father Paul Lei Shiyin for that position, and so this possibility was closed to him.

Another path, however, opened up for Father Lou to become a bishop. He was seconded to the diocese of Yibin in May 2009. Seven months later, on 9 January 2010, he was elected as the candidate to be coadjutor bishop of Yibin diocese. He obtained 14 out of the 17 votes in the carefully arranged "democratic election", and subsequently obtained the approval of the Bishops' Conference, a body recognized by Beijing but not by the Vatican.

Father Lou, whom sources describe as "a government man", is the Chairman of the Catholic Patriotic Association of Yibin City, and is also the vice-Chairman of the Church Affairs Committee in the province of Sichuan.

As preparations go ahead for his ordination in the Blessed Sacrament Cathedral in Yibin City, sources told UCA News that they were "worried" that the excommunicated bishop of Leshan, Paul Lei Shiyin, might participate in the November 30 ceremony.

Lei Shiyin, was ordained bishop of Leshan on June 29 without the pope's approval, and the

Holy See subsequently declared him excommunicated on July 4. But since he is head of the Catholic Patriotic Association and the Church Affairs Committee of Sichuan Province he would normally be expected to participate in the ordination ceremony.

Church Law, however, forbids Lei Shiyin from participating in the liturgy, as an excommunicated bishop. Moreover, other bishops are prohibited from participating in such a ceremony with him. His presence as a consecrating bishop at Father Lou's ordination would create major problems for them. If they participate with him in the ordination ceremony, they will be in serious trouble with Rome.

Next week's ordination is the first since the illegitimate one held in Shantou on July 14. The Chinese authorities have, over the past year or more, already elected at least seven candidates to be bishops, but have not yet set a date for their ordination. A number of these candidates do not have the pope's approval.

It is a positive sign that Beijing has chosen to ordain a priest - Father Lou, who does have the papal mandate; presuming, of course, that it does not insist on the participation of illegitimate or excommunicated bishops at the ceremony.

It remains to be seen whether the Yibin ordination represents a decision by the Chinese authorities to return to the pragmatic 'win-win' approach, or not. If it does, then this would be a sign of hope that a new effort at constructive dialogue may be possible between the Vatican and Beijing.

9.

If it's good for the Church, it's good for Faith Weekly

Faith Weekly serves as a barometer of relations between China and Vatican

UCA News

www.ucanews.com

25 November 2011

ucanews.com reporter, Shijiazhuang

China

The ups and downs of Sino-Vatican relations are mirrored in the fortunes of Faith Weekly, a national Catholic newspaper published by Hebei Faith Press.

"Our subscription rate is like a barometer," says Father John Baptist Zhang, Hebei Faith Press founder. "It reflects very accurately the sensitive situation of the China Church."

"It also shows clearly that the paper is closely tied to the fate of the Church in China and the religious sentiment of Chinese Catholics."

Launched in 1991, Faith Weekly was suspended altogether in 1997 but re-opened in 1998, when China and the Vatican re-entered into dialogue. With hopes of establishing diplomatic ties running high, the paper's annual circulation reached its first peak of 57,000 copies.

Then, in 2000, five bishops were ordained without papal mandate and China criticized the canonization of 120 Chinese martyr-saints. As the relationship lost its warmth, the paper lost 12,000 subscribers.

After the election of a new pope, subscriptions in 2006 again topped 50,000 copies. In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI wrote to Catholics in China, urging reconciliation. One result of

that gesture was another hike in readership.

The upward trend continued to a peak of 61,000 copies but, amid a series of fallouts between Church and state, figures headed down again in 2008-2009.

“Our bulk subscriptions are usually renewed between December and February, before the Chinese Lunar New Year around January and February. Even slight friction between the Vatican and China during this period affects it,” says the newly appointed director of Hebei Faith Press, Father Joseph Li Rongpin.

“Faith Weekly is an innocent victim whenever there are tensions.”

Fr Li is also aware that the recent blooming of diocesan newspapers has made an impact on Faith Weekly figures. It is estimated that there are more than 30 newspapers and a dozen journals circulating in the China Church.

“Since most of them are offered free, and most are diocesan, readers find them more relevant to their lives. This is clearly an advantage for local papers,” he says.

