

The Religious Policy in China Today

During the winter quarter, more exactly on December 19, 2008, we were given a clear confirmation that the Chinese authorities did not accept to dismantle the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) as it was requested by Pope Benedict XVI in his Pastoral Letter of June 2007.

That day, in the presence of high officials of the government, of the United Front, of the Communist Party and of the Bureau of Religious Affairs gathered in the Great Hall of the People, Mr. Anthony Liu Bainian, vice-president of the CCPA, presided at an important conference celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. This solemn celebration of the independence and self-governance of the Chinese Church and of the ordination of the Chinese bishops without the approval of the Holy See was the last in a succession of signals, and somehow the final response coming from China to the Vatican: China will continue its Religious Policy and will not implement it without the use of the Patriotic Association for the Catholic Church. No exemption will be given to the Pope, no more than to the Dalai Lama, or to Muslims in Xinjiang.

There was no official reaction from the Vatican. No protest, no accusation, no complaint, as if the Vatican diplomacy had chosen to continue **"the sincere and frank dialogue" begun with the Chinese authorities**, instead of inviting the Chinese Catholics to resistance like Falungong or to uprising like in Tibet or in Xinjiang.

In Hong Kong, Cardinal Zen Zekiun wrote a letter on St. Stephen Feast Day to the Chinese bishops registered with the government inviting them not to give in, and to be more courageous in opposing the pressure from the regime.

For us at the US Catholic China Bureau, we have to accept the fact that our desire to see China and the Vatican coming to a common agreement and establishing diplomatic relations did not come to fruition this time. Yet, we still hope to see this become reality some day. In our prayer we asked the Father to please take this cup of suffering from us. Yet we say "not what we want but what You want."

Without diplomatic relations, and agreement between Beijing and Vatican City, **there are many things the Church can still do in China**. This is what we read on our front page of the issue of CCQ 77 in the pastoral Letter for Lent by Mgr. Li Shan, bishop of Beijing.

While we pray for the day the Catholic Church in China will enjoy complete religious freedom, we can still continue joyfully our partnership with the Church in China in the field of pastorals and evangelization.