
Catholic Church updates February '10

? Updates

The first Six updates bring together material on Mateo Ricci –the 400 anniversary of his death is approaching.

Texte intégral de la conférence du cardinal Rylko sur le P. Matteo Ricci

Une des figures « les plus significatives de l'histoire de l'humanité »

ROME, Jeudi 25 février 2010 (ZENIT.org) - Pour le cardinal Rylko, le P. Matteo Ricci, sj, est « une figure comptant parmi les plus significatives de l'histoire de l'humanité » : un savant et un missionnaire qui « jeta les bases d'un développement de la connaissance réciproque et du dialogue entre l'Orient et l'Occident ».

Soulignant l'actualité du P. Ricci, il ajoute : « L'exemple du père Ricci indique clairement la route à suivre pour vaincre la méfiance et préparer le terrain en vue d'une collaboration effective et durable ».

Le cardinal Stanislas Rylko, président du Conseil pontifical pour les laïcs est intervenu à Paris, à l'UNESCO, de façon passionnante sur le thème : « Le père Matteo Ricci et le dialogue entre foi et culture », lors du colloque du 16 février, sur le thème : « Aux carrefours de l'histoire : le jésuite Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) entre Rome et Pékin ».

« Le père Matteo Ricci et le dialogue entre foi et culture »

par le card. Rylko

Mesdames et Messieurs,

J'adresse mes salutations les plus cordiales à toutes les personnes présentes à la projection du document-film « Matteo Ricci. Un jésuite au royaume du Dragon », et en particulier aux autorités de l'UNESCO qui ont permis la réalisation de cet événement. Une initiative - parmi de nombreuses autres - qui, pour le IV^{ème} centenaire de sa mort, nous fournit l'occasion de faire mémoire d'une figure comptant parmi les plus significatives de l'histoire de l'humanité et d'honorer sa stature spirituelle et intellectuelle. Homme de science et missionnaire, à une époque de grand ferment culturel et économique, à cheval entre le XVI^{ème} et le XVII^{ème} siècle, Matteo Ricci jeta les bases d'un développement de la connaissance réciproque et du dialogue entre l'Orient et l'Occident ; entre Rome, cœur de la chrétienté, et Pékin, où depuis plus de deux siècles régnait la grande dynastie des Ming.

Ce jésuite, originaire de Macerata, dans les Marches italiennes, s'est gagné l'estime et l'admiration, en

Chine comme en Europe, pour avoir ouvert la voie à la rencontre entre deux cultures aussi éloignées qu'inconnues l'une de l'autre ; une entreprise extraordinaire, plusieurs fois tentée par d'autres précédemment, mais que personne n'était jamais parvenu à faire aboutir. Et, par bien des aspects, bien plus importante par rapport à ce qu'avait fait et raconté l'autre grand Italien, Marco Polo, qui était entré indirectement en contact avec la Chine, trois siècles auparavant, par le biais d'échanges commerciaux avec les Mongols. L'œuvre du père Matteo Ricci mérite donc d'être davantage connue et approfondie, aussi bien pour mieux en comprendre les raisons et les modalités que pour mettre en valeur son actualité indéniable et permanente.

Les célébrations du IV^{ème} centenaire de sa naissance au Ciel constituent donc une heureuse occasion de relire cette œuvre, de retrouver le témoignage de Matteo Ricci et, par là même, l'enseignement qui en dérive pour notre monde, engagé précisément à tisser des rapports stables et constructifs entre l'Orient et l'Occident, entre le grand peuple chinois et les autres peuples. L'exemple du père Ricci indique clairement la route à suivre pour vaincre la méfiance et préparer le terrain en vue d'une collaboration effective et durable. Quel est donc son témoignage ? Quel chemin a-t-il entrepris ? Et nous, comment pouvons-nous l'aborder aujourd'hui ?

En dépit des difficultés de la langue, de la politique très fermée de la dynastie Ming et de la nouveauté totale des rapports avec le peuple chinois, Matteo Ricci sut développer un dialogue basé sur l'amitié, sur le respect des us et coutumes, sur la connaissance de l'esprit et de l'histoire de la Chine. C'est cette attitude, dépourvue de préjugés et de tout esprit de conquête, qui a permis à ce jésuite européen d'établir avec le peuple chinois un rapport de confiance et d'estime. Ce n'est pas un hasard si sa première œuvre en langue chinoise fut consacrée au thème de l'amitié. Or, ce recueil de 100 maximes sur l'amitié, puisées chez les classiques grecs et latins, suscita une grande stupeur chez les Chinois qui admirèrent la sagesse et la richesse spirituelle de cet homme venu de l'extrême Occident.

Toutefois, le père Matteo Ricci, ne se limita pas à manifester son amitié à l'égard du peuple chinois et son intérêt pour sa vie et sa culture. Il s'engagea pleinement pour apprendre sa langue et approfondit l'étude des classiques confucéens, au point d'être considéré comme un expert égal, sinon supérieur, aux lettrés chinois qui se pressaient pour le connaître et s'entretenir avec lui. En somme, il se fit Chinois parmi les Chinois, en s'adaptant en tout à leurs coutumes et en adoptant - après dix années d'analyse attentive et de connaissance de leur réalité - le profil et la teneur de vie du lettré, c'est-à-dire de cette catégorie de personnes qui orientait et guidait la société chinoise dans la ligne de la continuité avec la philosophie et la tradition confucéennes.

Ce trait caractéristique de son approche de la Chine ne doit certes pas être dissocié de l'échange culturel bénéfique qu'il instaura avec les Chinois sur tous les fronts du savoir humain. De la cartographie à l'astronomie, de la philosophie à la religion, des mathématiques aux techniques mnémotechniques, en passant par les horloges mécaniques, la peinture et la musique : aucun domaine du savoir humain qui n'ait constitué un terrain fécond de confrontation et d'enrichissement réciproque entre les Chinois et cet homme que la Providence, selon ses amis lettrés chinois eux-mêmes, avait envoyé pour donner encore plus de lustre à la dynastie des Ming et pour faire participer les Chinois aux progrès que la science et la technique avaient réalisés au cours de la Renaissance européenne. Un exemple parmi tant d'autres de la haute considération en laquelle il était tenu : dès son arrivée à Pékin en 1601, selon la volonté de l'empereur Wanli, tous ses frais furent pris en charge par le trésor public et, à sa mort, le 11 mai 1610, il eut le privilège - jamais concédé jusqu'alors à un étranger - d'être enterré dans la Cité impériale. Ce n'est pas non plus un hasard si rien moins que la direction de l'Observatoire astronomique de Pékin et la révision du Calendrier chinois, achevée quelques années

après la mort de Matteo Ricci, furent confiées aux jésuites qui poursuivirent son œuvre. La vaste documentation conservée dans l'ancien Observatoire astronomique de Pékin et l'inscription du père Matteo Ricci parmi les personnages les plus illustres de Chine témoignent aujourd'hui encore de la gratitude des Chinois pour la contribution apportée par le missionnaire jésuite et par ses confrères au progrès des connaissances humanistes et scientifiques dans leur pays.

Mais en quoi s'enracinait l'intuition géniale du père Matteo Ricci ? Quel peut être le motif de son actualité permanente ? Ce ne furent ni l'esprit d'aventure, ni la volonté de se faire l'ambassadeur de la Renaissance européenne en Chine qui poussèrent le missionnaire jésuite, mais bien le désir d'apporter au grand peuple chinois l'annonce évangélique comme couronnement de ce riche cheminement culturel et social qu'il allait d'ailleurs admirer et apprécier, comme en témoignent sa correspondance et son célèbre et minutieux compte-rendu autographe intitulé De l'entrée de la Compagnie de Jésus et de la Chrétienté en Chine.

Formé à la rigoureuse école des Jésuites et fasciné par l'esprit missionnaire de saint François-Xavier, qui avait dépensé sa vie pour l'évangélisation de l'Orient, alors qu'il n'avait pas encore trente ans, et avec une grande ardeur missionnaire, il commence son entreprise par Macao en 1582. A la différence de ceux qui l'avaient précédé dans les nombreuses tentatives d'entrer en Chine, le père Matteo Ricci comprend qu'il faut trouver une nouvelle méthode pour voir la culture chinoise s'ouvrir à la nouveauté de l'Évangile. Avec ses confrères responsables des missions de l'Orient, en particulier avec le père Alessandro Valignano, il élabore donc une nouvelle stratégie que l'on pourrait résumer par le mot " inculturation " : une optique dans laquelle la culture du peuple chinois n'est plus un obstacle à surmonter, mais une ressource pour l'Évangile.

Cette originalité de la méthode de Matteo Ricci, née d'une vision de la foi qui ne s'oppose ni à la science, ni à la raison, ni à la culture, mais qui entre en harmonie profonde et substantielle avec elles, a été soulignée par le pape Benoît XVI dans son Message pour le IV^{ème} centenaire de la mort du père Ricci : « En considérant son intense activité scientifique et spirituelle, on ne peut manquer de rester favorablement impressionné par la capacité innovatrice et particulière avec laquelle il se familiarisa, dans un plein respect, avec les traditions culturelles et spirituelles chinoises dans leur ensemble. Cette attitude a en effet caractérisé sa mission visant à rechercher la plus grande harmonie possible entre la noble civilisation chinoise millénaire et la nouveauté chrétienne, qui est ferment de libération et de renouveau authentique au sein de toute société, étant donné que l'Évangile est un message universel de salut, destiné à tous les hommes, quel que soit le contexte culturel et religieux auquel ils appartiennent » (Benoît XVI, Message à S. Exc. Claudio Giuliodori, évêque de Macerata, 6 mai 2009).

Voilà pourquoi il est donc tout à fait approprié de commémorer, au siège de l'UNESCO aussi, le père Matteo Ricci, un grand homme qui a su tisser un réseau de relations et d'échanges culturels sans égaux dans l'histoire de l'humanité, en aidant ainsi l'Europe à connaître et à découvrir la sagesse et la civilisation chinoises et en introduisant en Chine, d'une manière judicieuse et avec beaucoup d'intelligence, le patrimoine de culture, de science, d'art et de foi de l'Occident. Il a concrètement démontré, de la sorte, que l'Évangile, précisément parce qu'il conduit au cœur de la vérité sur l'homme et sur son destin, est en mesure de se rapporter positivement à toute culture et à toute société capables de reconnaître la dignité et la grandeur de la personne humaine. Son labeur intellectuel et spirituel a eu pour finalité ultime de greffer dans les consciences et dans la culture chinoise les germes de la nouveauté et de la plénitude de la Révélation chrétienne. Il savait que le plus grand don que les chrétiens peuvent offrir aux peuples de l'Asie, c'est d'annoncer Jésus-Christ, qui répond à leur profonde quête d'Absolu et dévoile les vérités et les valeurs qui garantissent un développement

intégral (cf. Jean-Paul II, Exhortation apostolique *Ecclesia in Asia*, nr 20).

Un an avant sa mort, il écrivait au Supérieur de la vice-province du Japon et de la Chine : « Les Chinois ont une belle intelligence naturelle et aiguë ; ce qui transparait bien dans leurs livres, dans leurs discours [...] et dans le gouvernement de cette machine qui émerveille tout l'Orient. Aussi, si nous pouvions leur enseigner nos sciences, [...]pourrions-nous à travers elles les conduire aisément à notre sainte loi et ils n'oublieront jamais un si grand bienfait, [...] car ne leur ayant enseigné jusqu'ici que peu de choses des sciences mathématiques et de la cosmographie, ils nous en sont tellement reconnaissants que bien des fois j'ai entendu, de mes oreilles, dire de personnes importantes que nous avons ouverts les yeux aux Chinois qui étaient aveugles ; et ils ne parlaient que de ces sciences naturelles que j'ai dites, de la mathématique ; que diront-ils donc des autres [...] comme les sciences physiques, métaphysiques, théologiques et surnaturelles ? (Lettre au P. Francesco Pasio. Pékin, le 15 du mois de février 1609). Ces mots explicitent, on ne peut mieux, aussi bien l'esprit qui animait son engagement missionnaire que la méthode avec laquelle le père Matteo Ricci a tracé un sentier indélébile dans l'histoire des rapports entre les peuples et les civilisations et du rapport entre la foi et les cultures. Ambassadeur d'amitié et de vérité, quatre cents ans après sa mort, il se dresse encore comme un exemple fulgurant d'ouverture universelle et de capacité à bâtir des ponts entre les civilisations et les cultures, en se faisant - en tant que messager de l'Évangile - l'artisan du bien véritable et du développement authentique des peuples. Je vous remercie de votre attention.

Agenzia Fides - www.fides.org
ASIA/CHINA

Public press coverage of Fr. Matteo Ricci exhibition in Beijing

Beijing (Agenzia Fides) - "Matteo Ricci – A Meeting of Civilizations in Ming China," the exhibition commemorating the 400th anniversary of death of the Italian Jesuit missionary, was opened in Beijing with ample coverage from the official press in Chinese and English, including the agency "Xin Hua," which emphasized that the great Italian missionary was the first European who brought the successes of technology and art to China. From February 7 to March 20, 2010 at the Capital Museum in Beijing, the Chinese audience can admire the Jesuit from Macerata who "became Chinese," by far the most respected, known, and loved foreigner over the course of centuries in China. Today, his figure once again shines in the country to which he devoted his life, where he died and was buried exactly 400 years ago.

The exhibition, sponsored by the Marche Region of Italy, the Exchange Center for Chinese Archaeological Findings, and the Capital Museum in collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute of the Italian Embassy in Beijing, traces the extraordinary life of Fr. Li Ma Dou, as the Chinese like to call Fr. Matteo Ricci. The exhibition also presents two hundred works - paintings, engravings, maps, clocks ... - to tell the path of Fr. Li Ma Dou in the history of the Ming Dynasty. The exhibition will then be shown in Shanghai (Shanghai Museum: April 3 to May 23) and Nanking (Nanjing Museum: June 5 to July 25). (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 24/02/2010)

CHINA - Jesuits to link Chinese and American scholars

Published Date: February 23, 2010

HONG KONG (UCAN) — A Jesuit province in the United States is striving to firm up friendship between Chinese and American scholars as a way to mark the 400th anniversary of Father Matteo Ricci's death in Beijing in 1610.