However, with this year’s subscriptions holding steady at 50,000 copies, the publishers are pleased to be able to record a pattern of overall growth since the paper’s inception.

And although they have kept a prudently low profile in the paper’s 20th anniversary year, letting it pass without celebration, they are able to look positively into the future.

In September, they changed gear from publication every 10 days to weekly. The editors have enhanced the content, differentiating it from local competitors with more commentary on social issues from a moral standpoint, as well as more in-depth reporting.

“I’m optimistic,” says Fr Li. “Having so much competition motivates us to strive for improvement.”

10.

The vitality of the Catholic communities promotes the mission of evangelization

Agenzia Fides

www.fides.org

24 November 2011

Shi Jia Zhuang

ASIA/CHINA

According to what Faith of He Bei refers to Fides, the vitality of the continental Catholic communities, strengthened by spirituality and by the exchange of experiences, is giving greater impetus to the mission of evangelization. Among the several initiatives that testify the life and the active involvement of different communities, we mention a few.

The four-day spiritual retreat of the parish of St. Mark, of the Diocese of Nanjing in Jiang Su province, were welcomed by the young faithful. Some of them pointed out: "we need a solid formation, this meeting allowed us to experience a period of calm, during which we came in contact with Jesus in prayer". The pastor said that "the parish is located in an isolated area. So it is difficult to organize regular formation and the same spiritual community is a bit disadvantaged. But we saw the enthusiasm of the faithful for the spiritual life that has become a force for evangelization".

During the congress of the parishioners of the parish of Lin Zi, of the Diocese of Zhou Cun,

in Shan Dong province, held on November 20, about fifty participants, led by the pastor and women religious who are responsible for the pastoral work, did a check of the work carried out in the previous year in different fields: pastoral, catechism, evangelization, spirituality, social service and charitable work. From this analysis, they found the work that needs to be intensified in the future, such as reading and study of the Sacred Scripture.

Over the past three years, a 66-year-old lady from the village of Xin Cun of the diocese of Yan Yang in the province of He Nan has brought more than 100 newly baptized in the Church. During the exchange of missionary experiences she said to the faithful: "we must all rely on the Holy Spirit. Every time I do catechism, I pray. I pray the Lord so he makes me his instrument".

11.

Failure to Communicate

**America Magazine
Editorial**

21 November 2011

For the last 15 years, relations between Rome and Beijing have shown slow but steady improvement following the late Pope John Paul II's "One Church—Two Faces" policy in the mid-1990s. Catholics from both the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the members of the unregistered, so-called underground Catholic Church have moved toward practical and affective unity. Beijing and the Vatican quietly cooperated in the appointment of bishops and, in some cases, appointed a single bishop or coadjutor to succeed divided official and unofficial church bishops. Because the progress has been real, the current breakdown in relations is all the more difficult to watch.

Over decades of Communist rule, Catholics in China have struggled to manage the dual loyalties of faith and state. Many were driven underground; priests, bishops and laypeople were harassed and arrested. Some died in China's prisons. But in an era of greater tolerance, Chinese Catholics were beginning to live their faith—together— with growing confidence. The Vatican even quietly validated bishops previously ordained in the Patriotic Association. Official and back channel negotiations explored normalization of relations between the two sides.

Then, in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI released a letter exhorting unity, pardon and reconciliation among all Catholics; but it also frankly challenged the legitimacy of the Patriotic Association as "extraneous to the structure of the church." The association's current vice chair, Liu Bainian, a long-time party apparatchik charged with managing China's Catholics, backpedaled from his previous "hope" for a papal visit to China and quickly reoriented himself safely within party lines with an enthusiastic and familiar condemnation of Roman interference in Chinese affairs.

By the time a politburo vote in October 2010 favored party hardliners, the regression to historic postures became just about complete. Michel Marcil, S.J., the executive director of the U.S. Catholic China Bureau, reports that over the last year there has been a clear effort to corral the already limited religious expression of China's Catholics, and Beijing has once again begun to ordain bishops without Vatican approval. Pope Benedict has ramped up the church's response to the provocations by excommunicating the illicitly ordained bishops and threatening the same to others who willingly cooperate with the ordinations. The Vatican and Chinese authorities appear to have stopped talking and have returned to

wrestling over China's 14 million Catholics.

