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China Exchange

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EDITORIAL

There is a well known story from the philosopher Hanfeizi who lived towards the end of the Warring States period - about 300 BC. A merchant had set up a street stall to sell his wares. He specialized in spears and shields. Naturally he wanted to give them the best billing he could and a crowd gathered to take it in. "Look at this spear - it will go through anything.Just look at this fine shield - it will stop anything that comes at it..." After a while one of the bystanders asked the obvious question - "And what happens if one of your spears comes up against one of your fine shields?" The merchant was confused and muttered, "my spear .. my shield ... spear... shield..." And so there appeared the Chinese term for contradiction - 'spear-shield'.

Since 1949 - there have been innumerable problems for the Catholic Church in China.

There were untold sufferings for Chinese Catholics, expulsion of foreign missionaries, imprisonment for Chinese bishops, priests, sisters and lay people, suppression of the right of free association, freedom of conscience and belief and worship to name but a few. With the death of Mao Zedong in 1978, there appeared to be a change for the better. A limited freedom of worship and association appeared. Seminaries and novitiates opened again. But now there was also a division within the Church - officially operating with government approval, and unofficially operating without government approval - this last often referred to as 'underground' - not two Catholic Churches but two divisions within the one Church.

Over recent years there has been a lot of talk on many levels about reconciliation between China and the Vatican. China's rhetoric is well known. Relations with Taiwan must be discontinued. The Vatican must not interfere with the Church's internal affairs in China meaning the appointment of bishops. Since last year three - young bishops have been ordained seemingly with both government and Vatican approval. However, underneath

the surface things are not as bright as they might seem.

The recent elevation of Cardinal Joseph Zen, Bishop of Hong Kong seemed to augur well for Sino -Vatican relations and a much hoped for improvement in the situation of loyal Catholics in China, but suddenly there have been two Episcopal ordinations without the consent of the Vatican. Relations have once again soured - although the Vatican has said on many occasions that it is willing to transfer its representative from Taipei to Beijing at any time. Statements from the government however, indicate a contrary attitude - that China really wants an "independent Catholic Church".

While it is true that there are obstacles to free and sincere dialogue between the Vatican and the government of China at official levels, it is also true that dialogue of life continues at different, though no less important levels, between ordinary Catholic people of China and their brothers and sisters in other countries. Two articles in this issue of China Exchange inform us of cultural, professional and faith encounters between the 'ordinary' people of Australia, Britain and China. Hopefully, these exchanges are significant pointers towards a more positive and constructive relationship between the government of China and the Universal Church in the time to come.

We are in solidarity with the Church in China and look forward to the time that it enjoys full freedom of religion and communion with the Universal Church. ■

Paul McGee, ssc

**THE SEARCH IS ON IN CHINA
FOR GOOD AND WORTHY PRIESTS TO BE BISHOPS –
By Gerald O’Connell
(Sunday Examiner 26th March, 2006 - UCAN)**

The Holy See is deeply concerned about the appointment of new bishops in China. The age-lacuna created by the ban on the ordination of priests during the Cultural Revolution has produced a situation where priests are either over 80 or under 45, with no one in the middle group, which serves the Church in various leadership positions in other parts of the world. It also means that new bishops must be chosen from the younger group and that they will remain in leadership for decades.

“This is a big problem,” an official, who asked not to be named, said at the end of last year.

As 2006 began, the Catholic community in mainland China’s 138 dioceses had 65 official and 38 unofficial bishops, most of whom are near or past the usual retirement age of 75. Fewer than 20 are younger than 70 and several are quite ill.

Last October, Hong Kong’s 74-year-old (then) Bishop (now Cardinal) Joseph Zen Ze-kui told the Synod of Bishops in Rome that the overwhelming majority of China’s bishops are now in full communion with Pope Benedict XVI. Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi, who retired as bishop of Kaohsiung, Taiwan, on January 5, concurred. The 82-year-old Jesuit said that “only a small number” of official bishops are still not reconciled with Rome. Vatican sources refuse to give a precise number, but it is generally thought to be about a dozen.

