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Vatican's explanation a goodwill gesture. Latest declaration from Council on illicit ordinations points to issues beyond China

ucanews.com reporter, Hong Kong
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Church observers believed that the latest declaration from the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts on illicit ordinations points to issues not only in China but clarifies what persons should not do to eliminate the chance for some clergy to fish in troubled waters.

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The declaration on the correct application of canon 1382 of the Code of Canon Law reaffirms the canonical penalty of excommunication for unapproved episcopal ordinations.

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The six-point document was published by the L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican's official Italian daily on June 11.

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However, neither the Italian nor English text has been released on the Holy See's official website and its press office's Vatican Information Service till today [June 14]. The Vatican Radio published a Chinese summary by its director Father Federico Lombardi on June 11.

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The official full text in Chinese is published on CathNews China, the Chinese language service of ucanews.com, today.

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The document explains the meaning of latae sententiae excommunication, how and when it is applied, according to a canon lawyer.

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Its aim is not to focus just on punishment but "to explain how serious violation of Church disciplines can be a disaster for the Church, the priests and the faithful in the case of episcopal ordination without papal approval," he said.

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It is "medicinal," which means the perpetrator can be "recovered from sickness, that is, to get reconciled with the Church." So it is meant to help those bishops who are illegitimately ordained around the world, including China, and to clarify doubts of the faithful, he added.

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Anthony Lam Sui-ki, senior researcher of Hong Kong diocese's Holy Spirit Study Centre, believes the new document is not aimed at the China Church but is a goodwill reminder to Catholic clergy worldwide not to violate the canon.

It will be an encouragement to the majority of Chinese faithful who are fervent to maintain communion with the Successor of Peter. "Even one illicit ordination is too many and we don't want it to happen again," Lam stressed.

The declaration pointed out the grave consequence of an episcopal ordination without papal mandate to the Church community even if the bishops involved are exempted from punishment eventually. "This is an important clarification that solves the problem of some candidates attempting to take a snap course by getting ordained first and asking for papal recognition later."

It also clarified the scope of *latae sententiae* excommunication to include the co-consecrators, as people traditionally think only the main consecrator and the one being ordained are subjected to the punishment.

The document cited what kind of bad example the excommunicated person should avoid. Now the faithful can distinguish between right and wrong so that the clergy can no longer "fish in troubled waters," Lam noted.

Hong Kong-based Church-in-China observer Kwun Ping-hung said the document can be obviously interpreted as a decision targeting continuous rumors that illicit bishop ordinations would take place in mainland China.

Given that the text does not deliberately mention the China Church and the way and process of its publication, it can also be seen as the needs of the Vatican to strengthen its implementation of the canon and maintain its hope to continue dialogue to resolve differences with China as when both parties cannot reach a consensus on the issue of bishop appointments.

"In this sense, the main purpose of this declaration is to give a strong warning to Chinese clergy and faithful to urge them to voluntarily boycott bishop ordinations without papal approval," Kwun said.

But since the authority of appointing bishops touches the uncompromising bottom line of both China and the Vatican, he believes it is difficult to anticipate if publishing the declaration or even implementing canon 1382 could help the Vatican to achieve its purpose. ♦ ♦ ♦



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China Infodoc Service—Tuesday, 14 June 2011 12:23AM
BISHOP-CHINA Jun-10-2011 (560 words)
Vatican hopes postponed event marks end to illicit ordinations in China
By Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The Vatican said it hoped the postponement of an illicit episcopal ordination in the diocese of Hankou would mark the end to all ordinations without papal approval in China.

The Vatican confirmed the planned illicit ordination of Father Joseph Shen Guoan was postponed indefinitely; he was to have been ordained bishop of Hankou, or Wuhan, June 9.

Passionist Father Ciro Benedettini, vice director of the Vatican press office, told Catholic News Service June 10 that the Vatican hopes "this kind of ordination without the permission of the pope doesn't ever happen again."

There was no new date set for the ordination or explanation for the postponement.

The postponement came after the Hong Kong-born secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples urged priests and bishops in China to show "some backbone" and resist government pressure to disobey the pope.

In an interview with the Rome-based AsiaNews June 3, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai said he had been aware of the planned illicit ordination in Hankou and that he knew the faithful there had been urging the government and the Chinese Patriotic Association not to go through with the ordination.

He said he would want to tell Father Shen: "I trust you to act the right way. The only thing to do is to refuse."

Archbishop Hon said even though the government still puts pressure on priests and bishops to follow government orders concerning illicit ordinations, he said the consequences of not obeying are not as harsh as in the past.

"Today, for instance, there is no risk of forced labor, prison or death," he said.

Clergy may still be punished, however, he said. For

example, he said, they may lose public funding for their diocese, face difficulties in performing pastoral tasks, be isolated from other clergy or the faithful, be forbidden to travel abroad or within China, or they may be forced into a "re-education" program.

"In any case, the punishment that might be meted out is no reason not to resist. Submission is a public act that causes scandal, sending the wrong message to the faithful," he said.

He added that those who have succumbed to government pressure and acted against papal mandate should "make public amends" to show the faithful their actions were wrong.

Standing up to the government and not agreeing to participate in an illicit ordination also sends a powerful message to the government, the archbishop said.