Father Ricci's first publication in classical Chinese was a treatise On Friendship in 1595. His methodology was to inculturate Christianity through respect for local culture and the formation of personal relationships.

The Jesuit California province is reviewing the Malatesta Program this week with a hope to continue such person-to-person exchange.

The program's objective is to promote academic collaboration in the area of theology and allied disciplines through exchanges between faculty and graduate students at three California Jesuit universities and those at selected Chinese universities.

It seeks in particular to support the development of religious studies programs in China and to enhance the state of theological investigation there and at the California Jesuit universities.

The idea began in the 2006-07 academic year after two faculty members from the Jesuit School of Theology were invited to lecture in China, where they met faculty from some prestigious mainland universities who expressed enthusiasm for academic exchanges.

The program was named after Jesuit Father Edward Malatesta, a biblical scholar who died in Hong Kong in 1998. He was one of the first priests from outside China to teach at Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai in 1989 and had contributed 20,000 books to the seminary's library.

The California province's involvement in China began in 1928 when Pope Pius XI requested the Jesuit society to provide men for the China mission.

The Malatesta Program is administered by a committee that includes two faculty members each from the Loyola Marymount University, Santa Clara University and the University of San Francisco (USF).

Its office is located at the USF's Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, co-founded by Father Malatesta and the California province in 1984.

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“In the Footsteps of Matteo Ricci”; The Legacy of Fr. Yves Raguin S.J.

By Michael Saso, February 11, 2010 3:26 pm

“In the Footsteps of Matteo Ricci”; The Legacy of Fr. Yves Raguin S.J.’

(Asian Catholic Prayer in Buddhist and Daoist dialogue).

The year 2010 marks a worldwide movement to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the legacy of Matteo Ricci, SJ, who passed away in Beijing, China, in 1610. Ricci is acclaimed by historians for introducing western science to China, and adapting Chinese cultural and spiritual values to Jesuit missionary work in Asia. During the ensuing 400 years, the Jesuits were “suppressed” (1762 to 1810) by those who opposed Ricci’s vision.

raguin_yves The work of Fr. Yves Raguin, SJ, and his quiet, less publicized movement to adapt Asian forms of prayer to Catholic/Christian spirituality, continues until today, transcending and going far beyond Ricci’s original “Confucian limited” vision.

A report on the “Monastic Interreligious Dialogue,” which occurred between Sep 18-22 1995, gives a concise account of the teachings of Fr. Yves Raguin, SJ, on Asian Catholic prayer. The following report on “Prayer of the Name and Prayer of Silence,” organized by the Commission of the Secretariat “Aide Inter-Monasteres,” took place at the abbey of Bec-Hellouin in France. ,” A special session, given the title “Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique was called, to study the question of “meditation without object.” The input of Fr Yves Raguin SJ was the core and main topic of this session.

zenmeditation The essence of Asian meditation, Fr. Raguin suggested, was: “meditation without object, without theme, without reflection, without image and frequently without rite.” It was Fr. Raguin’s life long mission to show that such meditation has a place in the spiritual, monastic, as well as Lay Christian tradition

The question is of even greater importance for Christian prayer when it comes into contact with other religions, particularly Buddhism and Daoism. The Catholic Church in Asia must face squarely the question of the relevance of pre-Christian Greek and Roman cultural “weltanschauung” (world view), when dialoguing with men and women versed in Asian forms of apophatic prayer. This can be seen as one of the benefits of dialogue with other Asian religions, Fr Raguin suggested.

I. The “Departure” of Christ

marycrucifix The 1995 conference was based on an earlier talk, given on October 15, 1978, when Father Raguin spoke at the Notre-Dame conference on prayer in Paris. The title was: “Ways of Contemplation—Encounters between East and West.” After the conference Raguin was assailed with multiple questions. One of the auditors objected “but, Father, it is necessary that we center on Christ and make Him the object of our meditations and contemplation.” Father Raguin spontaneously responded with the words of Christ: “It is expedient that I go away. If I do not depart, the Holy Spirit will not come to you” (John 16:7). The “departure” of Christ, and the “taking away of the presence of God the Father” is indeed an essential part of Christian spirituality, as seen in the 3rd week of St. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, as those versed in the Ignatian way of prayer know well. He went on to

say: “We no longer see Him before us as an object of thought. Henceforth it is He Himself who through His Holy Spirit turns our regard toward the Father and makes us cry: “Abba, Father.”

That is to say, only after “departing from us,” as seen in the Ignatian 3rd Week, can Christ invite us to share in the 4th Week of the Spiritual exercises, the “Via Unitiva,” which is indeed an attentiveness to the divine presence within us, an awareness that would have been impossible without experiencing Christ’s sense of abandonment in the Gospel. “Meditation without an object” is not a meditation. It is a pure attention which becomes awareness of who we are, children of God, made in His image, following in His footsteps, including the experience of apophysis, or “kenosis.”

Buddhist, Daoist, and Christian mystics agree that this attention is without object; it is pure attention, total silence, void of all thought. The organizers of the session at Bec-Hellouin posed to Father Raguin the question of whether this “meditation without object” has a place in the spiritual and monastic Christian tradition. The question almost totally overlooked the tradition of apophatic prayer in the western Church. It is precisely the mystical tradition of the Church, which offers the basis and the pathway for dialogue with other religions such as Buddhism and Daoism. Just as Buddhism refers its faithful to the experience of the Buddha, so it is necessary that Christians model their prayer on the experience of Christ.

II. The Spiritual Experience of Christ

Jesus’ awareness of His filiation and “Union with the Father” was affirmed as He grew. Again, paraphrasing Fr Raguin’s talk, “At the age of twelve, while in the temple, which was the place of the presence of His Father, He gained a new awareness of the fact that He was the Son of the Father. When His mother said to him: “my child, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been searching for you (loss of a sense of Jesus’ presence) with concern,” Jesus responded very simply: “Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father?” (Luke 2:48-49).

The years spent at Nazareth were a time of “increasing in wisdom and stature before God and men.” Just as He grew in awareness of Who He is, so the Christian too must grow in awareness that he/she must also experience Thabor, the ascent to Jerusalem, the agony in the Garden, the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension. Christian prayer is thus a growth in awareness that Christ Himself pursued throughout His whole life. And this growing awareness cannot happen without a “prayer without object,” an experience shared in all mystic forms of spiritual cultivation.

III. The Discovery of the Word

Again, quoting the words of Fr Raguin, “In this process of becoming aware of Himself, in this “prayer without object”, there surfaced “the Word”. Christ became aware that He is the “Word of the Father, the word in which the Father knows Himself.” He knew Himself as the Word of the Father and this Word of the Father was to inform and model His humanity. He became the perfect image of the Father. This is why He could say: “Whoever sees me, sees the Father” John 14:9).

When Christ is the wordless object of our contemplation, this contemplation “brings us into silence in the face of He who is. He reveals Himself as the source springing up within.” Fr Raguin suggested that this is what Christ wanted us to understand in the allegory of the vine. Seeing the fruit invites us to be aware of the flow of sap, which rises from the roots. In the same way the word invites us to become aware of the current of life, which rises from the depths of God. “But such a prayer is truly a

prayer without object, for it flows out of a simple awareness that God, by His spirit, animates our whole life. In this way we join ourselves with the prayer of Christ as it was spoken of above.”

It is this kind of prayer which contemplatives share and live in Christian, Buddhist, and Daoist context, without even being aware of it, since attention is totally given to “presence” in itself. It is in mind and heart’s silence, whether through Zen contemplation, Daoist “centering” prayer, or Christian mystic experience, that one passes from prayer with object to prayer without object, the passage from self-expression to simple awareness.

(The above quotes are taken from an article entitled “Christian Spirituality and Spiritualities of Other Religions,” published in Bulletin of the Secretariatus pro non Christianis, Rome, 1988, XXIII/2 #68.

IV The Doctrine of No-Thought, No-Attachment in Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism and the Christian Experience.

(From a talk given by Fr. Raguin in October 1988, “Bulletin 33”)

“The Zen experience,” Father Raguin taught, “is based on a few very simple principles, which are quite well known:

- 1) The way to the ultimate experience of oneness with the Absolute Reality is not based on a relationship to God through a mediator. The way to this ultimate experience is through the realization of the oneness of our original nature with “the Buddha-nature” in Buddhist prayer, and with the “Absolute reality,” in the Christian mystic experience.
- 2) At the depth of our human being lies our “original nature,” which is absolutely pure. When the Zen monk, or Daoist Monk/nun sit in meditation, he/she become aware of Absolute presence in oneself, as well as in all of nature—in the Daoist sense as “gestating” or “birthing”, in the 3 western traditions (Judaic, Christian and Islamic) as “creating.”
- 3) We cannot reach, understand, or “will” the experience of Absolute presence. We can only wait for it to manifest itself and shine at the depth of our human being. This manifestation, which will be a real enlightenment, is beyond our power, because by our original nature we are in fact open to this awareness.
- 4) To arrive at this form of wordless, “apophatic” enlightenment, the best we can do is to sit in pure attentiveness to our original nature. We cannot think about it, and still less imagine it. This is the reason why the great masters of Zen and of Daoism teach the principles of the method: no thinking, no relying on, no attachment. This creates a real “emptying” of the “heart,” which becomes void. This does not mean that the Zen or Daoist contemplative faces “nothing.” He/she faces original nature through void mind and heart empty of selfish desire (???? “heart fasting, sit in forgetfulness,” in the words of the Zhuangzi, Ch. 4).

Again, we listen to Fr Raguin speaking: “From Zen practice, I learned not to search for a God on high, a transcendent level, but I turned toward my inner being, facing my human nature. Since my human nature is God’s image, I simply wait for this image of God to manifest itself to me. Being a child of the Father, I learned from Christ to be simply attentive to my inner mystery, knowing that I cannot see myself as God’s child, unless the Father enlightened me by His Spirit.

ara-goma The practice of Zen, as well as Daoist meditation can teach all who practice it, Christian as well as other faiths, to stay in pure attentiveness before the inner mystery. “No judgment, no thought” makes one realize this inner mystery. Buddhist, Daoist, and Christian mystics agree that one cannot rely on any thought, any desire, to reach this presence of “God within me.”

In Father Raguin's words (from a private letter written to a Nun in Macao): "When I was told not to think, not to rely on anything, I was a little disturbed. I was not allowed to think of Christ. Then I realized, after some years, that the last step of the Gospel was not only to follow Christ, but to imitate him." These are necessary steps, but the last step of the Gospel is taken when Christ says: "It is good for you that I go." We would comment: "You will not see me any more before you, you will not be able to rely on my external presence, but I will be in you."

In the book of an anonymous 14th Century Benedictine, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Christ is not seen as an object of contemplation, but as the one who, living in us, stirs in us this intent of love which turns our attention toward God Himself, the God which cannot be known by knowing, but only by unknowing.

The way of prayer of Jesus when he was alone was of the "Zen" or Daoist type. He was simply aware that all his life was filled with the awareness of sharing the life of his Father. "This is why I dare to say that the practice of Zen led me to a deeper understanding of God's presence in me and of Christ's way of prayer."

(The above quotes are based on a series of lectures first given at the Institute of East Asian Spirituality, Taipei, from 1977 to 1982, and later published in a four-volume series called *Ways of Contemplation East and West*).

In 1976 the Archbishop of Taipei invited Fr. Raguin to teach a course at the Institute of East Asian Spirituality. He was asked to teach "the method which emphasizes sitting," i.e., not sitting physically but "any attitude of prayer in which one does not face a person or object."

Fr Raguin explains his method as follows:

"In my development of the topic I decided to make East and West meet but not in a syncretic manner; Christ would be the center and way from start to finish. The whole course began to appear to me as a highway leading to God. The central experience would be Christian, but as I moved ahead I would meet Buddhists, Taoists, Yogists and many others. Christ would help me understand them, while their experience would help me deepen my understanding of Christ. To my amazement, this is what actually happened."

The course, comprising four parts, has been published. Its basic outline is as follows: 1) *The Structure of the Spiritual World*; 2) *Methods and Powers*; 3) *Spiritual Writers and Works: A Parallel between East and West*; 4) *Chinese Spirituality: Important Authors and Works*.

The work of Father Raguin has had a profound influence on nuns, lay people, and members of varying faiths in Asia, who are on a spiritual path. Fr. Raguin hoped that his legacy would encourage and assist all those eager to participate in inter-religious dialogue on spirituality and inner contemplative practice. In celebrating the legacy of Matteo Ricci over the past 400 years, surely Fr Yves Raguin must rank as one of those who furthered and expanded, even transcended the impressive work of the early Jesuits in China, truly one of those whom Fr George Dunne SJ would rank as "A Generation of Giants." (University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).

For a continuation of this theme, please see the recent work of Thierry Meynard, SJ, "Following the Footsteps of the Jesuits in Beijing," (St Louis: 2006)

News from the Library of Congress

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January 12, 2010

Rare 1602 World Map, the First Map in Chinese to Show the Americas, on Display at Library of Congress, Jan. 12 to April 10

A rare, 400-year-old map that displays China at the center of the world will be on exhibit at the Library of Congress from Jan. 12 to April 10, before it heads to its intended home at the James Ford Bell Library at the University of Minnesota. The map is on loan from the James Ford Bell Trust.

The Matteo Ricci World Map, the first in Chinese to show the Americas, will be on exhibit for the first time in North America, joining the Library of Congress' cartographic gem, the 1507 Waldseemüller World Map, in the ongoing exhibition "Exploring the Early Americas." The exhibit is free and open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday, in the Northwest Pavilion on the second floor of the Thomas Jefferson Building, 10 First St. S.E., Washington, D.C.

After the three-month display, the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division will digitally scan the 1602 document and make the electronic image available to scholars and students for research.

"When the James Ford Bell Trust asked the Library to be the site for unveiling the Ricci map in North America, I was delighted," said Deanna Marcum, associate librarian for Library Services. "The Ricci map, the first map in Chinese to show the Americas, will be placed near the Library's Waldseemüller Map of 1507, the first document to name America and to depict a separate and full Western Hemisphere. These two maps will 'talk' to each other, offering a unique perspective on East-West linkages."

The 1602 map was drawn by Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), a missionary in China, and measures 5.5 feet tall by 12.5 feet wide. It was designed to be mounted on a folding screen.

The James Ford Bell Trust purchased the map for \$1 million from the firm of Bernard J. Shapero, a noted dealer of rare books and maps in London, for the benefit of the James Ford Bell Library.