As if to emphasize that there is a new reality, in August Zhang Qingli, noted for his heavy-handed administration of Tibet, was appointed party secretary of Hebei, a province home to a quarter of China's Catholics and the site of the most passionate acts of Catholic resistance. Zhang's appointment likely signals that a harsher response to popular religious expression is coming.

Meanwhile, far below the headlines over bishops' appointments, roundups and harassment of uncooperative Catholic priests and laypeople has apparently accelerated. In September the State Department released its regular update on worldwide religious freedom. The report dryly noted that conditions had deteriorated over the past six months in China and once again duly listed the various offenses by Chinese officials against religious expression. The lack of a more significant reaction out of Washington in response to the deepening repression is disheartening.

There is much at stake. The church in China is growing; over the next 40 years there could come to be more Christians in China than in any other country in the world. In the past, China's Christians feared the might and the reach of the party. Perhaps Beijing now worries over a shift in that relationship.

Both Beijing and Rome have taken missteps; both should review lost opportunities and explore how to rebuild the relationship. They may also wish to reactivate the informal negotiations that appeared promising in the recent past and begin informal dialogue in neutral Catholic academic venues like Georgetown University.

Pressuring China on human rights can be perilous not just for U.S.-China relations but for everyday Catholics in China who are trying to live out their faith as discreetly and truthfully as they can. "No need to pull the tiger's whiskers to see if it still bites," Father Marcil says.

True enough, but the tiger might benefit from some plain speaking. The State Department and the Obama administration need to express forcefully their concern over the treatment of China's Catholics and other religious communities and the persisting problem of religious freedom in China. Annual report cards and scattered criticisms at press conferences are not enough. There should be no opportunity for misunderstanding. A heightened sense of urgency on religious freedom from Washington would be welcome.

12.

Shanxi seminary resumes classes

**Head's position now vacant after board members
refused to reinstate former rector**

UCA News

www.ucanews.com

17 November 2011

China

Montecorvino Major Seminary in Shanxi province, northern China, resumed classes this week following a 10 week hiatus caused by a dispute involving the institution's rector.

Around 50 out of 70 seminarians have returned to the seminary in a suburb of Taiyuan city, while the rest have transferred to other seminaries, according to Church sources.

The position of seminary rector is now vacant, after board members refused to reinstate

the former rector, Father Anthony Chang Tongxi, at their last meeting in late October.

Fr Chang, 45, who is suspected of embezzling seminary funds, was dismissed by the board in June. All seminarians who had not taken examinations were told to return to their respective dioceses or congregations on an extended summer break.

Religious officials in Shanxi demanded the board, headed by Bishop John Huo Cheng of Fenyang, delay the commencement of the new semester in September until the dispute was settled. They even threatened to remove the 85-year-old bishop as the board director, the sources said.

The seminary board called its students back earlier this month who spent some time cleaning the seminary and tending its vegetable garden, and have now resumed classes. There has been no government intervention so far, said the sources.

13.

Disabled elderly priest promotes the construction of a new church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Agenzia Fides www.fides.org
Zhou Zhi

16 November 2011
ASIA/CHINA

Don Zhang Xiong Feng, disabled elderly priest of the Diocese of Zhou Zhi, in the Shaan Xi province, presided the solemn blessing and location of the new church building cross dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on 12 November. According to what Faith of He Bei reports to Fides, thirty priests concelebrated with the eighty-year-old priest, Don Zhang, while a score of religious of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady and Dominicans together with thousands of faithful took part in the rite.

Although Don Zhang had a fractured leg and became an invalid during the Chinese cultural revolutionary, this did not prevent him from pursuing his pastoral mission and evangelization in the parish. As soon as he regained freedom in 1984, he immediately began working to reconstruct a simple chapel on the ruins of the church dedicated to the Sacred Heart. During these years the faithful have increased considerably and consequently the parish needs a larger and solid church.