"If you show some weakness or a propensity toward compromise, the government will take advantage of you," the archbishop said. On the other hand, "the government could do nothing" when people stood firm and refused to be ordained by excommunicated bishops, he said.

He said Blessed Pope John Paul II and his words "Be not afraid" are an inspiration to Chinese Catholics -- clergy and laity.

Those bishops and priests who are fearful of government retribution or pressure for not following orders should get support from others or else "they should simply ask to be released from their pastoral duties and have the courage to suspend their ministry."

Archbishop Hon said the government's strategy in setting up a church that is independent of the Vatican and the pope is a way to maintain government control over religion and yet create the impression that having Catholic priests and bishops administering the sacraments means there is religious freedom in the country. ♦♦♦

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

06/20/2011 14:53

CHINA – HONG KONG

Hong Kong Catholics call for the release of religious detainees
by Eugenia Zhang

Fr Chen “disappeared” more than two months ago. Fr Zhang was tortured in prison. A Mass will be held in Hong Kong on 29 June. It will be presided by Card Zen, followed by a protest rally to demand greater freedom for Catholics and the release of priests and bishops held in prison. Meanwhile, the wife of dissident Hu Jia “disappears”.

Hong Kong (AsiaNews) – Nothing is known about Fr Joseph Chen Hailong of Xuanhua (Hebei), two months after he disappeared. On 29 June, Hong Kong Catholics will stage a protest to demand the release of jailed clergymen and respect for Catholic believers.

Ordained two years ago, Fr Chen was taken into custody on 9 April in Yangqing, Beijing County, where he exercised his ministry. His whereabouts remain unknown. His family does not have any information about his fate and fears he might have been tortured like Fr Peter Zhang Guangjun, who comes from the same diocese.

Fr Zhang, who was held between 10 January and 13 April 2011, was hit with fists, sticks, a bucket, and was forced to stay awake for five days, soaked in cold water in the middle of winter, until he collapsed.

“He always refused to accept the principle of an autonomous and self-governed Church, independent [from the Pope],” an anonymous source told AsiaNews. “He was eventually released on 13 April.”

“During those days, despite the physical pain, I prayed the rosary and said Mass every day, in silence,” Fr Zhang told those he met. “I imagined praying with my parishioners and that gave me spiritual strength.”

“It was however impossible to force me to celebrate Mass with priests from the patriotic Church or get me to register, so officials insulted me, the Church and God. I defended myself and was tortured again,” he was quoted as saying.

“After he was released, he showed injuries to the head and the legs, clear signs of torture,” a source said. “Now he is undergoing medical treatment for his head injuries. He still suffers from headaches and vomits.”

On 29 June, feast day of Saints Peter and Paul, Card Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, will preside over a Mass in Hong Kong and lead a protest rally to the China Liaison Office in the former British Crown Colony to demand Fr Chen’s release and that of all the other Catholic priests and bishops. It will also be an occasion to remember all the Catholics who suffer in China.

Mgr Su Zhimin, bishop of Baoding, Mgr Cosmas Shi Enxiang, bishop of Yixian, Fr Lu Genjun, vicar general of Baoding, and Fr Wang Lifang of Zhengding are among those in jail or who “disappeared”.

The protest on 29 June is organised by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Hong Kong.

“The date was chosen to remember that the people of China are suffering because of their faith, like Saints Peter and Paul who were persecuted and jailed for their faith,” Lina Chan, executive secretary of the commission, told AsiaNews. “They are enduring prison, torture and inhuman mistreatment to follow their faith.”

The ordination of bishops without the consent of the Holy See "is an act that shows disrespect for the Catholic Church, personal freedom and freedom of conscience," she added. "By staging a protest after the Mass, we shall voice our demand for religious freedom in China and for believers' right to practice their faith in a normal way."

Since mid-February, Beijing has been engaged its worst crackdown against human rights since at least 1998. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of pro-democracy activists have been threatened, arrested or disappeared. The authorities are afraid that Jasmine Revolution-like protests might spread to the mainland. Many of those arrested are Christian.

Meanwhile, Zeng Jinyan, wife of dissident Hu Jia, disappeared today. Mr Hu is scheduled for release on 26 June after purging a three and half year sentence for "subversion".

Ms Zeng took a plane from Shenzhen yesterday, but did not land in Beijing. It is thought that she was "taken away by the authorities", a local newspaper reported.

In recent days, she had told the media that she was concerned that after her husband's release, they would continue to face restrictions and checks. ♦♦♦

China Infodoc Service
26 June 2011 12:04am
China's Catholic church faces pressing task to select, ordain bishops: spokesman
English.news.cn 2011-06-23 19:55:01

BEIJING, June 23 (Xinhua) -- The spokesman for China's Catholic church said Thursday that the church faces an urgent task to select and ordain bishops in an "active and prudent" way, as more than 40 of the country's 97 dioceses are without a bishop.

Selection and ordination of bishops must be based on national conditions and pastoral and evangelizing work, said Priest Yang Yu, spokesman for the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) and the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church of China (BCCCC).

Yang made the remarks following a recent meeting between leaders of the CPCA and the BCCCC, which concluded that absence of bishops has "seriously affected normal operations and church affairs at bishopless diocese."