When the map returns to Minnesota, it will be displayed for a limited time at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Afterward it will move to its intended home in the James Ford Bell Library at the University of Minnesota.

The James Ford Bell Library documents the history and impact of international trade prior to 1800. Its premier collection of rare books, maps and manuscripts illustrates the ways in which cultural influences expanded worldwide, with a special emphasis on European interactions.

Founded in 1800, the Library of Congress is the nation's oldest federal cultural institution and the largest library in the world, with nearly 145 million items in various languages, disciplines and

formats. The Library serves the U.S. Congress and the nation both on-site, in its reading rooms on Capitol Hill, and through its award-winning website at www.loc.gov. Many of the Library's rich resources and treasures may also be accessed via interactive exhibitions on a personalized website at myLOC.gov.

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VATICAN - Ricci's beatification cause back on track

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By Gerard O'Connell, Special Correspondent in Rome

VATICAN CITY (UCAN) – A bishop in the birthplace of famous missionary to China Matteo Ricci on the weekend re-launched the process to beatify the Jesuit priest.

Bishop Claudio Giuliadori of Macerata diocese presided at the first session of a diocesan tribunal into the matter in San Giuliano Cathedral.

The tribunal's main task is to hear witnesses to ascertain whether people considered Father Matteo Ricci a holy man during and after his lifetime and whether devotion to him still exists. Father Ricci was born in 1552 in Macerata, Italy and died on May 11, 1610 in Beijing.

Yesterday's tribunal session swore in officials including the new Postulator for the Cause, Jesuit Father Tony Witwer. A historical commission has also been established to collect all writings and documents attributed to Father Ricci.

The commission will then make a study and evaluation of his works and transmit its verdict to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. The beatification process for the famous Italian Jesuit missionary to China was re-launched in Macerata, the city of his birth, by the local bishop on Jan. 24.

The canonization process was first opened in April 1984 and the diocesan phase concluded on April 13, 1985. Matteo Ricci was then declared a "Servant of God." For several reasons, however, the process lost impetus but Bishop Giuliadori has taken renewed interest in the cause.

Last October, he told UCA News he hopes this new phase will rapidly lead the Church to recognize the "missionary genius and spiritual stature" of Father Ricci and beatify him. Bishop Giuliadori will lead a pilgrimage from Macerata to Beijing in July to pray at the priest's tomb.

On Feb. 6 an exhibition will open in Beijing to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the priest's death. It is entitled, "Matteo Ricci: the Encounter of Civilizations in China of the Ming" and will move to Shanghai on April 2, and Nanking on June 4.

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

02/25/2010 13:48

CHINA – VATICAN

Waiting for the beatification of Card Kung Pin-mei ten years after his death

by Annie Lam

Pope John Paul II appointed him cardinal in pectore in 1979 when he was purging a life sentence for "counterrevolutionary activities". Overall, he spent almost 33 years in prison and died in exile in the United States. A memorial Mass will be celebrated on 6 March in Stamford.

Hong Kong (AsiaNews) - Many Catholics, lay people as well as priests, are praying for Card Ignatius Kung Pin-mei, ten years after his death, hoping that the cause for his beatification may start soon. The Kung Foundation, which is chaired Cardinal Kung's own nephew Joseph Kung, has led the initiative through a petition. A thanksgiving Mass will take place on 6 March at the Basilica of St John the Evangelist, Stamford, Connecticut, where the prelate died in 2000 in exile. Bishop William Lori, bishop of Bridgeport, will celebrate the liturgy.

In a press release, the Foundation said that the Mass would be dedicated to religious freedom around the world, especially from the Church in China, as well as to the petition that "Cardinal Kung may be raised to the honour of Blessed."

Anthony Lam Sui-ki, senior researcher at the Holy Spirit Study Centre of Hong Kong diocese, said that Cardinal Kung was always a good model of faith for Chinese Catholics. Everyone remembers him for that.

On the canonisation issue, Lam said that he hoped the Chinese government would take the matter easy and look from the Church point of view. "To canonize someone is to let others have a good model of faith," he noted.

In 2000, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese government launched a campaign of insults against the Vatican when the latter decided to canonise Chinese martyrs.

Ignatius Kung Pin-mei was born in Shanghai on 2 August 1900 into a Catholic family. Ordained a priest in 1930, he was appointed bishop of Shanghai in 1950.

On 8 September 1955, he was arrested along with more than 200 members of the clergy and the laity. He was sentenced to life in prison and spent

almost 33 years behind bars for "counter-revolutionary activities" according to the charges of the Chinese government.

Following pressures from international VIPs, he was released in July 1985 and placed under house arrest until 1988, when he travelled to the United States for medical treatment.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II named the then-imprisoned bishop of Shanghai a cardinal in pectore (in the heart), revealing it publicly (and to him) only in 1991.

In March 1998, his passport was seized when he went to renew it at the Chinese consulate, so that he was now officially an exile.

He died on 12 March 2000 from stomach cancer.

Agencia Fides - www.fides.org
ASIA/CHINA

As New Year kicks off, ecclesial base communities relaunch initiatives for growing in the faith

Beijing (Agencia Fides) - With the start of the new year, a number of ecclesial base communities have launched training courses to help the faithful deepen in their faith life and be authentic witnesses of Christ in the environment where they are. We report some of the initiatives sent to Fides. The parish of Yan Quan in the Province of Shan Xi organized a winter course for young people, which was held February 9-11, with the theme of the meaning of life and the value of faith. They were three days of "purification of the soul, to spiritually "recharge" young people and help them live their lives in harmony with the faith, getting closer and closer to the Lord," confirmed priests who organized the event.

Seminarians of the Congregation of St. Joseph and Franciscan seminarians, with the help of local religious, organized a short faith formation course for thirty young migrant workers who had returned home for the New Year and students on school vacations. The initiative was held at the Parish of Qian Jia Tan in the Diocese of Feng Xiang, Province of Shan Xi. According to the priest who was the spiritual director, he wanted to send a message to young people: "Jesus loves you and is waiting for you. Your conversion is all it takes."

The Diocese of Zhou Cang has especially geared its activity towards immigrant workers and businessmen, taking advantage of their return home for the New Year celebrations. February 18-21, 45 people gathered to exchange their experiences on how to live the life of faith at work. In addition to offering support and comfort in the faith, through the teachings of the Church, the priests of the diocese also tried to meet the needs the people expressed by proposing a pastoral visit to the place where they work, because "it strengthens their faith" and is also a way to help

them "bear witness to the faith in their environment." (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 23/02/2010)

Christian Today

Demand for Bible outstripping supply in China

by Charlie Boyd

Posted: Friday, February 19, 2010, 13:55 (GMT)

The Bible Society has reported a growing demand for copies of the Bible in China where an estimated 500,000 people converted to Christianity in 2009 alone.

Although some four million Bibles were printed and distributed across China last year, the rapid growth of the church year on year means that demand for Bibles is now outstripping supply, according to the Bible Society.

The official number of Christians in China stands at 28.6 million, but it is believed the true figure could be as high as 90 million if the estimated number of worshippers at unofficial house churches is included.

The UK-based Bible Society subsidises the cost of printing Bibles to keep the cost below £2 a copy, vital for Christians living in China's rural heartland, where 70 per cent of churchgoers are found and half the population live on less than \$2 a day.

The Bibles are printed at the state-owned Amity Printing Company, which has printed around 70 million Bibles since it was established in 1987. Around 50 million of them have gone to Chinese believers.

"As more and more people are joining the Church they are asking for a Bible," says Bible Society's China Partnership Co-ordinator Kua Wee Seng.

"Every year we have to raise funds for Bible subsidy. The reason is that in the rural areas where most Christians are found, they are living in relatively poor conditions. In order for them to have a copy of the Bible we have to provide paper so that a Bible is affordable for most of the Christians in China.

"This is a time of opportunity in China. Many of us feel that we mustn't miss this opportunity or people will turn to something else, other than Christianity."

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

02/22/2010 13:51

VATICAN – CHINA

Mgr Nugent, “nuncio” to China, would like to visit each bishop in communion with the Pope

by Annie Lam

After ten years of work, the representative of the Holy See is set to leave to take up the post of nuncio to Madagascar. He will be consecrated on 18 March, by Card Bertone. In this interview, he looks back at his work and the life of the Church in China. Main moments include the witness of the persecuted Christians, the unity of the Church, diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican, the appeal on behalf of imprisoned bishops and priests, and the openness of some leaders in the Chinese government.

Hong Kong (AsiaNews) – “I would like to visit each bishop, who is in communion with the Pope, both underground bishops and official bishops” and “embrace each one and pray together the ‘Our Father’,” Mgr Eugene Martin Nugent told AsiaNews on the eve of his departure for Rome. He is leaving after ten years at the helm of the Holy See Study Mission to Hong Kong, a kind of nunciature that ran affairs relating to the Church in China. During that time, he was able to visit China only once, and has never been able to meet Chinese bishops because of government restrictions.

On the eve of Chinese New Year, 13 February, he was named by Pope Benedict XVI, as the new Apostolic Nuncio to Madagascar, Apostolic Delegate to Comoros Islands and Apostolic Delegate to Reunion Island. On 18 March, Card Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone will ordain him archbishop in St Peter’s Basilica on 18 March.

Mgr Nugent, 51, will soon leave Hong Kong for Rome to prepare for his ordination. He will spend Easter at home in Ireland and in May head to Madagascar, a country of 17 million in which Christians constitute 40 per cent of the population, including about 4 million Catholics.

Mgr Nugent, Liu Yuzheng in his Chinese name, is known to Chinese Catholics as “Daiban”, the Vatican delegate. Like another Matteo Ricci, he is held in high regard for his great memory and his dedication to the Mission. When he arrived in Hong Kong in August 2000, he worked for five months with Mgr Fernando Filoni, currently substitute at the Secretariat of State. Like his successor, Mgr Filoni also concluded his mission to Hong Kong on the eve of Chinese New Year in 2001.

The Church in mainland China was his sphere of work, roughly 12 million Catholics divided in 138 dioceses (116 active and 22 inactive), served by about 90 bishops, 3,000 priests, 5,000 sisters, 10 major and 22 minor seminaries in the open Church and another 10 seminaries in the underground Church.

Good moments and challenges

During his 10-year mission, Mgr Nugent had good moments as well as challenges. Speaking to AsiaNews he said, “I admire the faith of Catholic bishops, priests, religious and laypeople, and the testimonies of their lives in difficult circumstances.” The unlawful ordination of bishops in China, especially the three cases in 2006, [1] was “one of the most difficult challenges. It was a painful experience for me personally. I had many sleepless nights at that time,” he said.

Comparing the Church in China in 2000 and now, he noted, “Today, it is more firmly set on the road to ‘normality’ even though it is still at the beginning. Pope Benedict XVI’s Letter for Chinese Catholics in 2007 set clear directions in this sense.” He explained that “normality” refers to applying the universal law of the Church to a situation where, heretofore, special faculties and privileges had been applied. A notable example he cited was the normalisation of Shanghai diocese where the succession of bishops in Shanghai was clarified around 2005.[2]

“I’m convinced that some of the top leaders of the Chinese government understand very well the importance of unity among Catholics, not only in China, but also with the universal Church which was emphasised by Pope Benedict’s letter,” Mgr Nugent said.

The Church in China should fully enjoy the freedom of belief like Catholics in the rest of the world. Catholics living in unity, solidarity and peace with one another will also make a positive contribution to the unity, solidarity and peaceful relations within Chinese society as a whole, he said. “I think this should be the goal of the policy of the Chinese government.”

Having dealt with many controversial issues, he said, “It’s inevitable that there has been criticism, especially when coping with conflict situations in the Church in China”. However, “criticism was fair. All my work was aimed at easing the conflicts and helping the Church to find the best solutions for each case,” he emphasised.

One of the difficulties, he had in his work is the fact that it is “not possible to have direct access to the bishops in China and one has to depend on third-parties to communicate. Our letters in response to local Church issues might sometimes seem to favour one side and upset the other, and in turn one side might react critically while the other would react positively.” Currently, there are about 90 bishops in China in both the underground and open communities.

The significance of Pope Benedict’s Letter

The Papal Letter of 2007 is “like a roadmap” for the Church in China. “Even though the results may not be so clear and evident now, at least everyone understands the direction we have to take,” he said.

“We are not asking the underground community to register or to come into the open, or asking the official community to go underground. However, we do ask for a sincere effort on both sides to move forward on the path of reconciliation,” he added.

He said he hopes “the official communities would be more courageous in making public gestures of communion and building trust with the unregistered communities.” Likewise, “I would hope that the unregistered communities would be able to make further progress in opening up to the official communities.”

“I understand all of this takes time, and it cannot be forced. We, from the Holy See, are not forcing it. But we are willing and happy to facilitate the process,” he said.

Citing a well-known remark Pope John Paul II made at the beginning of his pontificate, “Do not be afraid”, he urges Chinese Catholics to “hold your heads high” without compromising on Church principles. “Let us continue to walk together along the path of communion and reconciliation.”

Church’s hope in China

The hope of the Church in China lies in achieving greater unity within the Catholic community and giving “witness to Christ, to the Gospel and a witness of charity to the great Chinese society”.

In the past decade, he met hundreds of mainland priests, sisters and seminarians, but just a few bishops, since Chinese bishops are severely restricted in travelling. “On critical issues, the bishops have sent their delegates to express their views,” he said.

“In meeting bishops and priests from mainland China, one can see a young, dynamic and vibrant Church. It is true that one also sees a divided and persecuted Church, where faith is tested. Although the Church is controlled, it exudes energy and vitality,” he noted. “Catholics in China are of strong faith and will resist persecution. I will be very happy to see them live out their Catholic faith in freedom, and reunited with the universal Church.”

“I invite the Chinese government to release all the bishops and priests from detention and give them freedom to meet and discuss all Church matters without state control. I am convinced that this is for the benefit of all,” the prelate said.

“My overall impression of the Church in China is positive. We cannot apply our Western criteria or judge people who have endured difficulties such as the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).” Many mainland Catholics do not know much about the Church, and this includes seminarians and the clergy, he noted. The training of Church personnel is considered a priority by the Vatican. Diocesan management systems, transparency and the proper autonomy of sisters’ congregations also need attention.

