



United States Catholic China Bureau

China Church Quarterly

Issue No.69

Winter 2007

Editor's Note:

For those who are interested and concerned about the Catholic Church in China, this Year of the Lord 2007, opened on a very hopeful note, when the Vatican issued an important communiqué on the Church in China [VIS 01/20/07 cf. adjacent text].

While analyses, commentaries, and interpretation of the Holy See's message appeared in many quarters, as reprinted here, USCCB's reading of the essence of the statement's three critical points is highlighted. We can only wait in prayerful anticipation, the promised **Papal Pastoral Letter to China's Catholics**, which for the first time, will address the sensitive and complex challenges to be overcome so as to bring to fruition the long quest for full reconciliation and unity within the China Church – and for that Local Church to be in complete communion with the Universal Church.

While hopes are very high in every quarter, their **realization depends first and foremost upon the wisdom and fortitude of all the Chinese Catholics**; (no matter their personal affinities in the so-called "official," or "unofficial" communities of Faith) to be open to this most graced moment in the nearly millennium and a half history of Christianity in China (circa 637 AD). It behooves each of us as friends and partners in mission with the Church in China to respectfully refrain from imposing judgments and criticism. Rather, let us stand in prayerful solidarity at this Easter as **the Resurrection of the Lord of New Life leads us forth.**

Pope's Pastoral Concern for Chinese Catholics

On January 20, 2007 the Holy See Press Office released an official communiqué at the close of a meeting held in the Vatican from January 19 to 20, on the situation of the Catholic Church in China. While both the secular and religious media printed excerpts, commentaries, interpretations and spin, here we provide the verbatim text of the statement:

Pope Benedict XVI, in the desire to deepen his knowledge of the situation of the Catholic Church in China, called a special meeting which took place in the Vatican Apostolic Palace on January 19 and 20, 2007. The meeting was presided by *Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B.*, and attended by representatives of the Chinese episcopate (Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan) and by the people who, for the Holy See, follow the Chinese question most closely. The wide-ranging and intricate debate was characterized by a frank and fraternal cordiality.

In the light of the troubled history of the Church in China and of the principal events of recent years, consideration was given to the most serious and urgent ecclesial problems. Problems which call for adequate solutions based on the fundamental principles of the Church's divine constitution and religious freedom. The inspiring witness of the bishops, priests and lay faithful was recognized with profound appreciation; without giving way to compromise they have maintained their loyalty to the See of Peter, sometimes at the cost of grave suffering. **It was noted with particular joy that today almost all of the bishops and priests are in communion with the Supreme Pontiff.**

There has, moreover, been a **surprising numerical growth of the ecclesial community** which, in China as elsewhere, is called to bear witness to Christ, to look ahead with hope and, in announcing the Gospel, to measure itself against the new challenges that society is facing.

From the multiplicity of the participants' contributions, **what emerged was the will to continue along the path of respectful and constructive dialogue** with the governing authorities, in order to overcome the misunderstandings of the past. The hope was also expressed that a normalization of relations at all levels could be achieved so as to facilitate a peaceful and fruitful life of faith in the Church, and to work together for the good of the Chinese people and for peace in the world.

The Holy Father, who was fully informed of the proposals reached in the course of the meeting, has benevolently **decided to address a Letter to Catholics in China.**

Vatican Information Service 070122 (410)

In a commentary for UCA News entitled "**No Confrontation, But Dialogue in Truth: A Call from Pope Benedict XVI to the PRC and to all Chinese Faithful,**" Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM, director of Verbiest Institute at Leuven University in Belgium, notes that not only Chinese authorities, but also bishops and all other members of the Church in and outside of China are challenged to dialogue in truth.



Following is an edited version adapted from *Asia Focus*:

In a press release after the **Vatican China Meeting** on January 19-20, 2007, the Holy See made it clear that, in spite of three illicit episcopal ordinations in 2006, it still wished to dialogue with Beijing, following in the footsteps of Pope John Paul II, who promoted dialogue during 25 years. This is, so far, **the most significant China initiative of Pope Benedict XVI**. The ball is now clearly in the camp of the PRC authorities, who have to prove that they are also ready for dialogue.

The high-level China meeting was called at the explicit request of the Pope. Among the high Church officials present were: the Secretary of State, who presided; the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Archbishop of Hong Kong and other bishops from Hong Kong, Taiwan & Macau; as well as experts on China Church matters.

The Holy See called for dialogue, not confrontation. According to the press release, "*It was noted with particular joy that today almost all of the bishops and priests are in communion with the Supreme Pontiff.*" This is a message of the Holy See to Chinese authorities and also to the faithful of the Chinese church. Rome tells Beijing that Chinese Catholics are all firmly behind the Pope and united with the Universal Church. **Attempts by the government to establish an independent Church have failed.** No mention is made either of two communities inside the church – 'official' and 'unofficial' – as if to indicate that this phase should belong to the past. The last two paragraphs revealed that the Holy Father will write a pastoral letter to the Chinese faithful during the Easter Season.