Leaders of China's Catholic church agreed at the meeting that the church would strive to select and ordain bishops at these diocese without delay.

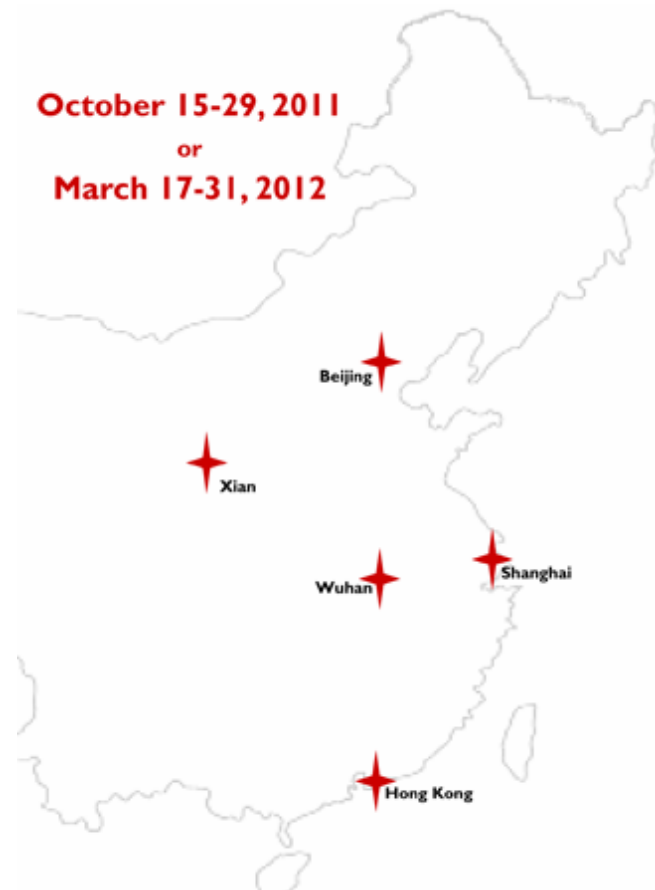
Priest Yang was named the first spokesperson for the CPCA and the BCCCC at the meeting. ♦♦♦



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China Infodoc Service
1 July 2011 11:14pm
Jesuits in Asia Pacific
Chinese Catholic layman to be beatified
Submitted on June 24, 2011 - 4:06pm

The Vatican has put a Chinese Catholic scholar who lived nearly five centuries ago on track for beatification. In an Associated Press story dated April 20, Vatican spokesman Fr Federico Lombardi SJ, is quoted saying the go-ahead for the beatification cause for Paul Xu Guangqi, who lived from 1562 to 1633, was a "beautiful light of hope for China today and tomorrow."

Fr Jerry Martinson SJ talks about the significance of the start of the beatification process for Xu.

This is hopeful news indeed for Chinese Catholics. In his pastoral letter to the Shanghai Diocese on the 375th anniversary of Xu's death, Jesuit Bishop Jin Luxian stated that Xu "can be declared a saint without a shadow of a doubt". It was Bishop Jin who actively initiated the process for Xu's canonisation. Xu was a native of Shanghai for whom the city's Xujiahui District is named.

Many Chinese Catholics believe that Xu should be canonized together with his close friend and colleague, Italian missionary and Jesuit Matteo Ricci. It was Ricci's map of the world that caught Xu's attention and drew him to seek out the Jesuits in Shaozhou in 1596, and in 1600, to visit Ricci in Nanjing. Xu received instructions in the Catholic faith by the Jesuits and was baptised in 1603.

Shortly after his baptism, Xu passed the Metropolitan Examination, moved to Beijing where he re-established contact with Ricci, and steadily rose to the highest office in the land, Grand Secretary to the Emperor, the equivalent of today's Prime Minister. He worked closely with Ricci and translated many of Ricci's writings into Chinese. Together they translated the first six books of Euclid's Elements, introducing geometry and western logic to Chinese.

Xu collaborated with a number of Jesuit scientists, including the mathematician-astronomer, Adam Schall von Bell, and convinced the Emperor to assign them major projects such as the correction of the Chinese calendar. This led to the appointment

of Schall, and a long line of Jesuits after him, to the directorship of the Astronomical Bureau for a period lasting nearly 150 years.

Xu's close friendship with the Jesuits, and frequently heroic defence of the Society at the Imperial Court, resulted in a relationship of trust between the Jesuits and the Emperor. This relationship was maintained with successive emperors well into the Qing Dynasty and provided an umbrella of protection that allowed the fledgling Chinese Catholic Church to take root and grow.

Xu's work and influence have been the focus of several meetings over the years. Most recently, a symposium on Xu's influence on East-West intercultural dialogue was held in June by the Archdiocese of Naples, the University of Naples, the Saint Egidio Community, the Xu-Ricci Dialogue Institute of Shanghai's Fudan University, and the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. An international group of scholars, including several from China, presented papers that explored Xu's deep religious faith, his outstanding accomplishments in agriculture and the development of life-saving crops, water conservation, military reform, and various areas of scientific research.