Mgr Nugent's visit to Beijing in 2003, representing the Holy See at an international meeting, was his first and only visit to China. He was not granted a visa on two subsequent occasions in 2004 when the Holy See was invited to participate in other international events.

"I would like to visit each bishop, who is in communion with the Pope, both underground bishops and official bishops" and "embrace each one and pray together the 'Our Father'," he said.

At present, all the dioceses in China have contacts with the Holy See. Mgr Nugent served as a channel of communication between the Holy See and the local Churches. As such, he tried to improve it so that each side had a better understanding of the other. It is true that communication in some places is easier, but more difficult in others.

Regarding China-Vatican negotiations, "It is strictly reserved to the Secretariat of State and Chinese foreign ministry. There are regular contacts between the two parties," he said. "I believe that, with goodwill, problems can be resolved. There is no need to be afraid of one another," he stressed. The Catholic Church has offered a big contribution to Chinese culture in the past, and wants to do the same now and in the future".

Leaving Hong Kong

He gets ready to leave in a few hours, he said that he was full of admiration for Hong Kong, its efficiency and order, and will miss the "many wonderful friends" he made, and he will certainly miss Cantonese food.

A good diplomat, Mgr Nugent is known for his strong spirituality. He thanked his "good parents for fostering a happy family and a good environment" where "faith came very natural and normal". His family members will attend his Episcopal ordination.

Ordained a priest in 1983, he graduated from the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy in the Vatican in 1992. Before coming to Hong Kong, he served in the Vatican missions to Turkey, Jerusalem (Israel and Palestinian Territories).

* 1 See the dossier "China - Vatican: the illicit ordinations," asianews.it, May 2006.

* 2 See "China: the government and Holy See ordain a bishop jointly for the first time," asianews.it, 28 June 2005.

__AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

02/18/2010 13:44

CHINA - VATICAN

Underground Priest: we work for the unity of the Church, with Mgr. An and Card. Zen

by Peter Song Zhichun

After the controversy raised by an Italian magazine, on the division between official and underground communities, AsiaNews gladly received and publishes the testimony of a priest in the underground community in China. Appreciation - even if not shared - for Mgr. An Shuxin, who decided to become vice-chairman of the Patriotic Association, esteem for card. Zen, a champion of freedom of the Church. The most important commitment is the recovery of the reconciliation of the Church, promoting "forgiveness" and "martyrdom".

Beijing (AsiaNews) - After reading the article by Gianni Valente in the Italian magazine "30 Days" (No.12 - 2009), as a priest in mainland China, I can express my opinion on two topics covered in the article.

I know the diocese of Baoding, and Hong Kong and have been in contact with Bishop Francis An Shuxin, coadjutor of the diocese of Baoding, and Cardinal Joseph Zen, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong. I consider both to be good examples to imitate. I am now a pastor in China and serve the Church, trying to put into practice the 2007 letter of Pope Benedict XVI. Given this situation, I feel compelled to express my opinions to make a contribution to the Chinese Church, and I remain open to accept honest advice because I love the Church.

The difficult relationship with the government

1. I can not believe that the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples lobbied Bishop An in order to induce him to leave the underground church and cooperate with political authorities. In fact, the Holy See leaves each bishop free to act within his powers and does not force the Chinese bishops to give heroic witness in rejecting the Patriotic Association (PA), which has the stated aim of implementing "principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church". In recent years I have observed that many underground pastors have come out of hiding, for example Mgr. Wei Jingyi, bishop of Qiqihar, or Mgr. Li Jingfeng, Bishop of Fengxiang. The latter, with his particular witness and honesty, won the legitimacy of his local community. And Msgr. Wei is still today attempting to obtain the legitimisation of his Episcopal identity by the Chinese government. The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples follows the directions indicated in the letter from the Pope, leaving individual local bishops the freedom to decide. Especially in the current circumstances, so difficult and delicate for their mission as pastors, "the traditional orientation 'nihil sine episcopo' remains valid."

My experience suggests that it is difficult for underground communities to become official, even if this is also desired by the Holy See, which would like to establish a diplomatic relationship with the Chinese government. To this end the Secretary of State has acted with all its might, but has met with a major obstacle, which is the same one that meets the underground Church in relations with the government: this only intends to legitimize an "independent church" that, in reality, distances itself from our dogma. And how can the Church accept the negation of itself? As the papal letter reiterates their claim to place

themselves "above the bishops themselves and to guide the life of the ecclesial community does not correspond to Catholic doctrine."

After this letter many said they were optimistic about the relationship between church and government and immediately expected to see positive results, when in reality, victory does not reside in the civil relationship with the Government, rather in the clear intention of the pope to recover Church unity in China. As an underground priest I have longed to be able to exercise my ministry in Chinese society by witnessing to the Catholic faith in front of my friends, dear comrades in childhood, but I feel it necessary to accept the sacrifice of hiding as Jesus accepted his Cross, with patience, prayer and forgiveness, accepting the Providence of our heavenly Father.

The facts of Baoding

2. A detailed reconstruction of the dynamics of the facts concerning Bishop An is difficult owing to a lack of communication and is not necessary to advance of the diocese of Baoding. Constant debate over the reasons for which he was released from prison or has accepted the post of vice president of the PA only leads to further divisions in the diocese. Benedict XVI writes in his letter: "The Holy See, after reaffirming the principles, leaves the decision to the individual bishop who, having consulted his priests, is in a better position to know the local situation, to weigh the concrete possibilities of choice and assess the possible consequences within the diocesan community, albeit with suffering, and which maintains the unity of the diocesan community with its own pastor". The Holy See has confirmed Mgr. An's episcopal authority as Bishop Coadjutor of the diocese. The priests must put aside their personal views and obey for the good of the Church and the unity of the diocesan community. Mgr. An is our "older brother": who has the right to judge him? Personally, I do not agree with his decision to take the post of vice-president of the PA, even if he did so with good intentions. However I can not fail to remember some specific circumstances, and especially what he said.

Archbishop An said he had accepted the said assignment after reading the letter of the Holy Father, he found himself before the alternative of taking the said office or to seeing appointed to his post at the head of the diocese, a new unlawful bishop. I understand also that Mgr. An has sought to consult his priests, many of whom have not responded, and in the end felt obliged to not follow the majority opinion, but his conscience. Has Archbishop An made a mistake? Maybe, but I do not feel it in myself to condemn him. St. Peter also made his mistakes. Who can deny that Mgr. An loves the Church? With the voice of the Holy See, the Lord has entrusted him the task to shepherd the local church. I believe that the priests of Baoding must take their share of responsibility for the mistake made by Mgr. An, in so far as their insistence in refusing to accept his authority and in leaving him alone, have caused, to some extent, An's mistake. I hope that the dear brothers in Baoding gather around the bishop and cooperate harmoniously with him as in the past, especially as they did in 1995.

The help of card. Zen

3. Thanks to the Holy See and the other brothers in Christ who live outside China we have already seen success, that of safeguarding the Chinese church, which remains in communion

with Peter, although she lives under constant threat of a political atheistic nature. This success of the Church in China demonstrates the wisdom of the Holy See and confirms that the Holy Spirit works among Chinese Catholics. The Pope's letter of 2007 is a sign of the Apostolic See's trust in the evangelization in China. Thanks to the compendium and the transcript or interpretation of the Pope's letter prepared by card. Joseph Zen, Chinese priests can deepen the Papal directions for their mission and their goals. After that letter, in fact, the two Catholic communities in China are once again slowly moving closer to each other and working together. We are ready to save the Church's unity despite political obstacles.

Card. Zen deserves respect, his figure is not only important for Hong Kong, given that his voice echoes throughout the world. He is a defender of human rights and the legitimacy of the Catholic Church. His speeches and his "Guide" to understanding the papal letter aim to be a contribution to remain faithful to the intentions of the Holy Father. His voice and his work are a valuable service for Chinese pastors because it teaches them how to apply the principles of the Church to the concretely more difficult and complex situations, provided they are not considered as an alternative voice and contrary to the bodies of the Holy See and they are not bestowed an official character, as if the retired bishop of Hong Kong is playing a supplementary role of the Bishops' Conference of China, as some tend to attribute him. This disorientation would be of disservice to Chinese Catholics, and is certainly something the same card. Zen does not want.

Card. Zen also takes equal care of priests from the underground community and those from the official Church. In 1999 he also encouraged them to celebrate Mass together in Belgium, explaining, in harmony with the words of the Pope, that "it is permissible to celebrate together with bishops and priests in communion with the Holy Father, even if they are recognized by civil authorities and maintain a relationship with entities desired by the State and extraneous to structure of the Church, provided the recognition and the relationship does not entail the denial of essential principles of faith and of ecclesiastical communion. "

4. We need the sincere collaboration of all our brothers in Christ, both inside and outside mainland China, to help the Chinese Church to recover its full unity. All sterile accusation, not only does not help the Church, but unwittingly becomes a tool in the hands of the Chinese Patriotic Association. In China, for reconciliation and forgiveness we must promote the spirit of martyrdom that is the willingness to give our lives for the will of God and the unity of the Church. We must learn the method of dialogue left us by the Second Vatican Council, so that one day we can all say together, "Our Father

Cardinal Zen: My hopes for the Church in China in this Year of the Tiger

by Card. Joseph Zen Zekiun, sdb

Nearly 1000 days from the Pope's letter to Chinese Catholics, it is hard to see any fruits. But there are some seeds. The most important commitment is reconciliation in the Church, without media exaggerations. The "abnormal interference" of the current government makes "the abnormal secrecy" of the Church still valid. The Cardinal of Hong Kong, a defender of religious freedom, takes stock of the situation.

Hong Kong (AsiaNews) - Many Asian countries are celebrating the New Year according to the lunar calendar which falls in mid-February [and is the Year of the Tiger]. In mainland China, the Lunar New Year is called "Spring Festival". This would be the equivalent of the ancient Roman festival of the "Dies natalis Solis invicti" (birthday of the invincible Sun), later replaced by the Christian Christmas. In Hong Kong this year, the Lunar New Year has brought us cold weather, foggy and rainy. But we know that spring is upon us. The Holy Father's Angelus address on Sunday 14 February, greeted all those people who are celebrating, hoping that they will maintain and enhance "the rich heritage of spiritual and moral values, which is firmly rooted in their culture."

So it is only right that, despite everything, we begin this year in hope. The Holy Father in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* spoke of small hopes, expectations every day, of our many small desires. But then he says there is great hope, that of salvation and eternal happiness. I would like to focus on a hope that I would call of intermediate measure, which is the hope for our Church in China.

Pope's letter

It's been almost a thousand days (960, to be exact) since the publication of the historic letter of Pope Benedict XVI to our dear Church in China, but the seed sown by the Pope still struggles to blossom and bear fruit. The letter gave a clear direction for change, a maturation and progress. The journey however seems excessively slow.

The Holy Father has repeated clearly the Catholic doctrine on the Church. It is and must always be, one and founded on the Apostles. Therefore having other bodies that place themselves above the bishops to lead the Church is not normal. So far there has been no sign of even the beginning of normalization. It seems only right to seek what is lacking in the meantime. Without claiming to be the ruling judge, I have tried to find some reasons for this lack of progress.

Desired balance between clarity and understanding

As I said immediately after its publication, the Pope's letter is a masterpiece of balance

between the clarity of the principles and understanding for people. I also said that it was easy to break this balance, which depends greatly on both sides of the equation. Now it seems that, on the side of clarity, it has been lacking by default, whereas on the part of the understanding by excess.

It seems that government authorities have not believed the time ripe for change, while our side has not wanted to encourage our brothers to further efforts of authenticity.

Some say that I have seen a lack of clarity in the Pope's letter, but so convinced of the clarity am I that I fail to understand how some were capable of misinterpreting it, even by some with are deservingly considered an expert in matters of the Church in China.

Reconciliation is certainly a main theme in the letter. From my heart I hope that all sides will open their hearts to feelings of sincere fraternity and that the brothers of the two communities will promote common initiatives of prayer, dialogue and pastoral partnerships be they within limits and constraints. But it is not always possible to come to the unification in the sense of structure, because this is still under the control of the party.

Some, citing the Pope's letter, say that "the underground is not a normal life of the Church" and stops there. By doing so, he quotes out of context (leading some to think that the decision of those who remain in hiding is abnormal), while the text says that "pastors and faithful have recourse to it only amid suffering, in the desire to maintain the integrity of their faith and not to accept interference from State agencies in matters pertaining intimately to the life of the Church "(so is the abnormal interference that created the unusual secrecy). Therefore, it is wrong to say that the Holy Father has encouraged everyone to seek government recognition, while the Pope has reminded everyone that to achieve this aim they can not resign themselves "to adopt attitudes, make gestures and undertake commitments that are contrary to the dictates of their conscience as Catholics. " This is true even if the person involved, in the past gave heroic witness of faith, and in the present has acted in good faith. Respecting a person does not necessarily mean agreeing with their every decision.

Hoped for normalization

Can we hope that during this New Year the supreme leaders of our nation will decide to afford Catholic citizens the right to live their faith normally? In giving a positive answer to this question we are encouraged by the fact that they have already shown to understand that we are dealing with faith and conscience. Indeed, they have accepted that illegitimate bishops are legitimized by the Holy Father and that new candidates for the episcopate are approved by the Roman Pontiff to do before their ordination. Why not come to a final clarification, after a sincere and open dialogue, and suggested by the Holy Father in his letter?

Another hope for the New Year is that on our own, children of the Church, will not create more obstacles for the goal of normalisation and consequently we all strive to objectively

understand and faithfully follow the letter of the Pope, despite any differences that must be overcome and not inflated along the lines of a certain journalistic style.

Hoping by praying

I said that my hopes for the New Year are of an “intermediate measure”. But maybe I have to admit that they are also "high hopes" that will never be accomplished without great sacrifice, without humility and courage, and without mutual openness of heart, recognizing ourselves (Catholics and Communists) as brothers of the great Chinese nation.

But human efforts certainly are not enough; it will take a miracle of God through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. So we must hurry this miracle with our prayer, prayer for all, in mainland China and abroad, starting with this Holy Lent, in which everyone will examine his infidelity. Trusting in the Passion of the Redeemer, we look with confidence to the effectiveness of the Resurrection for a flowering of the Church and a new harmonious order of the nation, founded on "spiritual and moral values", especially honesty and respect for the dignity of human person.