Last year, therefore the old priest decided to fulfill this dream and mobilized all the faithful to build a new church by collecting the necessary funds. After reaching 1.1 million yuan (about 100 thousand euros) he began the work of the church which is 35 meters long and 15 meters wide. According to the forecasts 2 million yuan (about 250 thousand euro) is needed, but Don Zhang is confident: "let's leave it all in God's hands, so that we have God's temple where to pray and to break Bread".

14.

'The Church in China has never changed a single iota of the Apostolic Tradition that was delivered to it'

Interview with John Baptist Li Suguang Coadjutor Bishop of Nanchang

7 November 2011

by Gianni Valente

At the twenty-fifth International Prayer Meeting for Peace held in Munich by the Community of Saint Egidio he was also there: John Baptist Li Suguang, 46 year-old Catholic bishop in mainland China with the consent both of the Successor of Peter and also of the government officials in Beijing. So young and timid as to be almost lost among the many religious leaders called from 11 to 13 September last to the Bavarian capital by the network of friendships and closeness without borders that the Community founded by Andrea Riccardi continues to weave around the world.

Yet, when he spoke in one of the 35 panels that marked the event hosted by the Archdiocese of Munich, the voice appeared decisive and the ideas clear. His speech was punctuated with allusions and references to the complex and unresolved trilateral network of relationships that for centuries involve the West, the Catholic Church and the former Celestial Empire. Such as the Chinese proverb that Monsignor Li used to remind everyone that also in the fluid times of globalization 'a long distance can become as close as nearness'. Or as the clear confirmation of the fact – verified in his experience as a pastor of souls – that 'the Church does not lose its universality by respecting Chinese culture and considering the actual circumstances in China'.

Q- Monsignor, you are very young to be a bishop.

JOHN BAPTIST LI SUGUANG: I was born in 1965, in a village in Shanxi Province where the population of about two thousand inhabitants shared a very strong Catholic faith. I grew up like that, in the midst of many people who loved Jesus

Q- And yet those were difficult years. The cultural revolution was in full swing.

A- In my village there weren't too many problems. There were two priests who continued to administer the sacraments. Now, in the village there are four or five. In the surrounding areas there are in fact thirty-eight priests. And there are also many sisters.

Q- What helped you to recognize your vocation to the priesthood?

A- What I saw in the family was very important. I had an uncle priest, and when I was very young, my mother and father showed me how to pray, reciting the morning and evening prayers. I was the youngest of the family, and my parents often told me that I could grow up to become a priest. My mother especially had great influence on me, through her spiritual life. Then a priest whom I met in the diocesan seminary in Beijing as my spiritual father also had an important role. I was there from 1987 to 1992. Our teachers were very old priests, and we studied theology using principally old manuals from before the Second Vatican Council.

Q- How has the condition of the Church changed compared with the years of your childhood?

A- When I was a young boy, the country had yet to experience the season of openness. In the villages it was the devotion of the Christians who conserved the practices of the life of faith. Now there is more opportunity to carry out pastoral work. On Sundays the churches are full, certainly more so than in many European parishes. In the villages, when the church bell rings, people come out of their houses and you see them walk together along the streets, directed towards the church. And also the daily masses, early in the morning, are very popular.

Q- How would you describe the pastoral profile of your diocese?

A- In our province there are a hundred and twenty thousand Catholics, the priests throughout the province are less than fifty. So only the larger parishes have a priest who remains as pastor of the community in a stable manner. The others circulate from village to village, from one parish to another, to administer the sacraments. The good thing is that many of them are young, and compared to them I am the "old one"... The average age of the priests in my diocese is thirty-six. At the economic level, the diocese owns some buildings in Shanghai which with their incomes help to finance the ordinary activities.

Q- What is it that most facilitates the Christian message?

A- The most important thing is the presence of lay people who proclaim and witness the Gospel in the places and circumstances in which everyone lives. And then the works of charity are very important. In our country each religious community is called upon to assist and support a minority ethnic group. We Catholics also do so ourselves, assisting some minority ethnic communities, which are not of Christian faith.

Q- Are there many baptisms of people who do not come from Christian families?

A- We have almost three thousand a year. Two thirds of them are young, then there is a third of adults and the elderly. Most are from rural villages. They request baptism mainly because they are struck by the witness of their fellow Christians and friends, or because they see the spectacle of Christians who take care of the poor and the needy.