Throughout his long and distinguished career, Paul Xu remained a faithful, zealous and model Catholic layman and supporter of the Jesuits. Fr. George Dunne SJ, author of *Generation of Giants*, states that Xu is "rightly regarded as the greatest glory of Chinese Catholicism."

Xu's beatification and canonization - together with Matteo Ricci - would enshrine these two saintly men as models for Chinese Catholics and missionaries as well. The universal Church would profit greatly by emulating their example of collaboration between clergy and laity and sincere intercultural dialogue. Without these qualities, neither Xu nor Ricci, alone, could have made such outstanding and long-lasting contributions to China and to the Catholic Church. ♦♦♦

Vatican Insider

<http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/world-news/detail/articolo/4274/>

07/ 4/2011

Illegitimate Chinese bishop has no authority to govern diocese, Vatican says
The Holy See has refused to recognize Rev Paul Lei Shiyin as bishop of Leshan diocese in Sichuan province. He was ordained without the papal mandate on June 29

GERARD O'CONNELL

Rome

The Holy See has refused to recognize Rev Paul Lei Shiyin as bishop of Leshan diocese in Sichuan province, southwestern China, and has declared publicly that he has no authority to govern the Catholic community in that diocese, and is subject to the sanctions envisaged by Church law for his defiant act, which include excommunication.

The Rev Lei Shiyin was ordained without the papal mandate on June 29 at Our Lady of the Rosary church, Emeishan city, in a ceremony attended by 1000 guests, including government officials.

The Holy See's executive decision, issued by the Vatican Press Office, July 4, means that the Chinese priest has absolutely no spiritual authority over the priests or people of that diocese, and cannot make any demands on them because he is not their legitimate pastor. His only recognition now comes from the government of China which has temporal but not spiritual power over the more than 15 million Catholics in mainland China.

In a sharp, four-point statement, directed to the Catholic Church in mainland China and only addressing Church issues, the Holy See said the Rev Lei Shiyin was ordained bishop "without the Papal mandate, and hence illegitimately". For this reason, he "has no authority to govern the diocesan Catholic community" and "the Holy See does not recognise him as Bishop of the diocese of Leshan".

It confirmed that "the effects of the sanction which he has incurred through violation of the norm of canon 1382 of the Code of Canon Law, remain in place". In other words, he is subject to excommunication. The implications of this canon were fully explained in a clarification issued by the Vatican on June 6.

The statement today revealed that the Rev. Lei Shiyin "had been informed, for some time (before the ordination) that he was unacceptable to the Holy See as an episcopal candidate for proven and very grave reasons". It does not identify what those reasons were, but well-informed sources say they include the fact that as a priest he has had a relation with a woman and has had a child.

Seven bishops recognised by both the Holy See and the Chinese government participated in the ordination ceremony on June 29: Fang Xingyao of Linyi, Li Shan of Beijing, Li Jing of Ningxia, He Zeqing of Wanzhou, Xiao Zejiang of Guizhou, Zhao Fengchang of Liaocheng and Fang Jingping of Tangshan.

Referring to, but not naming them, the Vatican statement said "the consecrating Bishops have exposed themselves to the grave canonical sanctions laid down by the law of the Church (in particular, canon 1382 of the Code of Canon Law; cf. Declaration of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts of 6 June 2011)". Sources say the Vatican will deal with each one individually.

China has frequently accused the Vatican of interfering in its internal affairs, but the Holy See's statement seeks to avoid that happening again by pointing out clearly that the ordination of a bishop is an internal Church matter linked to the spiritual power of the Pope.

"An episcopal ordination without Papal mandate is directly opposed to the spiritual role of the Supreme Pontiff and damages the unity of the Church", it said.

It denounced the Leshan ordination as “a unilateral act which sows division and unfortunately produces rifts and tensions in the Catholic community in China”, adding that, “the survival and development of the Church can only take place in union with him to whom the Church herself is entrusted in the first place, and not without his consent as, however, occurred in Leshan.”

Aware that as many as 40 dioceses are without a bishop, and that many other episcopal ordinations are being planned, some of which could be illegitimate too, the Holy See stated clearly - in words directed as much to the Beijing government as to the mainland Catholic community - that “if it is desired that the Church in China be Catholic, the Church’s doctrine and discipline must be respected.”

Pope Benedict XVI was “deeply saddened” by the Leshan ordination, the statement revealed. In actual fact, though it did not say so, this act of defiance took place on June 29, the day when bishops around the world express their communion with the pope and which this year also happened to coincide with the 60th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

Ever since his election as pope, Benedict XVI has given an enormous amount of attention to the dramatic situation of the Church in China, and has often expressed his wish for the normalization of relations with the People’s Republic of China. Several times too, he has called on Catholics throughout the world to pray for the Church in China and has personally sought to encourage the Catholics there.

The Vatican statement concluded by saying that on this occasion too, “the Holy Father wishes to send to the beloved faithful in China a word of encouragement and hope, inviting them to prayer and unity”. ♦♦

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

07/12/2011 16:23

HONG KONG – CHINA

Hong Kong Catholics protest illicit Episcopal ordinations
by Annie Lam

A demonstration was staged this morning outside the China Liaison Office in Hong Kong. Local Catholics want the mainland to respect the personal and religious freedom of bishops and the release of prelates seized by the authorities.