Agenzia Fides - www.fides.org
ASIA/CHINA

Testimony of Bishop Raymund Wang Chonglin: untiring in the work of evangelization, never discouraged by difficulties

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – On this past February 2, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Archbishop Raymond Wang Chonglin, retired bishop of the Diocese of Chaohsien (Zhaoxian), Hebei Province (Mainland China) died following a brain hemorrhage. The prelate was 88 years old. He was born May 13, 1921 in the village of Yuejiazhuang, County Ningjin (Hebei). He entered the minor seminary in 1935, passing in 1944 to the seminary of Jiazhuang (Zhaoxian) for the study of philosophy and then to the Vincentian seminary in Beijing, for theology. He was ordained a priest on November 30, 1950 by Bishop John Zhang Bide, Bishop of Zhaoxian. On December 26, 1957, he was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment.

On March 9, 1983, he was consecrated Bishop of Zhaoxian. In the winter of 1985, he began the construction of a new seminary for the training of future priests and in 1988, began the construction of the monastery "Saint Teresa of the Infant Jesus Institute," for the education of religious sisters and care of the orphanage “House of Dawn,” which was much appreciated by the whole community. That orphanage, one of the first established by the Catholic Church after the political openings of the 1980s, has been a great means of evangelization. Through it, many people have come to know the Catholic Church. It currently continues to receive hundreds of abandoned children, mostly people with physical and mental disabilities.

In 1988, five years after his consecration as Bishop, Bishop Wang was officially recognized

by the government as Bishop of Zhaoxian, but after the consecration of his Coadjutor, Bishop Joseph Jiang Mingyuan, he was forbidden to publicly exercise the episcopal ministry. In 2005, he resigned from the diocese, but in 2006 he became its head once more, due to the illness of the Coadjutor Bishop. In 2008, the Diocese celebrated the 25th anniversary of his episcopate.

All those who knew Bishop Wang spoke of him as a simple man, intelligent and virtuous, with a strong faith in God and sincere loyalty to the Church. Bishop Wang was tireless in the work of evangelization, not discouraged by difficulties: he supervised visits to faith communities, assistance to the sick and weakest, promotion of vocations to the priesthood and women's religious life, reconstruction of churches and places of worship, and administration of the sacraments. He was truly a good shepherd for his sheep, whom he cared for with great passion, traveling on bicycle through the whole province, to visit communities without a priest. Throughout the diocese, you can see the mighty works wrought by this bishop, and the community he started and loved. The history of the Diocese was written largely by Bishop Wang. "From the time we were little - said Fr. Simon Gao Bojin - we were brought up by his testimony of total trust in God. Bishop Wang urged all believers to evangelize, by living a very simple and sober life."

Bishop Wang was a bishop of a great faith, who lived in a simple and unpretentious manner. He invited the faithful to pray without ceasing to be witnesses of God, light of the world, and salt of the earth. He very much loved, and helped others love the Pope and the doctrine of the Church. Until the last moment, he spent his life for others, working hard and suffering, but always with joy.

At the time of his death, the faithful and many friends have come from all the villages to offer their condolences. In the "House of Dawn," there were moving gestures from the children housed there. The funerals were celebrated in the Cathedral of Biancun on February 8, with the participation of many people: there was talk of 20,000 people in attendance. The body was buried in the church cemetery. A priest of his diocese greeted him with these words: "Bishop Raymond, even though you left us, we will never forget your selfless faith, your gratuitous gift of self, your simple and industrious life, your noble moral character, and your ability to look to the future with Christian hope. The great Chinese master Laozi Dao wrote: "The saints love all the people with all their heart," and this was just your spirit, Bishop Wang: all your life you have loved with the heart of Christ."

The Diocese of Zhaoxian now has 60,000 Catholics, 60 priests, 124 religious sisters, 170 minor seminarians, and 52 major seminarians, and 145 churches and places of worship. (Agenzia Fides 17/02/2010)

Chinese Catholics moved by Pope's greetings for New Year's; commemoration of deceased missionaries among initiatives

Beijing (Agenzia Fides) – Masses of Thanksgiving, prayers for the world and the country, the commemoration of deceased priests and missionaries, the pastoral visit of the bishops and priests to the Ecclesial Base Communities, and works of charity have marked the celebration of Chinese New Year by Catholics on the mainland. Also, the Pope's greetings at his Angelus address given on Sunday, February 14, has brought happiness and excitement among the faithful. As a priest in Beijing told Fides, "for someone else, it might seem like the usual greeting of good wishes, but for us Chinese Catholics, especially those of us who live on the mainland, every time it arouses great emotion. Every time, gratitude arises from the depths of our hearts! Thank you Holy Father! You have made us feel so close to you, so close to the Universal Church. We are always with you."

According to information received by our agency, the Solemn Mass celebrated on the morning of February 14, the first day of Chinese New Year, in all the Catholic communities there was a very large participation of the faithful. Entire families came and prayed together, thanking God for the past year and calling on the maternal protection of Mary, for peace and prosperity in the world and the country.

Among the events of this day of celebration, we mention that at the parish of Fan Ga Da, in the He Bei Province, priests and the faithful went to the Catholic cemetery to pay homage to priests and missionaries who have dedicated their entire life to the Church. They also visited the parents of several priests and religious, to thank them for their support of their children's vocations.

The Catholic community of Zhong Shan has launched on its website a message for the Chinese New Year, addressed to all peoples, commemorating the missionaries that have come from abroad and, on behalf of Catholics, thanking all who have helped and supported growth of the Catholic community, hoping for a further increase in social harmony so that Catholics may help people to know Jesus Christ and the Church. Finally, it invokes God's blessing on the Chinese people. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 16/02/2010)

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

VATICAN - Pope transfers Vatican's HK diplomat to Africa

Published Date: February 15, 2010

VATICAN CITY (UCAN) — Pope Benedict XVI has appointed the head of the Holy See's study mission in Hong Kong, Monsignor Eugene Nugent, as nuncio to Madagascar, the Vatican announced on Feb. 13.

The Vatican said the Pope had promoted him to the rank of archbishop and given him two other diplomatic roles — apostolic delegate to the Comore Islands, northwest of Madagascar and the functions of apostolic delegate to La Reunion, a tropical island east of Madagascar.

News of the re-assignment of the 51-year old Irish-born Monsignor Nugent had been expected for some time as he had worked for more than nine years as head of the Holy See's study mission in Hong Kong. The Vatican had informed Beijing of his presence there from the very beginning.

Before coming to Hong Kong, he had served in the Holy See's diplomatic missions in Turkey and Jerusalem. From Hong Kong he followed closely the life of the Catholic Church in mainland China and its relations with the Chinese authorities, and reported to the Vatican on this.

Speaking to UCA News in Hong Kong about Monsignor Nugent's re-assignment, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, retired Hong Kong archbishop, praised him as "a good man who is diligent and wise," and commended his work in the mission there saying "he has done a lot for the Church in China."

The cardinal dismissed criticism from some mainland Catholics who blamed Monsignor Nugent when they were dissatisfied with the Holy See, and explained that his role was that of "messenger" between the Holy See and the Church in the mainland. Therefore he should not be blamed for what was not done correctly, nor credited for what was well done.

Most China watchers agree with Cardinal Zen that Monsignor Nugent has done very well in what is a complex and challenging assignment. They say he has given very good service to the Church in China and to the Holy See.

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

VATICAN - Pope sends message for year of the Tiger

Published Date: February 15, 2010

VATICAN CITY (UCAN) — Pope Benedict XVI has extended his good wishes to the Chinese, the Vietnamese, and all other people in Asia and around the world who are celebrating the Lunar New Year.

He conveyed his greetings from his study window in the Vatican at midday on Sunday, Feb. 14, when he spoke to thousands of pilgrims from many lands gathered in St. Peter's Square.

"Today the Lunar New Year is celebrated in various countries of Asia — I am thinking in

particular of China and Vietnam, and in many communities scattered throughout the world,” the pope told them.

“These are festive days, which these people live as privileged occasions to strengthen family and generational bonds,” he added.

He concluded by expressing the wish that “all of them may maintain and increase the rich inheritance of spiritual and moral values, that are firmly rooted in the culture of these peoples.”

His words brought warm applause from the thousands in the square, and especially from several small groups of Chinese and Vietnamese present among them who waved to him.

In sending this greeting, Pope Benedict was following in a tradition started by John Paul II as he reached out to improve relations, particularly with China and Vietnam.

The Pope’s complete message is available [here](#).

ZY08834.1589 February 15, 2010 21 EM-lines (210 words)

Agenzia Fides - www.fides.org
ASIA/CHINA

Young Catholics doing volunteer work during school vacations for New Year's

Zhang Jia Kou (Agenzia Fides) - During the winter school holidays, young Catholics in the parish of Zhang Jia Kou are set to perform works of charity, becoming volunteers to witness to the love of Christ to all people, but especially to the youngest, the weakest, and those who are alone. On February 8, the young people, who are divided into several groups led by priests and nuns, visited the nursing home for the elderly, orphanages, and families of the elderly, who live alone and are sick.

In addition to bringing goods to these people, so they can enjoy the feast of Chinese New Year, they also cleaned their houses, their clothes, and helped the children with their homework. On February 10, there was a big celebration for all the young people of the area to celebrate the New Year, with the spirit of evangelization. Many young non-Christians received a warm welcome from their Catholic friends, attending the quiz on the Bible and a show on the stories of the saints. They also shared their impressions on how to "live their life of faith." This year, the priests involved in youth ministry have also launched three meetings a week to strengthen the youth's Biblical knowledge, and so they can grow in their faith. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 13/02/2010)

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

02/13/2010 10:43

CHINA - VATICAN

New Year in prison for the Chinese bishops. Two priests released

by Zhen Yuan

The family of Msgr. Jia Zhiguo have been requesting his release for months, but they have not been answered. Two other bishops missing for years in police custody: Mgr. James Su Zhimin and Mgr. Cosma Shi Enxiang. The two priests released belong to the diocese of Zhengding.

Beijing (AsiaNews) - Despite repeated requests of Catholics and their families, Msgr. Julius Jia Zhiguo, underground bishop of Zhengding (Hebei), will remain under sequester during the festivities of Chinese New Year, which begins tomorrow. With him, two other underground bishops remain segregated in unknown places in the hands of police.

Meanwhile, police in Zhengding have in recent weeks released two priests of the diocese: Fr. Hu Baoguo, vicar general, was released on Jan. 29 at 10 pm, Fr. Ma Hong'en was released on 6 January. Both were often targeted and subjected to periods of imprisonment to force them to join the Patriotic Association, the state body that wants to build a National Catholic Church, separate from Rome.

In recent months, the family of Mgr. Jia, and especially his nephew, along with lay leaders of the diocese have constantly appealed to the leaders of the Religious Affairs Bureau to free the bishop for the New Year celebrations, which are an important appointment for families to come together. But today it was confirmed that the bishop will remain in police custody.

Bishop Jia Zhiguo was arrested on 30 March, as the Vatican Commission on China held a closed-door encounter. At the conclusion of the meeting, a statement by the Vatican asked for his release (see: 31/03/2009 Police arrest underground Zhengding bishop Jia Zhiguo and 02/04/2009 Vatican's "sadness" over arrest of Bishop Jia Zhiguo. The Church and formation).

Catholics of Zhengding and the village of Wuqiu, home to the cathedral, continue to "pray for his release and his return to pastoral work." According to AsiaNews sources, "Mgr. Jia is in good health and his mind is clear". The prelate's nephew was able to visit his uncle in December.

During his detention, with Msgr. Jia has been allowed to celebrate Mass alone and to have the readings, including the Compendium of the Pope's letter to Chinese Catholics. A group of police officers charged with overseeing the cathedral and the bishop of Wuqiu, are present only on Sundays. When the bishop was there they made round the clock checks on the

prelate.

The Bishop was also absent at the memorial Mass to commemorate a year after the death of his uncle, Fr Joseph Fuqin Jia, who died December 26, 2009.

Bishop Jia Zhiguo was arrested on 30 March, during a close encounter of the Vatican Commission on China. At the conclusion of the rally, a statement by the Vatican has asked for his release (see: 31/03/2009 seized by the police Msgr. Jia Zhiguo, underground bishop of Zhengding 02/04/2009 and "pain" of the Vatican to stop Msgr. Jia Zhiguo. The Church and training).

Just like Mgr. Jia, two other bishops remain seized in police custody in unknown locations.

The first is Mgr. James Su Zhimin (diocese of Baoding, Hebei), 75, arrested and disappeared since 1996. In November 2003 he was seen in a hospital in Baoding, controlled by the police, where he underwent treatment for the heart and eyes. But after a few days he disappeared again. The second is Mgr. Cosma Shi Enxiang (diocese of Yixian, Hebei), 86, who was arrested and disappeared April 13, 2001. Bishop Shi, ordained a bishop in '82, had been in prison for 30 years. The last time he was arrested in December '90, and released in '93. Since then he has lived in forced isolation until his latest arrest.

AsiaNews sources say that there are dozens of underground priests in prison or forced labor camps. And dozens of other underground bishops in isolation.

CathNews Asia

Website: Holy Spirit Study Centre, Hong Kong

Published Date: February 8, 2010

The Holy Spirit Study Centre (HSSC) is an organ of the Diocese of Hong Kong. It was established in 1980 by the late Cardinal John Baptist Wu as an expression of pastoral concern for China and the Church in China. It is a research institute whose primary practical task has been to gather, store and analyze pertinent data about China that will serve to broaden understanding of the Mainland's rapidly changing situation, and to effect appropriate Christian responses.

Facilities at the Centre, which is housed in a wing of the Holy Spirit Seminary in Aberdeen, include offices for its full-time staff and research associates, a library, archives for collected

documentation, and meeting rooms.

LINK

Holy Spirit Study Centre, Hong Kong

<http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/en/>

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

02/08/2010 10:52

CHINA - VATICAN

Over twenty thousand Catholics at the funeral of the Bishop of Zhaoxian

by Zhen Yuan

Mgr. Raymond Wang Chonglin died February 2 at 88. He spent 21 years in prison for his loyalty to the pope. Underground bishop ordained in '83, he was accepted by the government in '88.