Q- What are the sources that feed the ordinary, everyday lives of the faithful?

A- The Mass is the heart of it all, along with prayer and participation in the activities offered by the parish.

Q- Are there figures of saints who arouse particular devotion?

A- In our region there is very strong devotion to St Anthony of Padua and Little Theresa of the Child Jesus. And then, of course, the Virgin Mary. Everyone has the Blessed Virgin Mary as patroness of their own spiritual life.

Q- What are the social realities and existential conditions that you encounter in your pastoral work?

A- Because of the rapid development of the Chinese economy, many people are under pressure in their lives. They really need someone to help them. Someone to give them comfort and consolation, who will support them. Many realize that they are not able to go on without some help. This widens the range in which the Church is called to work and show the love of Christ for everyone. We can not remain indifferent to these real conditions. And we need to favor a pastoral work that is of true support for our fellow citizens who are having some problems and difficulties in their lives.

Q- Did you read the letter Benedict XVI wrote to Chinese Catholics in 2007? And what are the most important contents of that document for you?

A- From my point of view, the very fact that the Pope addressed a specific letter to Chinese Catholics has been a great encouragement for the Church in China. In particular the things the Pope suggested to the priests impressed me.

Q- You were ordained a bishop in 2010 with the consent of the Apostolic See. How do you concretely live your communion with the Bishop of Rome? And how do you express it in

your ordinary pastoral work?

A- Not only I, but also the other Chinese bishops, always read and circulate not only the Pope's letter to Chinese Catholics of 2007, but also all of his talks, homilies, encyclicals, speeches. Photocopies are made and sent to all priests and all parishes. So that everyone can read and follow the Pope in his ordinary magisterium, and thus may well find inspiration for their lives in the situations in which they find themselves. In this way we share the faith of the successor of Peter, and this is really the most simple and concrete way possible to live the communion with the Pope, that everyone can see. Then we pray for him. All the bishops pray for him. I pray for him, and pray for myself also, that the Lord will help me be a good bishop.

Q- How do you see the Holy See's approach to the Chinese question? If you could speak with the Pope, what would you say to him to better explain the real situation of the Church in China?

A- It would be a great gift if the Pope could understand China, that is the concrete cultural and social situation in which the Church finds itself living in China. There is much to know, much to comprehend. Sometimes there are those who spend a week in China and then go home and begin to pretend they knew about all the events in the history of Chinese Catholics. Instead complex situations must be recognized and respected for what they are. I really hope that relations between China and the Vatican can resume in the right direction. It would be a good thing for us and for the entire Church.

Q- If you would also like to suggest to the Pope an indication as to how God has preserved and continues to nourish the faith of Chinese Catholics, to document that the Church of China shares the same faith with the Church of Rome, what would you tell him?

A- The fundamental question is how also the Chinese bishops live and express their faith in union with the Successor of Peter and the whole universal Church. So, I believe that from the beginning until now our Church in China has never changed a single iota of the Apostolic Tradition that was delivered to it. We have not changed a comma of the doctrine that concerns the faith and the great discipline of the Church. We are united around the same sacraments, recite the same prayers, in the continuity of the apostolic succession. This is the basis of authentic communion. Even with our limitations and all our failings and frailties, we are a part of, we are of the number of the Holy Universal Church, we share with our brothers throughout the world the fidelity to the same Apostolic Tradition. We do not want to change anything.

Q- Some observers argue instead that some people are still trying to build a new independent and self-sufficient Church, different from the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church.

A- This is others' thinking. These are the opinions of others, not ours. No Church is self-sufficient, no Church can live without the gift of the Spirit of Christ. I repeat, now in China no priest and no bishop has the intention of changing the Church's doctrine. In China also, the love of Christ manifests itself in acceptance and understanding. In today's world, despite the processes of globalization, there are still many differences. For example, mutual understanding is difficult between China and Europe. We need to find points of contact and dialogue, day after day; it is the only way to bring such different worlds close to each other. So I hope that the universal Church may accept and recognize the Church in China for what it really is. Without isolating it and mistreating it, so that communion grows as a sign of the love of Christ. As bishop, I only hope that the spirit of Christ's love also

spreads and shines throughout all of China.