In last year’s October 15 issue of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Father Hans Waldenfels said, “The reality is that before being consecrated (ordained) bishops for the official community, the candidates normally seek to obtain the nomination of the Holy See.”

A Vatican official said that the Holy See wants to ensure that “worthy men” are chosen as successors to the present elderly pastors. For a priest to become bishop he should have “good theological preparation, because he has to be pastor to his flock and must be able to teach sound doctrine and oversee that such is communicated throughout his diocese.” The episcopal candidate should also have a “good moral standing among the people.” In other words, “he should have lived a truly moral life, in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church.”

Another quality listed is, “The ability to relate well to people, have good communication skills, and not be too shy or timid.” Those chosen to be bishop must have the qualities required to be “a good pastor,” the official said.

The Holy See acknowledges that it may not always be possible to choose “the best” or “ideal” candidate for a

given diocese, but it at least wants to make sure that those appointed are “worthy” men, “good” men.

In contemporary China, the Holy See believes that there is a real risk that “unworthy” men could be imposed on Catholic communities in some dioceses, and it wants to prevent such an eventuality. If “unworthy” priests are ordained bishops, the Holy See fears this “would block” the development of the Church in China “for perhaps 20-30 years.”

According to existing procedures, the process of appointing bishops in China is meant to be “democratic” and priests, religious men and women, as well as the lay faithful vote. But the Vatican, the Holy See “is aware that in a number of places the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) is putting pressure on electors to choose its preferred candidates and sometimes they are people who are not suited to be bishops.”

Vatican officials have recently raised this issue with their Chinese counterparts, but the Chinese responded that there is “no obligation” for a priest or bishop to join the CCPA. Even so, the reality seems to be otherwise. The Holy See has learned that CCPA officials in many places, at the local level have put pressure on bishops and priests to join its association.

According to one Vatican source, the situation is most difficult in Hebei province, which has eight official dioceses and is home to roughly 25% of China’s 12 million Catholics.

Beijing diocese, is led by 74-year-old Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan, who is reportedly quite ill. He has played a highly controversial role in China’s Church, both as president of the CCPA and, since March 2002, as one of 15 vice-presidents of the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China, the first Catholic in the leadership of the country’s top legislative body.

Who succeeds Bishop Fu as Beijing’s bishop when he retires or dies is very important. The Holy See also is concerned that a worthy pastor succeed him because the bishop of Beijing plays a special role vis-à-vis the government, just as the Catholic archbishops of Paris, Westminster and Washington do in relation to their respective governments.

The Holy See believes it is necessary to re-start official negotiations. China suspended official talks with the Vatican in 2000, after Pope John Paul II canonized 120 Chinese martyrs on October 1 of that year.

Since then, the Holy See has on occasions, publicly expressed its desire to re-start official talks with China as soon as possible, but Beijing has shown little willingness. However, as one Vatican source has observed, the question of Episcopal appointments is only part, even if an important part, of the much broader issue of religious freedom. ■

CARDINAL ZEN:

**CHINESE GOVERNMENT IS MISTAKEN
ALL IN CHINA WANT TO BE LED BY THE POPE**
[china.infodoc@online.be] – 10th May, 2006.

On 6th of May last, the Religious Affairs Office criticized the Vatican statement condemning as a “serious violation of religious freedom” the Episcopal ordinations that took place without the approval of the Holy See. According to the Religious Affairs Office, which some days ago reiterated China’s right to elect and ordain bishops autonomously, without permission from the Pope.

The statement of Cardinal Zen reveals that the affirmations of the Religious Affairs Office are false, and that in China, after decades of Maoism, ever more bishops, priests and believers fought so that bishops could enjoy the Pope’s approval. The following is the translation of Cardinal Zen’s statement translated from the Chinese by AsiaNews.

The statement of the spokesman of the Religious Affairs office dated 6th May [affirms] that in the Chinese Catholic Church, recognized by the Chinese government, “self-election and self-consecration of bishops has gone on for more than 50 years.” This is the fundamental tactic for self-administration of the Chinese Church. They know there is a hierarchy in the Catholic Church; that if there is no bishop, there is no Catholic Church. But in the Catholic Church, bishops are appointed by the Pope. However, they want bishops, but they do not want the Pope’s appointment and approval. In this way, can the Church still call itself truly a Catholic Church?