Zhaoxian (AsiaNews) - Braving the cold winter, about 20 thousand Catholics took part this morning in the funeral of Mgr. Raymond Wang Chonglin, bishop of Zhaoxian (Xingtai). The large presence of faithful is due to the Catholics respect and love of their pastor, who spent 21 years in prison, but who never stopped working for his community (cf. 03/02/2010 Bishop Wang Chonglin, bishop of Zhaoxian (Xingtai) dies). The bishop died on 2 February at 88 from a brain haemorrhage.

The funeral took place primarily in the cathedral church of Biancun (Hebei) for the mass, then there was a moment of prayer in the birthplace of the bishop and then the burial.

Throughout all ceremonies hundreds of policemen controlled the situation. Mgr. Wang had been an underground bishop, but '88 was recognized by the government. This morning at 9, the administrator of the diocese, Fr Simon Gao Baojin presided over the mass. Fr. Guo Jinjun, of Shunde, gave the homily. "The pastor is now in the [eternal] pastures - said Fr Gao - but we hear his call. He is the servant and messenger of the Lord and he is not afraid. "

Mass was attended by more than 70 priests and more than 10 thousand faithful.

The second part of the funeral took place with the transport of the remains to the prelate's home village, Yuejiazhuang, where there was a moment of prayer, with the participation of tens of thousands of people.

Finally, the coffin arrived at the cemetery for priests in Zhujiashuang, about 35 km from Biancun, where the body was interred in the presence of tens of thousands of Catholics, along with all the priests and religious of the diocese.

Chinese Catholics appreciated and recognized by society and the media

Beijing (Agenzia Fides) – A Catholic has been chosen by major Chinese national media and by the votes cast on-line, to be among the list of “Top 10 People of 2009,” and a Catholic university student, who died saving a child, was presented by provincial and municipal authorities as a moral model of courage and dedication: they are two recent and eloquent testimony of how Chinese Catholics today are valued and recognized by society and by the Chinese media in general.

According to information received by Agenzia Fides, Wang Ping An (Ping An means "Peace"), a Catholic farmer of 71 years of modest means, has spent over 23 years taking care of the elderly, abandoned children, sick, lonely, disabled, and has welcomed hundreds into his home. He accompanied 63 elderly people in the final stretch of their earthly life, taking care of everything, even their funeral. In 2000, he built a house with 50 simple rooms, taking out a loan, to give a home to all those who do not have one.

During the pilgrimage to Rome in 2007, offered by a benefactor, he attended the General Audience with the Holy Father: to him this was the greatest reward, the dream of his life. Today, after the selections from among thousands of people, he has been elected as a candidate among the "Top 10 People of 2009" that have moved all of China, by the Commission composed of representatives of major Chinese media sources such as CCTV (China Central Television), the Xin Hua Agency, and People Daily, and the popular votes cast on-line. The award ceremony will be held for the Chinese New Year and will be broadcast live on CCTV in the early evening. But he, in his peasant simplicity has often stated: "Jesus taught us 'Whenever you did to this to the least of these my brethren, you did unto me.'"

The young Catholic university student John Huang Chuan Ding, age 21, of the parish of Nan Guan, in the Diocese of Bao Ji, in the Province of Shaan Xi, died on January 27 to save a 5-year-old boy who had fallen into an icy river. At his funeral, celebrated on February 3 and attended by over 3,000 faithful, including fellow university students, provincial and municipal authorities, all were deeply moved. "An example for all citizens of Bao Ji", "a heroic college student, courageous, of great moral height," "the best university student," are among the titles he was given by the authorities who have officially presented him as a model. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 08/02/2010)

for Chinese New Year, a family celebration

Shai Jia Zhuang (Agenzia Fides) – In anticipation of Chinese New Year, which is a very important traditional celebration marked by family unity and given the many challenges that today's society poses to the family and the Church, such as divorce, separation ... He Bei Catholic communities are promoting several initiatives in relation to the family and Christian marriage, news of which has also been sent to Agenzia Fides.

Aware of the needs of the rural area, where couples live long periods of time separated by migration for employment purposes, the Center for Social Services of the Diocese of Heng Shui led courses to promote the family and marriage in several villages, taking advantage of the return of migrant workers for the celebration of the New Year. The priests and 5 volunteers of the Center, along with a psychologist and priest, Fr. Hu Qiu Cheng, led a meeting of 2 hours in each village to explain the meaning of life, marriage, and family life. In each of the places that hosted the meeting, there were not only hundreds of local faithful in attendance, but there were also several from nearby villages, including several non-Catholics.

Another initiative is taking place at the parish of Wu An in the Diocese of Han Dan, which has established a prize for the "Model Couple" who promote Christian family life and marriage in society, especially among young people today. "The real, live witness is the best sermon," said the priest. The parish is always celebrating wedding anniversaries together, to remind everyone of "the indissolubility and the importance of family harmony, built on a solid foundation, i.e. the Christian one." (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 05/02/2010)

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

02/03/2010 10:41

CHINA - VATICAN

Bishop Wang Chonglin, bishop of Zhaoxian (Xingtai) dies

by Zhen Yuan

As a priest he spent 21 years in prison. He was ordained underground bishop, acknowledged by the Holy See, and then recognized by the government. The faithful remember his great commitment to evangelization and formation of priests and nuns.

Zhaoxian (AsiaNews) – Bishop Raymond Wang Chonglin, bishop of Zhaoxian (Hebei), died on Monday of a cerebral haemorrhage at the age of 88. During Maoism in 1950s-70s, he spent 21 years in prison. His funeral will be held on 8 February, at 9.30 am in the Cathedral of Biancun. The administrator of the diocese, Fr Simon Gao Baojin, confirmed to AsiaNews that the burial will take place the same day, at 1pm local time.

Fr. Gao points out that Bishop Wang has always been dedicated to training priests, seminarians and nuns, receiving the gratitude of his faithful. "We were brought up by his testimony since we were little," he said. "With a total trust in God – he adds - Bishop Wang urged all the faithful in evangelization, living a very simple and sober life".

Born in May 1921, Bishop Wang expressed the desire to become a priest since he was 14 years old. He was ordained priest in 1950.

In 1957, in the Party campaign against the Church, Bishop Wang was arrested and sent to prison for 21 years. Released in '79, he returned to evangelizing Hebei.

In 83 he was ordained underground bishop, and recognized by the Holy See as bishop of Zhaoxian with the mandate to administer to the area of Weixian. In '85 he reopened the diocesan seminary that had been closed in the '50s, and in '88 he formed a convent for female vocations.

In 88 the government has named him as bishop of Xingtai, covering Church matters in Zhaoxian, Shunde and Weixian.

In 2006 he retired, leaving the pastoral care of the diocese to Bishop Jiang Mingyuan, a bishop unofficially ordained by him in August 2000. Although the government has hindered the succession, Bishop Jiang officially headed the diocese in 2006. Bishop Wang retired. But in 2007 Bishop Jiang fell ill and asked Bishop Wang to resume care of the diocese. Bishop Jiang died in July 2008.

The (underground) Diocese of Zhaoxian overlaps with those of Shijiazhuang and Xingtai (according to administrative subdivisions of the government). This could have brought tensions and difficulties with the authorities. Anthony Lam, a researcher at the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong, who has met Bishop Wang a few times, said that the bishop "was very intelligent and capable of finding solutions to problems, without a direct confrontation with the government".

Lam also recalled the great efforts of Bishop Wang in the formation of priests and nuns. "He was very strong physically - he adds - and also very optimistic. He realised important pastoral and missionary work especially in the countryside. "

ZY08689.1587 February 2, 2010 11 EM-lines (387 words)

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

CHINA - Catholics rush to help after Sichuan quake

Published Date: February 1, 2010

SUINING, China (UCAN) – Catholics in Suining, Sichuan province, have gone to aid their neighbors in Tongnan county rocked by a 5.2-magnitude earthquake on Jan. 31.

Father Wang Jianzhong, parish priest of Suining Church, told UCA News three members of his parish's evangelization group went to Tongnan this morning (Feb. 1.) to visit those affected and undertake a preliminary study on what needs to be done for them.

International media reports the quake killed one person and injured 15 others. More than 100 houses collapsed in the quake and about 4,700 were damaged.

Of the 5,000 Catholics in Suining city in eastern Sichuan province, about 500 live in Tongnan.

Suining comes under Nanchong diocese and has a population of 3.8 million people.

Though the quake hit at dawn, Sunday Mass was held as usual with parishioners praying for the safety of those affected by the quake, said Father Wang.

The priest said he got up when the quake struck at 5.30am and felt the whole Church building swaying.

Catholics do not seem to be disturbed in their faith because of this quake, Father Wang said, although some people "still need to others to console them." He attributed this to the formation program that the local Church provided after an 8.0-magnitude quake in the province in 2008 killed more than 80,000 people. The program helped Catholics cope with the horror of the disaster and from having lost their loved ones.

The quake on Sunday widened existing cracks on the walls of Suining Church left by the 2008 quake.

The wooden rectory in the Church compound, where late Bishop Michael Huang Woze used to reside before he died in 2004, had been repaired since the 2008 quake and was not affected this time, Father Wang said.

Some laypeople have reported damage to their homes, but the Church is still waiting for a more detailed report, Father Wang added.

CH08682.1587 February 1, 2010 31 EM-lines (308 words)

“The Role of Religions in Chinese Society Today and the Impact of Sects on Social Stability”

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – The relationship between Church and State, domestic ecology, inner dialogue between cultures and tradition, development of research on the philosophy of life ... are the topics that were covered in the Conference entitled “The Role of Religions in Chinese Society Today and the Impact of Sects on Social Stability” held January 29 in Rome, organized by the Italy-China Association. Several academics and representatives of the political world, the mass media, and diplomacy attended this moment of reflection, analysis, and even cultural dialogue offered by two prominent Chinese professors: Prof. Lai Yong Hai, President of the Institute of Studies on Chinese Culture at the University in Nanjing, Director of the Center for Studies on Religion and Culture at the University of Nanjing, and his pupil, Prof. Chen Yong Ge, Vice-President of the Institute of Philosophical Studies of the Social Academy of the Province of Zhe Jiang.

During his intervention on "Religion and Society," in particular "Religion and Chinese Society", Prof. Lai Yong Hai confirmed that "China today is particularly sensitive to the importance of religion. Not only for the integral growth of each person, which is the cell of society, but also so as to consolidate and develop the achievements of Chinese economic reform from the past three decades." Moreover, "institutions are coordinated to place social sciences at their foundation ... to determine the value and social function of religion in the context of building a harmonious society." "Religion plays a major role in this harmony that includes three dimensions: man with nature, man with man/society, and man with himself". In the Chinese culture, "Buddhism is inculturated with Confucianism, and has had more development and duration, even today it is still in a flourishing stage..."

Outside the Conference, Professor Lai told Agenzia Fides that he had founded and now directs a Center for Studies in the Philosophy of Life, in order to promote cultural dialogue with the best academics in China and abroad. The first phase of his research on the Philosophy of Life is on traditional Chinese religion. The second phase will involve a comparison with other religions and traditions, Christianity included. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 30/01/2010)

spiritual aid

Beijing (Agenzia Fides) – In anticipation of Chinese New Year, which falls this year on February 14, the Chinese Catholic community is already organizing itself, as it does every year, to care for disadvantaged families and those who fall under the weaker segments of society, so as to reach out to them during in this time of celebration. According to information received by Agenzia Fides, lepers, the mentally disabled, elderly living alone ... are all the top priority for being visited by Catholics. The Sacraments - Reconciliation, Communion, Anointing of the Sick – will also be provided for those who have difficulty getting to a church.

Among the many initiatives we have received news of, the parish of Lin He, Diocese of Ba Meng, has reported that its faithful have visited the hospital, nursing homes for the elderly, orphanages, and families in difficulty, bringing them milk, rice, flour, cooking oil, fruits, and also financial aid, so that everybody can live the New Year's celebrations. They also sent more than 300 comforters (blankets) to the area hit by heavy snowfall in recent days. The faithful also visited the parents of their priests and religious, to thank those families who have children serving the community.

Farmers from the poorest area of mainland China, the Province of Gui Zhou, thanked the priests and faithful of the parish of Wei Yuan, Diocese of Gui Zhou, with these words: "You, members of the Church are the only ones there take care of us. Your faith is true and good." With 600 coats and other food items collected in the parish, they too will spend winter and the New Year with less discomfort. Fr. Ning Meng You, Vicar of the Diocese of Tai Yuan, along with 3 priests and 18 extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, led the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick for 197 families with seriously ill members or elderly over 80. This gesture of love from the Church, which has been repeated for 16 years, has gathered great appreciation from among the faithful. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 27/01/2010)

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

CHINA - Illicit bishops look back on turbulent decade

Published Date: January 26, 2010

NANJING, China (UCAN) – A decade after their controversial ordinations, three bishops have recalled the different paths their lives have taken since then.

The ordination of a total of five bishops without papal mandate in Beijing's Immaculate Conception Cathedral (South Church) on Jan. 6, 2000, sent shockwaves through the Church around the world.

Although China has been electing and ordaining its own Catholic bishops since 1958, the

ordination, the largest batch in a single ceremony since 1987, caused controversy, as on the same day Pope John Paul II also ordained 12 bishops at the Vatican.

The event destroyed expectations of China-Vatican normalization at that time, Anthony Lam Sui-ki, senior researcher of Hong Kong diocese's Holy Spirit Study Centre, told UCA News.

It also laid the basis for a period of difficult relations that lingers today.

The prelates spoke to UCA News about the different journeys they had taken.

*** 'Very sure it was God's call'

Bishop Francis Lu Xinping of Nanjing, the youngest at the age of 36 then, recalls the personal struggle he experienced before the ordination. He finally decided to obey his bishop, accepting the special situation of the local Church. He said he was always "very sure it was God's call."

The bishop was legitimized by the Vatican in 2007 but not before some painful times. Many seminarians refused to be ordained by him and some Catholics even refused to accept his leadership.

"I understood their feelings but fortunately most Catholics still respected me," he said.

Nanjing diocese currently has 40,000 Catholics although about 5,000 continue to attend Mass celebrated by "underground" priests.

Conflict between the two Church communities has now subsided, Bishop Lu said.

In recent years, he has suggested to episcopal candidates that they "gain papal mandate for their ordinations" to help their ministries run smoothly, he said.