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The treasure and the vessels of clay

The coadjutor bishop of Nanchang interviewed in these pages was originally called John Baptist Li Shuguang. His Chinese name was made up of two ideograms: 书 [shu] which means book and 光 [guang], which means light. When he became a priest, John Baptist chose to modify the first of the two characters, transforming it from 书 [shu] to 苏 [su]. A slight change, almost imperceptible to those who do not speak Mandarin, created for the sole purpose of introducing the same character into his name that appears in the name of Jesus (耶稣 Ye-su). So now the bishop's personal name can be translated into Italian as 'light of Jesus'.

In China today, affection for Jesus by those who bear His name can result in expressing itself also through subtle details, to be grasped immediately, by interior and implicit understanding. Similarly, different passages of the answers that the bishop of Nanchang provides in these pages can also be read in silhouette. Like the one in which he hopes that the bishop of Rome takes note of 'the concrete cultural and social situation in which the Church finds itself living in China'. Or the other in which he indicates as a sign and foundation of communion with the Successor of Peter and the Universal Church the unity around the same sacraments and the same prayers, in fidelity to the same Apostolic Tradition.

John Baptist Li Suguang was ordained bishop on 31 October 2010 with the approval of the Holy See and with the recognition of the Chinese authorities. At the liturgy of consecration, besides the three consecrating bishops, eighty priests were present, including some priests of the Church related to the ecclesial area known as 'underground'. After the celebration, the new bishop publicly expressed his intention to foster reconciliation between the Catholic communities registered with the State apparatus and those who distance themselves from the government's religious policy.

Before John Baptist Li Suguang, in 2010 alone, eight other young Chinese bishops were ordained with the consent of the Pope and with the parallel official recognition of the government. At that stage, the ever troubled story of Sino-Vatican relations seemed still to be capable of moving towards promising developments.

Compared to then, the present scenario appears again to be turning out for the worse. Between 20 November 2010 and 14 July 2011, three new episcopal ordinations, without the consent of the Holy See, imposed by the patriotic apparati under slogans of the supposed 'independence' of the Church in China have reset to zero the prospects for a mutually agreed solution to the issue of appointment of bishops that has always been the raw nerve in the relations between mainland China and the Vatican. For the first time since 1958 – the year when China began the illegitimate ordinations imposed by Beijing – the excommunication *latae sententiae* of two bishops ordained illegitimately was publicly confirmed in official pronouncements of the Vatican.

Also the new group of 'child bishops' to which Li Suguang belongs (who last 14 July participated in the illegitimate ordination of Joseph Huang Bingzhuang as bishop of Shantou) is called into question by yet another negative phase of relations between China and the Vatican. The forty-year olds who with the jump of a generation find themselves at the head of the Church in China are accused by many of surrender in relation to the religious policy of government interventionism. Distrust and suspicions of lukewarm

fidelity have resurfaced in their regard, similar to those reserved in past decades for those bishops who had accepted in varying degrees to subject themselves to the interventionism of the regime in the religious field. Including the great bishop-witnesses such as Anthony Li Duan and Matthias Duan Yinmin, who faced persecution and hardship to pursue to the very end their priestly vocations in the years of the Cultural Revolution.

Compared to that of their predecessors, the new generation of bishops appears to many observers as more fragile and timid. In both the 'official' and in the so-called 'underground' areas cases of clerical careerism, with young priests continuously seeking ecclesiastical and political advocacy to reach the episcopate, have been registered .

The complex situation recommends caution and thoughtful evaluation of all factors involved in the individual cases. The same eventual episodes of clerical opportunism in a Chinese context can not be separated from the obfuscation that also exists elsewhere on the nature of the episcopal ministry itself. The erroneous concept that interprets the appointments of bishops and their movements from one location to another as awards and honors granted to officials of a universal bureaucracy distinguished by their ability to cultivate relationships of power, is certainly not an exclusive 'made in China' production.

G.V.

Italian version: http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_77819_l1.htm

English version with pictures: http://users.online.be/~rikdg/doc3/china/china_30G2011-09.pdf

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