Hong Kong (AsiaNews) – A group of Catholics in Hong Kong has staged a protest outside the China Liaison Office, the Chinese central government’s office in Hong Kong, calling for a cancelation of illicit ordinations, including the Shantou case on July 14. They also demand a halt to forcing Chinese bishops to attend such events.

Braving heavy rains today, the protest, organized by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, urged Chinese authorities to stop the repeated illicit ordinations of bishops, as such acts are “greatly disrespectful” to the Church and have caused internal divisions and suffering to the Church.

The Chinese authorities have ignored the Holy See’s declaration of July 4 on the Leshan illicit ordi-

nation and planned another one in Shantou diocese for Father Huang Bingzhang on July 14.

Hong Kong Catholics said that Chinese authorities even pressured legitimate bishops, forcing them to join the event, thus seriously violating their freedom of religious belief.

Their protest statement cited Bishop Pei Junmin of Liaoning (Shenyang) diocese as one of the pressured prelates, whose priests have shown their opposition, and have attempted to protect him from being taken to the Shantou ordination.

Legitimate bishops in Guangdong have also been pressured to attend the ordination. Bishops Gan Junqiu of Guangzhou, Liao Hongqing of Meizhou, Su Yongda of Zhanjiang and Liang Jiansen of Jiangmen were taken away by officials, but their whereabouts are unknown.

Catholics have strongly protested against the brutal

Continued next page ...

interference by government authorities into the Chinese bishops' personal and religious freedom.

Catholic media have reported the case of Bishop Zhuang Jianjian of Shantou, who is in communion with the Pope but not recognized by the Chinese government. The 81-year-old Zhuang has been under surveillance since April 2011.

Citing China's Constitution, which stipulates that Chinese citizens have freedom of religious belief, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which upholds the right to freedom of religious belief, Hong Kong Catholics urge Chinese authorities to respect their citizens' freedom of religion and stop forcing the clergy to do what is

against the principles of their faith and conscience.

Lastly, Catholics have called for the release of all members of the clergy who have been unfairly arrested. They included Bishop Su Zhimin and Fathers Lu Genjun, Ma Wuyong, and Liu Honggeng of Baoding diocese in Hebei, Bishop Shi Enxiang of Yixian diocese in Hebei, as well as Fathers Chen Hailong of Xuanhua diocese and Li Huisheng of Xiwanzi diocese in Hebei.

They hope the Chinese government would engage in dialogue with the Vatican in good faith, equality, pragmatic and openness, in order to allow local Churches perform their normal activities. ♦♦♦

Vatican Insider—Friday, 15 July 2011 4:00 AM

www.vaticaninsider.com

CATHOLICS LOYAL TO POPE RESIST CHINA'S EFFORT TO ORDAIN BISHOPS
WITHOUT HIS APPROVAL
ANALYSIS BY GERARD O'CONNELL, ROME.

China's ongoing effort to control the Catholic Church in the mainland China is encountering a growing wave of courageous resistance from Catholics loyal to the pope, with Beijing suffering some setbacks over the past six weeks.

As it press-ganged several bishops over the past week-end to participate in the July 14 ordination of Father Huang Bingzhang as bishop of Shantou, without the pope's approval, news came from the Handan diocese (Hebei Province) that its elderly bishop -who is recognized by Rome but not Beijing - had outmanouvered the governmental authorities there by secretly ordaining Father Joseph Sun Jigen, as coadjutor bishop on June 21, in what is widely perceived as a setback for the Chinese authorities.

Father Sun Jigen was elected as candidate to be bishop of Handan in 2010, with the approval of both Rome and Beijing. The local Church prepared to ordain him June 29, at Caozhuang Cathedral in Hebei Province, but government officials rejected the date in mid-June, saying it was for the government to decide when a person should be ordained. They insisted, moreover, that an illegitimate bishop from the same province, Joseph Guo Gincal, should participate in the ordination. Guo Gincal was ordained, November 2010, without papal approval.

At that point, the Handan diocese's 89 year-old bishop, Stephen Yang Xiangtai, supported by priests and local lay Catholics, made clear to the authorities that they did not want the illegitimate bishop to participate in the ordination. As the diocese continued to negotiate with the authorities, the elderly bishop, aware that he risked being forced into a compromised ordination, decided to take preventative action: he secretly ordained Father Sun Jigen as his coadjutor-bishop, that means with the right of succession, on June 21. Bishop Sun Jigen is recognised by the Holy See.

Without revealing what happened, Bishop-elect Sun Jigen went on the regular pre-ordination retreat, since the ceremony had not yet been officially cancelled. But when he came out of retreat on June 26, he was immediately detained by public security officials, together with the vicar-general of the diocese, Father John Huai Jianting. The officials later detained another Curial consultor, Father Peter Liu Xiuhua. When the elderly bishop heard the news he suffered a heart-attack and had to be hospitalized.

Continued next page ...

Sources said the officials took the priests away forcibly, in a move to pressure the diocese to invite the illegitimate Bishop Guo Jincai to participate in the ordination ceremony. At the same time the authorities announced that the Handan ordination ceremony set for June 29 had been “postponed”.