To appreciate fully the meaning and importance of such a positive statement from the Holy See, one must remember that it comes after the recent, confusing events in the Church in China when three illicit episcopal ordinations in 2006 stunned the Universal Church.

By opting for dialogue in the given circumstances, the Pope passes beyond this whole discussion **and shows**

courage and strength, as well as wisdom, insight and a sense of discernment. He in fact challenges the PRC leadership. In 2006 Chinese authorities used deception and force to lure several legitimately recognized bishops to participate in the ordination of three bishops not appointed by the Holy See. In their un-freedom these bishops opted to avoid conflict with civil authorities, who would have punished them and their flocks if they refused. They knew that by giving in to this pressure they were subject to Canon Law sanctions. However, the Holy See, in statements released after each illicit ordination, did not apply any sanctions. This call of Pope Benedict XVI to avoid any further confrontation and to promote dialogue seems to imply a non-verbal message for Chinese authorities: **"Both China and the Church will gain if we dialogue to normalize that situation of un-freedom."**

We all should learn that this kind of dialogue is stronger than confrontation. It calls for an effort to pass beyond all obstacles. In the past, the PRC has not responded positively to attempts by Rome to dialogue. In spite of this, the Holy See after having sought dialogue dozens of times under Pope John Paul II, now once again opts for dialogue. Each time the PRC repeats its request to give up the Nunciature in Taiwan. The intention of Rome about its representative in Taiwan has been known by Chinese authorities ever since the Holy See removed its Nuncio from Taiwan in 1972 and left only a *charge d'affaires*. That is still the situation today. **Now the Pope invites the PRC leadership to discuss the application of religious freedom for Catholics in China** in the way more than 165 other countries in the world apply it and find it normal to do so. **Is the PRC ready this time?**

Pope Benedict XVI not only challenges the Beijing authorities; but also the faithful and bishops, in and outside of China, to dialogue in truth. Many are ready, others apparently are not. Yet the moment of truth has come. We must realize that it is easy, but useless and without merit, to limit oneself to pointing accusing fingers at individuals of "the other church community" or individuals of the government in an attitude of confrontation. We must find truth, as the source of our attitude in dialogue, in "*the fundamental principles of the Church's divine constitution and religious freedom;*" and above of all in the Gospel. Only Gospel truth based upon Christ's love can create unity inside the Church.

UCAN 3/2007

My Dream

Reflections of Rev. Raphael GAO Chao Peng, from Zhouzhi Diocese in Northwest Shaanxi Province; currently studying for his Ph.D. at CUA.

Confucius said, "Gone is time like the rolling river that rushes past day and night!" I have been studying in the States for over five years now and next year I will complete my doctoral program and return to China to serve my people. Although my hometown is not a particularly beautiful place, neither poverty-stricken nor prosperous, the very thought of homecoming fills my heart with unspeakable excitement. Only after I came to the States did I realize how little entertainment people back home enjoy. The one and only goal in life for those diligent-working people is to make sure that their sons and daughters have a bright future.

In many ways, America is a wonderful place, where people enjoy a high degree of democracy and freedom. It also offers excellent educational facilities in all disciplines and is open for every religion to thrive. At the same time it is a highly developed material society – a beacon to people around the world. Yet, despite the fact that I have a wonderful life here, **not a day goes by that I do not think about my motherland where I was born and raised.** At present, the Church of my hometown is undergoing tremendous trials, both within and without, but there is little I can do except to sigh helplessly towards the sky. I love my hometown and my church where my roots are; I pray unceasingly for them, as I prepare myself to faithfully serve them.

I was born in a Catholic family of many generations, including a priest in my grandfather's generation, who secretly baptized me. Although I was their only son, my parents decided to consecrate me to God and constantly reminded me that I was dedicated to serve the church as a priest. During that dark time, when no hope was in sight, my parents safeguarded this flickering hope deep down in their hearts, for "nothing is impossible for God," even when things seem humanly impossible. After I graduated from high school, I studied at the "family seminary" of our diocese, informally mentored by my bishop, until he sent me to *Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai Diocese* - the only seminary in China at that time where foreign professors were allowed to teach. After ordination, I served as a parish priest in a mountain area, until I came to the United States to do graduate theology studies in the Maryknoll Society coordinated *Program for Seminary Educators and Formators*.

After arriving in the USA, I experienced tremendous pressure due to cultural shock and the language barrier

but in God's plan, giving up was simply not an option for me. Under the tender care and patient encouragement of *Fr. Larry Lewis, MM, the Project coordinator*, I was able to muster the strength to face many challenges. Though these years have indeed been a difficult journey for me, I have been able to overcome many hurdles. In retrospect, **I am deeply grateful for what I have received.** After being immersed in the comfortable American lifestyle, I sometimes wish that I too could stay here. Yet this is not where I belong. God did not create me to be an American. Even after five years, I am thankful that God helps me to remain a Chinese at heart.

Two annual visits to Maryknoll (over the Christmas holidays and each summer for retreat) put my selfish intention to shame. Living with the Maryknoll missionaries is truly a blessing. I am profoundly touched by their dedication and faithfulness to missionary work. Many people immigrate to the United States and enjoy the amenities of democracy and freedom. On the other hand, Maryknollers willingly give up their privileges as Americans and choose to live among and provide service to the poorest of the poor, such as those with HIV/AIDS, including serving again in China. Sometimes I honestly think that they love China even more than some Chinese themselves.