The bishops consecrated “in more than 50 years” with “self-election and self-consecration” were aware of their situation and their hearts were not really at peace. At

the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s, as contacts with abroad became easier, these bishops through some people, entrusted their request for “pardon and recognition” to the Holy See. Whenever possible, the Pope accepted many of these requests, and he asked them to make this known to priests and lay believers, without putting themselves in direct opposition to government institutions. This allowed bishops, priests and lay people to live their faith activities tranquilly, being still under government control.

In the last 20 years, at the end of this “half century”, in the official Church, the importance of bishops being appointed by the Pope was gradually recognized by all.

Thus, all Episcopal candidates “elected” by the Council of Chinese Bishops [a sort of Chinese Bishops’ Conference that is not recognized], and recognized by the Religious Affairs Office, send to the Holy See their request to be approved by the Pope –and they know it is necessary. It is only after they get the Pope’s approval that they receive consecration.

Precisely because of this, at the Episcopal ordination organized by the Patriotic Association at the start of 2000, when there were 12 candidates, only five came forward, and they went to the ordination with their eyes brimming with tears. Even the seminarians of the national seminary in Beijing, directly dependent on Liu Bainian [deputy chairman of the Patriotic Association, the man responsible for the illicit ordinations that took place recently], did not attend that ordination. Thereafter, the Holy See reminded all that Canon 1382 of Canon Law [about excommunication *latae sententiae*] was still valid.

Those who are forced to be ordained as bishops illicitly [without the permission of the Holy See], do not face an easy situation: priests generally refuse to concelebrate with them; the faithful do not want to participate in their Masses.

From this attitude of priests and believers, a very clear significance emerges. And I myself therefore say that “in China, there is only one Catholic Church and all want to be led by the Pope.”

In some recent Episcopal ordinations, candidates received the approval of the Holy See, but they experienced many difficulties. The government does not allow them to make the approval of the Holy See public, and so in celebrations they are forced to use the formula “approved by the Council of Chinese Bishops” that replaces the approval of the Pope. Only outside the ordination, can they make it known to priests that the candidate has been confirmed and approved by the Holy See (all Chinese are familiar with this type of dissimulation).

But the paper cannot cover the fire: in this way, it was impossible for the Patriotic Association and Religious Affairs Office to fulfill their interests.

All are aware that for last year's consecrations of bishops of Shanghai and Xi'an, the two consecrated men were first appointed by the Holy See, and then the bishops and priests held an election to [seemingly] fulfill government norms. The government was forced to accept the two candidates. The government was rather silent about these two consecrations; only Mr. Liu Bainian, in an interview with Reuters, said that recently the Chinese government had become "very tolerant."

The reality is that China and the Vatican both affirm they want to collaborate in a harmonious society but in "passive collaboration". Alas, between the Holy See and the Chinese government, there is no accord. This is why we hope that in talks between China and the Vatican, it will be possible to find an agreement acceptable to both.

An agreement is our hope of today. But the Patriotic Association and the Religious Affairs Office have forced two priests to accept Episcopal ordination without the approval of the Holy See. We do not understand this fact and it leads us to lose hope.

In conclusion: who is it who is pushing backwards?

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun.
8th May, 2006 ■

SOME IMPRESSIONS ... AND HAPPY MEMORIES

Br. Michael Dredge, cfc

Recently, I had the privilege of staying for a weekend in the Beijing Catholic Seminary, visiting a seminarian unknown to me, but known by an Australian AITECE colleague who had taught him in Linhe, Inner Mongolia. He and his fellow seminarians made me and my companion Shaw feel very welcome, and the experience brought back many happy memories of my own novitiate days. The following are some scattered impressions

The Beijing Catholic Seminary sits in architectural splendor in a really down-at-heel neighbourhood on the edge of town near the Fifth Ring Road. With its tall and massive bell-tower, it stands out among the paddocks, groves of trees, tumble-down single-story housing and drab warehouses. Its architecture has won prizes, and it is also of interest having been designed by an Islamic woman: some Islamic architectural echoes can be noticed. Beijing was getting chilly in early November, so the golden leaves dropping off the trees added to the contemplative feel of the place. But the people living there are the real interest: indeed, they are the future of the Church in China. My reaction after living with them all for a long week-end: the Church is in very good hands.