During their detention, however, the priests informed the authorities that the ordination had already taken place in secret on June 21, and that Bishop Sun Jigen was now coadjutor bishop, UCA News, the main Catholic news agency in Asia, reported on July 11 when it broke the story.

The news agency said Government officials accompanied the new bishop to visit the elderly Bishop Yang Xiangtai in hospital on July 6, and released him three days later, July 9, much to the joy of the local Catholic community.

This was but the latest setback for Beijing’s effort to control the Catholic Church in the mainland.

At the beginning of this year, the government sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC), drew attention to the fact that 40 out of the 97 dioceses recognized by the state were without bishops, and said they intended to elect and ordain bishops for these dioceses as soon as possible.

By 11 May they had organized the ‘democratic election’ of some 13 candidates to be bishops, at least 6 of whom did not have the pope’s approval. The stage seemed set for high-tension between the Holy See and China, and for ever greater divisions and suffering within the estimated 15 million-strong Catholic community in the mainland.

After one legitimate ordination at Yanzhou (Shandong) on 20 May, the Chinese authorities began serious preparations for the June 12 ordination of Fr Shen Guo’an at Hankou (Wuhan – symbolic site of the first ever illicit ordinations in 1958). Days before the ceremony, however, the authorities “postponed” it without explanation and informed the candidate he would not be ordained then. The local Catholic community rejoiced, the Holy See remained silent.

Yet another setback for the Chinese authorities came on June 18, when Father Simon Li Zhigang, 48, died of liver cancer. He had been elected as candidate to be bishop of Chengdu diocese, again without papal approval, on May 10.

China had pushed through the first illicit ordination at Chengde last November, but since then it had only managed to hold one more, this time at Leshan on June 29, and that proved a short lived victory, because five days later the Vatican declared the new bishop, Lei Shiyin, excommunicated, and said he has no spiritual authority to govern the Catholic community there.

With four serious setbacks over the past six-weeks, the state-sanctioned Church authorities in China are more determined than ever to push-through the ordination of Father Joseph Huang Bingzhang, as bishop of Ghendgu, on July 14, according to informed sources. They want at least seven bishops to take part in the ceremony, but they are meeting some strong resistance from bishops, priests and lay faithful.

Thus, for example, some 80 priests of the diocese of Shenyang, north-eastern China, are giving round the clock protection to their Bishop Pei Junmin, to prevent him from being forcibly taken away. He has received the order to preside at the ordination. But his priests told him he should not go, and have signed a written protest to the authorities. He assured them he would not attend, according to various sources, including UCA News and Asianews

Four bishops, recognized by both the Vatican and Beijing, have been taken away by government officials in Guandong province over the past weekend in preparation for the July 14 ordination ceremony; they were ‘kidnapped’, according to an Asianews report on July 11.

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Nobody knows where they are being held, it said. Bishop Liang Jiansen of Jiangmen diocese, “was sobbing last night (July 10) as he was carried away”, while two other bishops – Liao Hongqing of Meizhou diocese, and Yongda of Zhanjiang diocese were taken away July 9, the agency reported. It said Bishop Gan Junqiu of Guangzhou has been missing for days, and “his faithful are praying for him.”

This reported pressure and coercion on these five bishops appears to be a repetition of what happened in November 2010, when the Chinese authorities forced through the first illicit ordination since late 2006, at Chengde.

If the Shantou ordination goes ahead as planned on July 14, then Father Huang Bingzhang is likely be declared excommunicated by the Vatican as was Fr Lei Shiyin on July 4. Sources confirm that the Holy See has already informed him that he does not have Pope Benedict’s approval and so should not present himself for ordination.

But the state-sanctioned Church authorities seem to give little weight to what the Holy See says about the doctrine and discipline of the Catholic Church, as was evident from its first reaction to the Vatican’s July 4 statement.

On July 8, the government-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and Bishops’ Conference of Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) – both state entities not recognized by the Holy See - expressed “regret” at the Vatican statement, that declared the newly ordained bishop of Chengdu was excommunicated.

“We deeply regret the Vatican statement, which does not promote the unity of the Church in China but makes more disputes in the Church that will affect the spread of the Gospel and Church development,” Father Joseph Yang Yu, spokesperson for the CCPA and the BCCCC said in an email on July 8.

Noting that China and the Holy See have not yet normalized relations, he said it is “inevitable” that the Church in China should elect and ordain bishops, following the Church traditions, for the sake of pressing evangelization and pastoral needs.

For its part, Fr Yu said, the universal Church should “understand and respect” the Chinese Church’s courage in bearing the responsibility endowed by God for its survival and development, “Father Yu’s remarks, which were also posted on a popular Chinese Catholic website, have received criticism from many mainland Catholics”, UCA News reported July 11.

“I don’t really understand on behalf of what institution Father Yu is speaking to and what Church he belongs to,” the agency quoted one mainland Catholic priest - which it only identified as Father Anthony - as saying.

A China observer told Vatican Insider that it is “significant” that the spokesperson for the CCPA and the BCCCC uses arguments from scripture, tradition and the early Church to justify these illicit ordinations. It would seem to suggest that the state-sanctioned Church authorities are developing another theology and understanding of Church which is different from the one that is shared by the universal Catholic Church, he said.