One visit to Maryknoll during Christmas particularly impacted me. We visited the Mission Archives at Maryknoll that house collections of several U.S. missionary organizations. I discovered for the first time hundreds of letters written by Maryknollers, documenting their missionary service all over the world. If I did not see these letters with my own eyes, I really would not believe it. There is a voice constantly hovering in my mind, "*What drives them to love others more than themselves? When everybody strives to have a better life, why do they choose to lead a life full of hardship?*" It is also the same voice that reminds me time and time again why I came to the States.

The Church in China is in desperate need of teachers, as fewer expatriate professors are permitted to teach in our seminaries. This could compromise the provision of comprehensive courses needed by our future priests, causing successive generations of Catholics to be deficient in knowledge of our Faith. I have no delusion to achieve heroic feats or fame; rather I pray I can simply be a faithful teaching priest. My greatest dream is to dedicate myself to teaching and writing to serve as a resource for my brothers and sisters in China. *I sincerely beseech you for your prayers so that my dream will come true.*

Church News

2006: A Retrospective

A "harmonious society" was a constant refrain in the Chinese media last year, with emphasis on improving life for the rural majority. In this context, **the government has recently acknowledged that religion can play a positive role in promoting social harmony** - as witness the April '06 *World Buddhist Forum* meeting with the theme, *A More Harmonious World Begins in the Mind*. Although closely monitored, more non-government organizations (NGOs) began to fill some gaps in the social welfare system. Thus, the Catholic Social Service Center at Shijiazhuang in Hebei became the **first Catholic NGO to be registered** by the government.

During 2006, ten bishops, ranging in age from 78 to 94, died. The secret to their longevity may have been disciplines developed to endure many years in labor camps, by holding fast to their Faith, maintaining fidelity to daily prayer and even relying upon a sense of humor. Last year, five new bishops were ordained averaging 40 years of age - many young enough to be the grandsons of the departed bishops. Only two of these new bishops had received prior approval from the Holy See. Their illegitimate ordinations were held in May, creating new friction between China and the Holy See. Despite conciliatory gestures from Rome in early Summer, on sudden notice and amid reports of severe pressures on the co-consecrating bishops, the religious affairs officials proceeded with a third illicit ordination in November. The Vatican deplored the strong-arm tactics used, the violation of Canon Law and this **blatant interference in internal Church affairs**. The Chinese religious authorities professed not to understand *the fuss*, rejecting the Vatican's protest as interference in China's internal affairs!

By the end of 2006, the cohort of Catholic clergy, religious and lay leaders had essentially transitioned to a much younger profile, like very young parents succeeding revered grandparents. As most vocations have traditionally come from the villages, **a scarcity of vocations in the intermediate years has re-emerged**, as millions of rural youth migrate to the cities where they are overwhelmed by materialistic influences and stunned by culture shock. If the *quasi* state-sponsored revival of Confucianism cannot bridge these generation gaps and fill the moral and spiritual

vacuum spreading in China today, then surely the Holy Spirit will. **Looking ahead to 2007**, more elderly bishops will surely pass away, leaving even more vacant dioceses. Hopefully, this will not lead to be a duplicitous reason or excuse for more precipitous decisions on new bishops, without prior approval of the Holy See.

[excerpted: *China Bridge* 01/07]

Shanghai Year of Evangelization

A *Year of Evangelization* commemorating the **500th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis Xavier** opened on February 11 2006 at St. Ignatius Cathedral in Shanghai Diocese. It was concluded on December 2nd when *Auxiliary Bishop Xing Wenzhi* urged the 1500 Catholics present at the closing Mass to model their lives after the Saint, by maintaining their zeal for spreading the Word of God. **Activities during the year** included relaying "*the baton of evangelization*," a two-meter-tall cross, to over 140 churches in six deaneries; a seminar on St. Francis Xavier's contribution to evangelization in modern-day China; special activities at the *Sheshan Marian Shrine* in May, and a special Prayer Service at the Cathedral in October. In his exhortation, the Bishop reminded his flock "*The Year of Evangelization has ended, but evangelization hasn't. Let us carry our spirit of evangelization with us always.*"



Bishop Joseph XING also ordained five young men to the priesthood: three for the Diocese of Shanghai and one each for neighboring HangZhou and Taizhou dioceses. Newly ordained *Father Joseph Liu Qiang* said that being ordained in this special year would encourage him to learn from St. Francis Xavier how to spread the Gospel to all the peoples of China. [UCAN 12/06]

[Ed. Note] The zeal of Shanghai's Catholics was clearly attested by the **large group of catechumens** participating during this 2007 Lenten Season in the *Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) in preparation for baptism at Easter*. On March 18th, when those of us on *USCCB's Religious Study Tour* attended Mass at *St. Ignatius Cathedral* over 100 mostly younger adults were present for the *Second Scrutiny* of the RCIA program.