Although Nanjing diocese could not hold a celebration for Bishop Lu's 10th ordination anniversary due to a retreat by clergy, Mindong diocese's government-approved Church community in eastern China held a thanksgiving Mass and banquet on Jan. 9 for Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu.

It was attended by hundreds of Catholics, central and local government officials and Anthony Liu Bainian, the Beijing-based vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

*** 'An interlacing of pain and joy'

Bishop Zhan, the only bishop who remains illicit, told UCA News the past decade has been "an interlacing of pain and joy." He has experienced "ups and downs, frustrations and pressures," but God has guided him.

Bishop Zhan, 48, is still waiting for papal approval.

Of Mindong's 70,000 Catholics, several thousands attend government-approved Church services under his jurisdiction. The rest follow underground Bishop Vincent Huang Shoucheng.

Some Mindong underground priests told UCA News that while they still "cannot be in communion" with Bishop Zhan with regard to the sacraments, they would accept his leadership if the Vatican recognized him.

Of the five men, Bishop Peter Fang Jianping of Tangshan, 47, was the first to receive papal approval in 2002 but he still bears scars.

His ordination raised such "turbulence" in the Church, Bishop Fang recalled, that he feels there is nothing worth celebrating, even after 10 years.

He said he has preferred to keep a low profile and work behind the scenes.

In June 2008, he succeeded retired Bishop John Liu Jinghe, who was legitimized recently.

The other two prelates ordained at the same time were elderly Bishops Andrew Jin Daoyuan of Changzhi (Lu'an) and John Su Changshan of Baoding.

Bishop Su died in December 2006. The Holy See had been unable to settle his application for legitimization as it could not seek advice from Bishop James Su Zhimin (alias Zhemin), the underground prelate who has been in detention since 1997, Church sources say.

*** Appointment of bishops remains an obstacle

Sources said the Holy See approved Bishop Jin as "a legitimate bishop without jurisdiction" in mid-2008, and required him to recognize Bishop Paul Li Yi as the head of Changzhi.

However, Bishop Li, a Vatican-approved bishop who is not recognized by the government, told UCA News he and Bishop Jin have not reconciled yet.

"I invited him to concelebrate the Chrism Mass last April but he did not come," he said. The two bishops in their 80s continue to work separately, each leading about 20 priests.

The issue of bishop appointments remains a major obstacle to China-Vatican ties, which continues to have its ups and downs. Currently, more than 90 percent of the 88 mainland bishops are Vatican-approved.

No illicit ordinations have been reported since Pope Benedict XVI's letter to Chinese

Catholics in 2007 stressed the pope's supreme authority to appoint bishops.

However, Church observers say it is premature to conclude there is consensus on bishop appointments.

CH08628.1586 January 26, 2010 87 EM-lines (870 words)

CHINA

The case of Baoding and the Pope's letter

The true story of Bishop Francis An Shuxin:
imprisoned for ten years by the Communists,
insulted by Catholic agencies, tried by his
brothers in the faith and treated with some
embarrassment even by the Vatican. A symbolic
story that reveals widespread resistance to the
pastoral suggestions addressed by Benedict XVI
to all Chinese Catholics in the Letter of June
2007

by Gianni Valente



Faithful coming out of Mass from the Cathedral of the

Immaculate Conception (Nantang) in Beijing
[© Associated Press/LaPresse]

Baoding is not difficult to reach, by road or rail. It is less than 150 kilometers south of Beijing. The polluting industries were dismantled some time

ago there, and they started making wind turbines and whatever was needed to derive energy from sun, wind and biomass. That is why reports in government newspapers extolled it as the capital of renewable energy, the Chinese model on the road to sustainable development. But for those who know even a little of the recent history of Catholics in China, Baoding is a place like no others. And for quite different reasons.

The name of the city in Hebei province, where currently less than one million people live, comes up often in the chronicles of Chinese Catholicism in recent decades as the epicenter of sensitive and controversial issues. It was in Baoding that in 1981 Bishop Joseph Fan Xueyan began to ordain bishops in clandestine fashion, outside the interference and control of the “patriotic” bodies imposed on the Church by the religious policies of the regime. An initiative approved after the fact by Pope John Paul II, and fraught with consequences. From there developed like lightning the network of “clandestine” bishops, those not recognized as such by the government, who set themselves at the head of that part of the Catholic Chinese – priests, religious, communities – which was unwilling to subject their ecclesial life to the control of the Party.

Thirty years later, Baoding again became the center of a controversy reminiscent in some ways of the way chosen at the time by Joseph Fan. Everything revolves around the case of a clandestine bishop who decided to come out into the open and to exercise his pastoral mandate by accepting procedures imposed by the civil authorities. His decision has triggered a storm of poisonous controversy that for months has been rending the Catholic communities of the region, and even involving the Vatican. The story is confused, and so far some partial and tendentious reconstructions put on the net by agencies and self-styled experts have encouraged misleading interpretations. But two documents, still ignored by the attacks of the western news agencies, throw full light on the concrete dynamics of the happenings and the reasons of the people involved. Showing up against the light the implications and the real contours of the larger issue that has opened around the case.



Francis An Shuxin, coadjutor bishop of Baoding [© Ucanews]

A badly told story

Hebei has long been one of the areas with a greater concentration of Catholic presence. And Baoding, since the time of the late Bishop Fan – whose dead body the police handed over to the family in April 1992 – is considered a stronghold of the so-called clandestine communities.

The sixty-year old Francis An Shuxin, at the center of the storm in recent months, is a spiritual son of Joseph Fan. He exercised his priesthood in the network of so-called “underground” communities and facilities, that is those not registered with government bodies, to become “clandestine” auxiliary bishop of Baoding in 1992. For that he spent ten years in prison and isolation under strict control, from 1996 to 2006. In August three years ago he was released, and started to exercise his pastoral ministry in the open.

The choice made by Francis An immediately aroused discontent and misunderstanding among the clandestine members of his diocese. Over time, the malaise of some priests and faithful, already opposed to his release from prison, has turned into open hostility to the bishop accused of treason, going as far as explicit rejection of his episcopal authority. Western agencies have spread widely on the net the charges supposed to prove that An has veered off the righteous path. Decisions such as that of co-celebrating Mass with John Su Changshan, “official” bishop of Baoding, recognized as such by the government but not by the Apostolic See. And above all his acceptance of positions in the diocesan Patriotic Association, the hybrid body created by the Communist Party as a means of controlling the Chinese Church. All this while the clandestine ordinary bishop of Baoding, James Su Zhimin, picked up in 1996 by the police, has still not been found. To complicate the picture, the most critical opponents of An have also involved the Apostolic See, spreading rumors about alleged pressure on the bishop from the Congregation of Propaganda Fide to get him to come out of hiding and cooperate with the authorities.

In the haphazard and tendentiously Manichean memory of agency reports and blogs, the story is in danger of being classified as a simple case of failure: a turncoat clergyman conniving with the persecuting enemy, in league with obscure Vatican officials who at least prove to be naive and confused. But is this really the case?



The Cathedral of Baoding [© Ucanews]

Document No. 1. The questioning of clandestines

The most detailed reconstruction of the dynamics of the case comes from a source hardly to be suspected of sympathy for Bishop An.

It is a long conversation held in late November between the bishop and a Chinese priest, who against An's will, then published it in mid-December on www.cccn.org, one of the websites linked to underground groups of the Catholic Church. The conversation – available in full in Italian on www.30giorni.it – sometimes takes an inquisitorial trend, with pressing questions that have the effect of bringing out more clearly the patient deposition of the bishop. An says that as early as 2000 he had noticed a certain change of pace in the political officials responsible for his forced isolation. At that time, “they too began to stress that one must obey the Pope, otherwise there is no Catholic Church. But one obeys the Pope in faith, discipline and doctrine”. The people talking to him continued to claim political and administrative control in the management of the ecclesial structure, adding however that “the administration we mean is a formal administration, it does not mean internal administration of the faith that you mean, because we cannot interfere in the affairs of your faith”.

In the interview, however, An makes clear that it was not the advances made by party officials that persuaded him to give up being a clandestine bishop. He gave much more weight to events and information that got rid of various clichés which had served him in observing and judging the affairs of the Church of China. “I learned,” the bishop says at one moment, “that the Pope had recognized many official bishops. First we thought that they had problems, but the Pope acknowledged them. If the Pope says there is no problem, what can we say? If we insist in saying that they are the ones with problems, then it means that it's us who have problems”. An says that as a matter of fact, his first move to feel out the terrain was that of encouraging some “clandestine” priests to register with the political bodies. When he himself decided to take the step, he used ploys to document the sincerity of his intentions if nothing else: at the moment of signing the forms to get the “bishop permit” – a certification required for clergy in Hebei province – he refused to sign the sections on the self-election of bishops, adding an eloquent explanatory note (“in the intention of not violating the Catholic faith”) to the signed portion, where there was reference to the principles of self-management and independence of the Chinese Church. Then the government officials asked him to co-celebrate with the official bishop of Baoding, to make manifest the union. The celebration, presented by his critics as chief evidence of his scandalous failing, took place according to An in full respect of the canonical norms which prohibit sacramental communion with illegitimate bishops: “I concelebrated with Su Changshan because Su had asked many times for his legitimization by the Holy See, while knowing that the Holy See could not legitimize him because in Baoding there was still the legitimate ordinary bishop, Su Zhimin, and myself. The Holy See replied to Su Changshan that it did not allow him to exercise episcopal ministry, but granted that he function as a priest. Of course, at the time I was thinking how not to violate the principle of sacramental communion. For that reason, when we concelebrated, neither of us wore episcopal vestments or insignia”.

Put under pressure by the interviewer, the bishop also responds to other objections. Regarding the fate of Monsignor Su Zhimin, An admits that he has no news of the ordinary bishop of the diocese, but well recalls that “at the beginning of 1996 or the end of 1995, Bishop Su Zhimin wanted to come out of hiding, and I myself prevented him”. An also makes clear that he had accepted some months earlier the position of vice president of the local Patriotic Association, ensuring his “verbal” willingness only, without signing any personal registration to the “patriotic” organization. When the interviewer asks him if he does not realize he has violated principles by accepting a post from a group that sets itself above the Church, An replies with disarming simplicity: “When a diocesan bishop takes charge of

the Patriotic Association, the important thing is whether the bishop is acting according to the faith or not. Even to us it seemed a little contradictory that some bishops had been accredited by the Pope while they had posts in the Patriotic Association. But in reality it is not at all contradictory. What the Pope acknowledged are the bishops. The Pope has never recognized the Patriotic Association. The bishops take the post simply to govern the diocese better". The accused bishop repeats he had done only what he has seen done in other dioceses, where for decades, other bishops have effectively defused the pressure of the patriotic bodies on the life of the Church with the simple move of taking control of these organisms themselves. An several times reaffirms that his only intention was to settle the "anomalous governance of the diocese", where the disorder is "not created by others but by ourselves", to help "the faithful go to church in normal fashion".

The bishop says he is aware of running "some risks". But is encouraged by the impression of being in line with the suggestions of the Apostolic See, "I look only to the guidance of the Holy See, I act following the guidelines of the Holy See. In 1996 the faithful [of the two spheres, the "clandestine" and that recognized by the political authorities, *ed.*] could not even pray together, and that caused very serious harm... I've seen that at one time the diocese of Baoding believed that self-elected and self-consecrated bishops were deserving of punishment, that they belonged to a schismatic church, and that the sacraments administered by them were problematic. Later I learned that over eighty percent of those bishops were recognized by the Pope...". In any event, An says he is ready to stand aside immediately, "if the Holy See tells me that what I did isn't right".

Indeed, as early as 2006, the Holy See sent a series of documents to Baoding that acknowledged legitimate authority to administer the diocese to the bishop who had just emerged from hiding. But those papal attestations have been repeatedly ignored by the groups of priests most critical of An's decisions. Sometimes even resorting to specious arguments, such as lack of seals or signatures that are alleged to have rendered invalid the letters from Rome. And when the letter came from the Vatican promoting him from auxiliary to coadjutor bishop, An showed it as further proof of his episcopal authority to the priests who were challenging that very authority. In his reply to his questioner he reports that on that occasion his opponents "were unable to put up any doubt, but simply did not accept it". For them An was not worthy to be bishop, after allegedly submitting to the demands of political officials and the patriotic apparatus. They set it down in black and white also in the letters of complaint they had been sending to the Vatican from the time the quarrel broke out.



Faithful in prayer before the crib in a church in the city of

The letter from Propaganda Fide

Qingdao, Shandong province [© Corbis]

When stirring up the controversy some agency reports referred to anonymous Vatican and Baoding sources to argue that Bishop An came out of hiding under pressure from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. On 3 November, the Vatican department that deals with the Chinese ecclesiastical region issued a note of denial, unusual as it was categorical, published by the *Fides* agency.

In reality, the Holy See has not exerted pressure, but more than once has sustained the legitimate authority and person of Bishop An, even in writing. The most telling example is a letter dated 29 June 2008 sent to the bishops, priests, religious and faithful of the diocese of Baoding, signed by Cardinal Ivan Dias, prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide. The document was also published on the site www.cccn.org, and now the full text is available in Italian on www.30giorni.it, in our own translation from the Chinese.

The long missive is scattered with references to the Letter addressed by Pope Benedict XVI to Chinese Catholics in June 2007 with the invitation to take it as a reference point on the path of reconciliation. The paragraphs referring to the particular situation of Baoding are unequivocal. Dias reminds the entire diocese of “the good fortune of having as legitimate bishops James Su Zhimin – though impeded, because still in detention – and his coadjutor Francis An Shuxin”. He writes that all, “without exceptions”, have a duty to acknowledge them as legitimate bishops of the diocese of Baoding, and also to support them materially and spiritually, “above all in the current circumstances, so very difficult and delicate for their mission as pastors. The traditional ‘nihil sine episcopo’ directive, repeated by the Pope in his letter, retains all its validity (no. 10, § 9)”. The prefect of Propaganda Fide assures everyone of the fact “that Pope Benedict XVI and the Holy See are well informed of everything that Bishop Francis An Shuxin has done since his release from prison”. He points out that everyone knows how he has “demonstrated his loyalty to Christ and the Church with more than ten years in prison”, always acting “with upright intent and goodwill for the welfare of the Church”. He flatly rejects all the allegations and resistance raised about his decisions: “Everyone must know that the esteemed bishop has the total support and confidence of the Holy See. Wherefore no one must permit themselves to doubt his sincerity, or challenge his authority, spreading thoughtless judgments that trouble the faithful. This, in addition to causing great pleasure among the enemies of the Church, is a grave lack of charity before God and the Church”.