My new friend Michael was very welcoming, but more through gesture and action as his English was not very advanced. No matter: on arrival I was very quickly involved in long yarns with the priests, first with the spiritual director Fr Joseph, (who showed me around before

lunch) and the Vice Rector Fr. Matthew (after lunch). Both are young blokes who have spent years abroad, in the US mostly, so they have an experienced and fairly cosmopolitan air about them. Their welcome and open discussions were a great way to start.

First impressions of the forty or so seminarians were of very keen young men in a very familiar, novitiate-like setting. There aren't many novitiates in Australia now with forty novices, so this setting was nostalgic – take mealtimes, with the long tables, the ting of the bell for the start of grace, silence at some meals, lots of talk at other times, the inevitable major wash-up ...

One episode during the quiet afternoon was a music student practising the clarinet –and absolutely murdering *Silent Night*. Thankfully he gave up very quickly! Meanwhile, in the computer room (which didn't exist in *my* novitiate), many of the students were on the internet, and by the look of some screens, keeping in contact with the western world through e-mail. Some of them are obviously e-mail experts, and they love communicating in English. Others were enjoying loud music through their headphones.

I had been invited to join the retreat, actually starting on the Friday evening with a Taize prayer after dinner. Then, silence until the next evening. I was looking forward to seeing how they did retreats and that sort of thing – so another set of familiar routines followed: the music practice, with the whole student body in four groups practicing, under the direction of one of the group, the Doh Re Me parts of a Taize chant. There was a good-natured buzz in the Chapel for the practice, prayer sheets handed out, groups practicing off to the sides, before it all came together beautifully. Not long after, practice over, the Chapel was dark except for the spotlight over the altar, and the real music began: *Ubi Caritas in Putonghua* was memorable!

On the Saturday night, after the common Vespers with the whole group, some of the seminarians went upstairs to a smaller, more modern chapel to continue their prayers. They belong to a voluntary prayer group, and their custom is to say the rosary together and pray for the intentions which members of the group announce, and for the intentions of the Church in China. This looked like a real student-led initiative, impressive for its sincerity and simplicity.

A contrasting service was the Sunday morning Mass, with many locals packing the large chapel (which is the size of any big parish church). The crowded, happy Sunday with young parishioners as acolytes would be familiar to anyone anywhere in the world, except for some sections of this congregation – the deacons dressed in clerical black suits and roman collars, the younger seminarians looking like a well-organized Mormon scrum in their black and white outfits, and the whole staff of six or eight priests celebrating.

The Sunday held other indelible memories for me: after Mass we took a longish journey on the new subway system (which is actually *above* ground for long sections, and being constantly expanded in time for the Olympics in 2008) to down-town Beijing. Michael and Kevin (a first year student and Beijing local) were guides, and they showed us some of the essential sights of both ancient and modern China: the South Cathedral, where we met the Parish Priest after their big Sunday morning Mass; western-style shopping malls and food courts; wide boulevards lined with marble-and-glass towers; and then what all the tourists want to see: Tien An Men square, the mausoleum of Mao Tse Tung, and the ...

Forbidden City. The accompanying picture tells part of that story

Our seminarians in the Beijing Catholic seminary will live a valuable ministry in such a crowded, exciting and challenging society. Life in the seminary is a real mix of traditional piety and the modern cyber-world. From the preparation for ministry they are experiencing now, we can expect their future, and the future of the teeming Middle Kingdom, to be a blessed and effective one. ■

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**CHINESE AND BRITISH ACADEMICS
SHARE RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL VIEWS**
(Agenzia Fides – www.fides.org 25th May, 2006)

A delegation of Chinese academics and religious led by Rev. Peter Zhao, director of the *Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture* and the *Sapientia Press Publishing House* recently visited a number of the principal universities and academic institutions in Britain. The 10 day visit, 10-20 May, focused on the theme “*The Role of Faith in a Globalised World.*” The initiative was sponsored jointly by the Chinese Institute for the Study of Christianity and the British Organization for Cultural Exchange with China. This was the first time a delegation of Chinese Catholic academics made an official visit to Britain.