As the resistance of bishops, priests and faithful grows to the Chinese authorities effort to control the mainland Church through such illicit ordinations, some have read the above mentioned ‘setbacks’ as victories, but Vatican sources on the other hand said they look on these illicit ordinations with ‘great sadness’, as does the Holy Father.

They read this growing resistance as an expression of “the sincere desire” of Catholics in the mainland to remain “faithful to the true teaching of the Catholic Church and to its discipline”, and said they hope and pray that the authorities in Beijing will see the wisdom of returning to a “sincere and honest dialogue” with the Holy See to avoid any further tensions, and to find a mutually agreeable solution to the existing problems. ♦♦♦

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VATICAN - CHINA

Few share the Pope's "pain and concern," for the Church in China

by Bernardo Cervellera

The statement by the director of the Vatican Press Office on the illicit ordination of Shantou. "An act contrary to the unity of the universal Church." But the Church prays little for China; presidents and secretaries of state are silent on the violations of human rights, the economy trumps everything. But this short-sightedness is preparing the ground for a huge and violent social conflict in China.

Vatican City (AsiaNews) – Only hours after the illegitimate ordination of Fr Joseph Huang Bingzhang as bishop (excommunicated) of Shantou (see photo), which saw the – forced – participation of eight bishops in communion with the Pope, the director of the Vatican Press Office, Fr. Federico Lombardi, told reporters that the Vatican is closely following this event, "with sorrow and concern."

"The position and feelings of the Holy See and the Pope - said Father Lombardi - have already been recently expressed in previous circumstances," and arise from the fact that it is "an act which is contrary to the unity of the universal Church".

The pope's "pain and concern," were evident in the words he expressed at the end of the audience on May 18 last, when he called on Christians worldwide to pray for "our brother bishops" who "suffer and are under pressure in the exercise of their Episcopal ministry. " "I ask Mary - the pontiff had added - to enlighten those who are in doubt, to call back the straying, to console the afflicted, to strengthen those who are ensnared by the allure of opportunism".

Since last November, China has decided to proceed with the election and ordination of bishops without waiting for papal mandate: Fr. Guo Jincai Chengde (November 2010), Fr. Paul Lei Shiyin for Leshan (June 29, 2011), Today, Fr. Joseph Huang Bingzhang for Shantou; several others for the future.

The ordinations of bishops without a mandate from the Holy See mean automatic excommunication for the candidate and the ordaining bishop. Many of these - like today - were forced to participate in the

function, so it is possible that they are not excommunicated. But at least a dozen of them are in a situation of causing scandal which divides the Chinese community.

The Pope's "pain and concern," is due to the fact that through these moves to dominate the Church in China, the patient work of mending bonds between the underground and official Church that John Paul II and Benedict XVI both attempted, is unravelling. A divided church is slow to evangelization and moreover, it fails to guarantee its right and space for religious freedom from the Chinese Communist Party which, in theory, the same Chinese constitution allows.

It must be said that faced with the absolutist pretensions of the Chinese government many of the faithful and bishops have become more daring: websites publish Vatican documents, even those critical of Beijing, an increasing number of bishops are saying no to the illicit ordinations because of their faith and relationship with the pontiff.

The "pain and concern" is also for the lives of these bishops. Because of the Shantou ordination, Mgr. Paul Pei Junmin of Liaoning has not been able to leave his diocese, helped by all the priests who were with him to praying continuously for days, to prevent their bishop being kidnapped. Another pastor, Mgr. Cai Bingrui Xiamen managed to hide. But he is now wanted by the government authorities. Last December, another bishop, Mgr. Li Lianghui of Cangzhou (Hebei), went into hiding in order not to have to participate in another gesture against the Pope (the Assembly of Representatives of Chinese Catholics). The police hunted for him for days like a "criminal" and after finding him, forced him to three months of isolation and brainwashing to convince him of the Party's "good intentions" towards the Church. It is possible that Mgr. Pei and Mgr. Cai have been subjected to isolation and political sessions, to tear them from their ministry and destroy them from a psychological point of view.

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With all of this, we must say that those sharing the Pope's "pain and concern," are all too few.

And first of all, they are too few in the Church. The World Day of Prayer for the Church in China, commissioned and implored by Pope Benedict XVI with the appeal of last May 18, found few dioceses ready to pray for the Church in China, its persecuted and "opportunistic" bishops.

Not to mention civil society. By now, the Yangtze River's white dolphin, which risks extinction due to pollution in China, provokes a greater outcry than over the extinction of freedom in a country that is destined to rule the world, but which uses heavy handed methods without batting an eyelid.

A rosé of presidents further encourages this attitude (including the Italian president) as well as Secretaries of State, who visiting China never fail to eulogise the "positive path" taken by Beijing on human rights, while – beyond bishops and priests - thousands of activists, petitioners, artists and writers are imprisoned and forcibly silenced.

As the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had to admit on her first trip to China "with Beijing we can talk about everything, including human rights, but with-

out jeopardizing our economic relationship."