Peremptory words that set out the story in terms as true as they are paradoxical: a legitimate bishop in full communion with the Bishop of Rome is rejected by some of his clergy, accused of being insufficiently faithful to the See of Rome.



Faithful during the Christmas Mass in the Xishiku Catholic church in Beijing [© AFP/Getty Images]

The “confused Pope” and the hidden Letter

In a recent interview with the Ucanews agency, Bishop An admitted: “After my release in 2006, I refused to join the Patriotic Association. I changed my mind after reading the Pope’s Letter”. In the above mentioned questioning, An adds eloquent details on the reception of the Letter sent by Benedict XVI to Chinese Catholics: “After the publication of the Pope’s letter of 2007”, says the bishop, “many priests [among those who oppose him, *ed.*] have prevented the faithful from studying the pastoral letter because they said the Pope was confused. In any case, they do not

let people study it. And that in itself is already a problem... When these priests learned that the Sisters of the diocesan congregation had studied it in secret, there were arguments”.

The Letter of Benedict XVI to Chinese Catholics, published 30 June 2007, is the most important document so far sent by the Apostolic See to the Church in China. But since its release there have been those who have pointed in more or less explicit ways to a lack of clarity making it open to conflicting interpretations, to the point of generating contrasting options on concrete and sensitive issues such as those dealing with the relationship between the Church and civil powers. Seventy-eight year old Cardinal Joseph Zen, as Archbishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, after the publication of a *Compendium* of questions and answers about the papal Letter – which some, including Zen himself, claimed contained items requiring disambiguation – felt the need last November to draft and publish a guide of 22 pages for the proper interpretation of the Papal Letter. The role *in situ* of interpreter and mediator of the papal Letter that Zen has cut out for himself in recent months has met with growing applications and agreement in the affairs of the Chinese Church. Recently, while underground priests have been trying to share prayer meetings and catechesis with priests of the official communities, others, including heads of congregations, have opposed the matter, stating they want to follow Zen’s line rather than that indicated by the Pope and Rome.

The initiative of the Salesian cardinal who offers himself as the guarantor of the precise hermeneutics of a papal text looks out of the ordinary and self-inspired. In fact, the papal Letter to the Chinese contains instructions and suggestions clearly and easily intelligible *sine glossa* to its recipients, also on the most burning pastoral issues. And it does so in light of all the factors involved, and following the Catholic criterion of *et et*.

Benedict XVI, in the text signed by him on Whitsunday 2007, advocates an “open and respectful dialogue” of the Holy See and the Chinese bishops with the government authorities to help overcome the lasting “limitations that affect the heart of the faith and, to a certain degree, suffocate pastoral activity”. He does not order the clandestine bishops and communities to come out of hiding *en bloc* and hastily, let alone to persevere in that option. He writes that “clandestinity does not come within the normal life of the Church”, and in this way he points out clearly and in fatherly fashion, with no *diktat*, the direction to take. With all the patience in the world, waiting for those slowly following a path that will be long and not without obligatory halts and detours. Showing cordial and active sympathy for those who have most suffered, and perhaps still are suffering the stupid or brutal politics of local political officials. Taking into account all the factors that may in the particular situation

hinder advance towards the goal or make it impossible. But with no uncertainty about what the way forward is. Without ever giving up the desire that all the bishops still in hiding “may be recognized as such by the government authorities also in law”.

As for the Patriotic Association and other institutions of control devised by the State, the Papal Letter repeats that their claim of setting themselves “above the bishops and of guiding the life of the ecclesial community does not correspond to Catholic doctrine”. What is described as “incompatible with Catholic doctrine” is not the existence per se of such bodies, but their stated aim of putting into practice “the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church”. There is also explicit reference to their “statutes that contain elements incompatible with Catholic doctrine”. But at no point is the systematic and immediate dismantling of the Patriotic Association demanded or suggested, leaving open the possibility that gradual reconversion through revision of its statutes may transform it into a point of contact between the Church and the political regime.

For the moment the Letter does provide clear criteria about how to adjust relations with civil authorities within the Catholic community. The Pope repeated that “it is licit to concelebrate with bishops and priests in communion with the Pope, even if they are recognized by the civil authorities and maintain relations with entities set up by the State and extraneous to the structure of the Church, provided the recognition and relation do not entail the denial of essential principles of faith and of ecclesiastical communion”. It is clear to the Pope that the preservation of the faith and sacramental communion do not, per se, go against dialogue with the various levels of political power, and that “we do not see any particular difficulties with acceptance of the recognition granted by the civil authorities, provided that it does not entail the denial of essential principles of the faith and ecclesiastical communion”. The Letter acknowledges, however, that in practice the procedures for recognition almost always involve adherence to gestures and formulas that can create problems of conscience for Catholics. “I understand”, the Pope writes, “how difficult it is in such varied conditions and circumstances to determine the correct choice to make”. The suggested interim solution to deal with such concrete contingencies manifests at a glance the dynamics of communion – also meant as a collegial sharing of responsibilities – that animates the entire papal Letter. Benedict XVI writes that “the Holy See, after reaffirming the principles, leaves the decision to the individual bishop who, having consulted his priests, is in a better position to know the local situation, to weigh the practical choices and to evaluate the possible consequences within the diocesan community”. The Pope also takes into account that the final decision may not win the consent of all the priests and faithful. In that case, he hopes that it may nonetheless be accepted, “even if with pain, and that the unity of the diocesan community with its own pastor may be maintained”.

The time of sowing

On balance, the decision made by Bishop An in Baoding is no more or less than an attempt to apply the Papal Letter of 2007. Questionable, like all human endeavors. But nothing to do with betrayal and turnaround. So the responses it has stirred suggest that perhaps the real problem is not the initiative taken by An. The problem, for more than one person, inside and outside mainland China, is perhaps the Pope's Letter.

The Letter of Pope Benedict XVI suggests the criteria that *in time* may foster reconciliation within the single Catholic Church of China, after years of suffering, conflicts, accusations and nastiness between brothers in the faith. Its publication, without even the need to say, has sidelined Manichaeic commonplaces and inveterate prejudices, like the one – by now grotesque – that says that in China there are two churches, one loyal to the Pope and the other to the regime. So it well may be that tacit mechanisms of removal and cover-up have been set in motion. Badly disguised attempts at nudging the Papal Letter into shadow. Or of encapsulating it in selective interpretations which mask from view the leading thread of the document and harp obsessively on individual phrases, carefully taken out of context, playing with the quotation marks in a somewhat cheating fashion.

Those who do so do not, usually, have the nerve to criticize the Pope, and so let it be understood that someone, maybe in Rome, informed and advised him badly. And so there is the danger in any case that the seeds of forgiveness and reconciliation that the Letter might sow along the path of the Church in China get dispersed, seeds that could germinate and help *in time* to put aside rending quarrels and heal wounds still open. It is no coincidence that Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, in his recent letter to Chinese priests on the occasion of the Year of the Priest – published in *Fides* on 17 November – re-proposed reconciliation within the Catholic community and respectful and constructive dialogue with the civil authorities as the “guidelines” of the Papal Letter of 2007. “Just two years after publication of the Papal Letter”, the Secretary of State added, “it seems that now is not the time to draw up a balance sheet. In the words of the great missionary of China, Father Matteo Ricci, I think one can say that it is still time for sowing rather than harvesting”. Something that perhaps Bishop An and the sisters of Baoding had already guessed, thanks to their *sensus fidei*, without the need of interpreters.

For your information:

The article "Il caso Baoding e la Lettera del Papa" by Gianni Valente (30 Giorni) has now been translated into Chinese.



The procession of the statue of the Virgin Mary at the Marian shrine of Sheshan (Shanghai) where on 1 May 2009, more than three thousand people came on pilgrimage [© Ucanews]

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It is still possible to download and read the "30 Giorni" articles in Italian, English and French:

Noi ricerchiamo la verità nei fatti

— Intervista con Wang Chen di Giovanni Cubeddu

<http://www.30giorni.it/it/articolo.asp?id=21952>

Il caso Baoding e la Lettera del Papa

— di Gianni Valente

<http://www.30giorni.it/it/articolo.asp?id=21953>

E il segretario comunista portò il calice per la messa

— Il colloquio tra un sacerdote dell'area clandestina e il vescovo Francesco An Shuxin

<http://www.30giorni.it/it/articolo.asp?id=21954>

Lettera alla diocesi di Baoding

— del cardinale Ivan Dias

<http://www.30giorni.it/it/articolo.asp?id=21955>

Per saperne di più

— di Gianni Valente

<http://www.30giorni.it/it/articolo.asp?id=21983>

Tra Roma e Pechino i nodi li scioglie il sensus fidei

— Intervista con Ren Yanli di Gianni Valente

<http://www.30giorni.it/it/articolo.asp?id=21957>

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The case of Baoding and the Pope's letter

30DAYS N. 12 - 2009 - by Gianni Valente

The true story of Bishop Francis An Shuxin: imprisoned for ten years by the Communists, insulted by Catholic agencies, tried by his brothers in the faith and treated with some

embarrassment even by the Vatican. A symbolic story that reveals widespread resistance to the pastoral suggestions addressed by Benedict XVI to all Chinese Catholics in the Letter of

June 2007

<http://users.online.be/~rikdg/doc3/china/baoding-en.pdf>

L'affaire Baoding et la Lettre du Pape

30JOURS N. 12 - 2009 - par Gianni Valente

La véritable histoire de l'évêque François An Shuxin: détenu pendant dix ans par les

communistes, insulté par des agences catholiques, accusé par ses frères dans la foi et traité avec un peu d'embarras par le Vatican lui-même. Une histoire emblématique qui révèle des résistances diffuses aux conseils pastoraux adressés par Benoît XVI à tous les catholiques

chinois dans la Lettre de juin 2007

<http://users.online.be/~rikdg/doc3/china/baoding-fr.pdf>

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

CHINA - Cardinal Zen slated for interpreting papal letter

Published Date: February 2, 2010

ROME (UCAN) — Chinese Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun has been accused of setting himself up as an “interpreter” and “guarantor” of the Pope’s influential 2007 letter to Catholics on the mainland.

Italian Catholic magazine 30 Giorni (30 Days) is critical of the cardinal’s role which it says “looks out of the ordinary and self-inspired.”

At the same time, it strongly defends Bishop Francis An Shuxin, coadjutor bishop of Baoding’s underground Catholic community who joined the officially recognized church community and Patriotic Association.

The magazine argues that Pope Benedict’s letter to Catholics on the mainland is clear on “burning pastoral issues” and says that critics of Bishop An’s controversial decision were symbolic of “widespread resistance” to aspects of the Pope’s letter.

The magazine says that despite the Vatican’s compendium answering questions about the letter, Cardinal Zen “felt the need last November to draft and publish a guide of 22 pages for the proper interpretation of the papal Letter.”

“The initiative of the Salesian cardinal, who offers himself as the guarantor of the precise hermeneutics of a papal text, looks out of the ordinary and self-inspired,” 30 Giorni says.

Ever since the Pope’s letter was published “there have been those who have pointed in more or less explicit ways to a lack of clarity making it open to conflicting interpretations,” the magazine says.

This has been “to the point of generating contrasting options on concrete and sensitive issues such as those dealing with the relationship between the Church and civil powers.”

“The role ... of interpreter and mediator of the papal Letter that Zen has cut out for himself in recent months has met with growing applications and agreement in the affairs of the Chinese Church,” the magazine says.

“Recently, while underground priests have been trying to share prayer meetings and catechesis with priests of the official communities, others, including heads of congregations,

have opposed the matter, stating they want to follow Zen's line rather than that indicated by the Pope and Rome," it claims.

Bishop An took the decision to join the open church community after ten years imprisonment for his faith from 1996-2006.

Some observers have expressed surprise at the approach of the article which defends a Chinese bishop while criticizing the best known Chinese cardinal.

The magazine is edited by seven-times former Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti.

UCA News - www.ucanews.com

CHINA - Professor defends Zen over letter guidelines

Published Date: February 9, 2010

HONG KONG (UCAN) — Professor of International Relations Sister Beatrice Leung Kit-fun says that the attack on Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun in Italian Catholic magazine "30 Giorni" (30 Days) was counter-productive.

In a commentary for UCA News, the Precious Blood Sister writes that Cardinal Zen's interpretation of the important letter from the Pope to Chinese Catholics in 2007 was essential in the absence of effective Church leadership review of the letter at the time.

Cardinal Zen's interpretation of the papal letter, with his guidelines, should be seen simply as taking the place of what would normally be the function of the Chinese bishops' conference, she says.

The "30 Giorni" article described Cardinal Zen's interpretation of the letter as "out of the ordinary and self-inspired."

Cardinal Zen defended himself against the accusations last week, saying they were unfair and groundless.

Public criticism of Cardinal Zen amounted to washing dirty linen in public and provided strength to the Communist Party's divide and rule policy toward the Church, Sister Leung said.

Sister Leung teaches at various universities in Hong Kong and Macau, and has written a number of books and academic papers on China-Vatican relations.

Her latest is "China's Religious Freedom Policy: An Art of Managing Religious Activity"
The China Quarterly. Vol.184 (Dec.2005):894-913.

The full text of her commentary can be found here:

<http://www.ucanews.com/2010/02/09/only-beijing-benefits-from-zen-attack>

CH08772.1558 February 9, 2010 25 EM-lines (215 words)

_30 Giorni: Extensive dossier on China

The December 2009 issue of "30 Giorni" has an extensive dossier on China, in particular on the case of Baoding.

You may find the original articles in Italian on the website www.30giorni.it. Or just follow the links below.

Further down there are also links to the English and French translations of two articles.
By courtesy of Gianni Valente, 30 Giorni, Rome.

* COPERTINA

CHI PREGA SI SALVA IN CINESE

Una cosa bella e gradita al Signore

— di Aloysius Jin Luxian

<http://www.30giorni.it/it/articolo.asp?id=21951>

* IN QUESTO NUMERO

CINA

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<http://www.30giorni.it/it/articolo.asp?id=21953>

E il segretario comunista portò il calice per la messa

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