It is not just a case of simple greed, of interest in the Chinese market, it is a matter of short-sightedness in not seeing that attacks on religious freedom, sooner or later, become attacks on all freedoms. The Chinese workers, enslaved and under paid, the farmers cheated of their land, the children and disabled people forced to work in brick factories, in preference to adults because "more docile", know this all too well. But even economic freedom is beginning to choke: by now there is not even one entrepreneur left who, having invested in China, was sooner or later robbed of his patents, or forced to pay bribes of up to 25 per cent of his turnover to be able to set foot on the Chinese El Dorado.

There is also short-sightedness in the Chinese leadership who instead of responding to the lack of political reform and respect for human rights with the change, prefers oppression and a police state and thus prepares the ground for an increasingly explosive social conflict. The 180 thousand riots that break out in the country every year are just a drop in the ocean to what might happen if China and the world continue to pat each others backs to exploit the Chinese people and together suffocate their human and religious rights. ♦♦♦

Vatican Insider

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Is China heading toward a schism?

Tensions, misunderstandings and distrust, with intermittent or skipped channels of communication are the ideal conditions for sparking division. An analysis of the Country's historical and cultural predicament

Gianni Valente, Rome

<http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/world-news/detail/articolo/cina-china-cattolici-cinesi-catholic-chinese-catolicos-chinos-4971/>

Not even Cardinal Joseph Zen's amicable appeal to President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, asking them to stop their "rogue officials" that help "the scum of the Church", managed to avert the pronouncement of yet another illegitimate ordination, that of the new Catholic bishop on Shanthou, in the Guangdong province.

This morning at 9 am, as planned, the 44 year old Joseph Huang Binzhuang was consecrated bishop with the approval of the government, but without the consent of the Pope and against indications from the Holy See. For him too there is a Vatican note ready that proclaims his automatic excommunication.

The eight bishops who took part in the consecration are all recognized by the Pope and were, until now, in full communion with the Holy See of Rome. In recent days, some of them were taken from their respective locations, upon recommendation or the departments that handle the regime's religious policy, to encourage them to participate in the rite, contrary to the canon laws of the Catholic Church.

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Meanwhile, after Shantou, officials of religious politics are moving ahead as planned, and are already preparing the next move. In a few days it will probably be the turn of the Diocese of Harbin. There, in the capital of Heilongjiang, they have already started preparations to celebrate the next Episcopal ordination without the Holy See's consent.

The candidate who will become yet another illegitimate bishop of the Catholic Church in China, is the 47 year old Joseph Yue Fu Sheng. A priest who a few years ago was involved in a fight and lost an ear. He was appointed by the representatives of the diocese, through the usual pseudo-democratic elections, under strict control of government agencies. But he will not receive the apostolic mandate, namely the approval of the Pope. Rather, he too, may be sent a certificate from Rome, informing him that he has incurred the immediate and automatic canonical penalty of excommunication. The same penalty as that already proclaimed for Paolo Lei Shiyin, the new illegitimate bishop consecrated in Leshan last June 29th.

The three illegitimate Episcopal ordinations imposed by the Chinese regime in the past nine months (before cases of Leshan and Shantou there was one that occurred in Chengde, on November 20th) and those that are already on the horizon, at this point appear as the beginning of a political-ecclesial tsunami with a potentially devastating outcome.

Some conditioning factors determine a scenario where each move pushes the crisis towards the worst. The China's political leadership has now entered the preparatory stage for the succession as leader of the regime. Everything has come to a standstill in the wait for the appointment of new leaders, all energies are concentrated in defining the cartels of power and in this phase of instability no one wants to take public responsibility to re-open official channels for dialogue with the Vatican, after the intense negotiations of recent years have stalled without an agreement being signed.

In this state of stand-by, middle-ranking officials who run the religious policy have returned to enforcing the usual protocols with bureaucratic mechanicalness, those that preside over the ordination of bishops organized without "interference" from the Vatican, in deference of outdated slogans on "patriotic" independence which must be adhered to by the various religious organizations in the country.

The roadmap to be fulfilled is the progressive assignment of forty vacant Catholic Bishop seats. Rome cannot imagine how to overcome the communication black out of reserved channels which had been opened in the past between the Chinese Embassy in Italy and the Palaces of the Holy See which were useful for facilitating the many appointments which have taken place recently with the parallel consent of Beijing and the Holy See.

On the contrary, with regards to intra-church communication, abundant information was sent by the Holy See to the pastors of the Church in China in this difficult situation. With the Vatican statement that followed the unlawful Episcopal ordination of Leshan, for the first time the Holy See publicly pronounced the *latae sententiae* excommunication imposed on an illegitimate bishop of the Church in China since the time of the first "independent" and self-directed ordination imposed by the Maoists in 1958.

As already mentioned, the same measure is likely to be adopted for the illegitimate bishop of Shantou, for the one of Harbin and for all the others consecrated without papal approval. The day before yesterday, a new blog in Chinese and English opened by Fides news agency - the agency of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - published a question and answer guide in Chinese and English, to provide detailed clarification of the canonical implications of recent Vatican pronouncements on illicit ordinations.

According to the text issued by Fides, the bishops in communion with Rome, who took a consecrating part in the illegitimate ordinations would be momentarily suspended on "presumed liability" and would not be allowed to legitimately administer the sacraments among their faithful, until their positions and the possible circumstances are evaluated by the Vatican offices. An interpretation that does not find consensus among the canonists, even in the Vatican. ♦♦♦