Under the general heading, the following themes were discussed:

inculturation and globalization, Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church and modern society in Britain and China; sharing research; assistance for students, care for Chinese students in Britain; attitudes of young people in China and Britain with regard to the world today and Christianity; ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue in the globalised world; the role of inter religious dialogue today in China and in Britain.

While in London, Rev. Zhao presented a new review *Catholic Studies* the first of its kind since 1950 which has three goals: to be a forum of dialogue among Catholic scholars in China, to offer a space for dialogue on religion among Catholic and other scholars in China and to meet the demand of many Chinese Catholic scholars for illumination on the thought of Vatican II.

During the ten days the Chinese delegation visited the following:

St. Edmund's College, University of Cambridge; Heythrop College, University of London; the department of Theology, University of Birmingham; the department of Theology, Hope University Liverpool; Christ's College Oxford; Whycliffe Hall, Oxford (Anglican Seminary); the Institute for the study of Christianity, Oxford University; the Commission for Other Faiths, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The delegation also had talks with the Missionaries of Saint Columban and was also received by Cardinal Murphy O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster who spoke about the evangelizing mission of the Church in Britain.

“Cultural Exchange with China” is an organization of missionary institutes and bodies working in China and university professors who have taught in Chinese colleges. The missionaries of the Society of Saint Columban for Foreign Missions belong to the organization which held its 5th annual general meeting in April. The director of Cultural Exchange with China, Fr. Eamonn O'Brien, ssc, said, “We want to build a bridge between the Church in China and the Church in Britain to promote ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.” ■

**ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY LI DUAN, 78
BRIDGE FROM THE CHINESE CHURCH TO THE
VATICAN, DIES**
(chinainfodoc@online.be) 29th May, 2006.

Archbishop Anthony Li Duan, an important figure in China's divided Roman Catholic Church, died Thursday, an official of China's state-approved church said. He was 78. Archbishop Li had had liver cancer for two years, the official said.

The archbishop, leader of the Xi'an diocese, in western China, played a major role in the Church's rebirth after severe persecution during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976.

He was also a strong advocate of reconciliation between the Vatican, which approved his leadership of the Xi'an diocese, and China's government-supervised church. The two sides have no formal ties and have repeatedly feuded over the appointment of bishops and other issues.

Archbishop Li walked a narrow line between fidelity to Rome and the demands of the China Patriotic Catholic Association, which is led by Liu Bainian, the secretary general, a layman responsible for enforcing strict Communist Party control over the Church.

While a member of the state-sanctioned church, Archbishop Li was also “a supporter and friend of pontiffs,” according to AsiaNews, an agency affiliated with the Vatican.

China has about 16 million Catholics, but priests and congregants in the underground churches linked to the Vatican are frequently harassed and fined, and sometimes sent to labour camps.

Relations have been worsened recently by China's appointment of bishops not approved by the Pope. The Holy See's insistence that it has the final say on the selection of bishops, and Beijing's refusal to relinquish control, are among the thorniest issues dividing the two sides.

Arrangements made before Archbishop Li's death should forestall a new round of strife, however. Last year, Anthony Dang Mingyan, 38, was appointed auxiliary bishop of Xi'an, with the Pope's approval, and consecrated by Archbishop Li, AsiaNews reported.

Archbishop Li was one of four Chinese bishops invited by Pope Benedict XVI to a major conference at the Vatican last fall. China barred all four from attending.

Under his leadership, the Xi'an diocese grew to 60 parishes with 20,000 congregants and achieved considerable financial independence. In an interview last year with the Chinese Catholic newspaper *Faith*, Archbishop Li said he wanted to expose more young people to the

Church and hoped to build a church in a local high-tech business park.

“Our people lack formation in faith, and to respond better to the call to mission we need to adopt new methods,” he said. ■

**THE ‘DA VINCI CODE’
OPENS WITH RICH TICKET SALES**
(by Wang Shanshan/Liang Qiwen *China Daily*)
chinainfodoc@online.be 20th May, 2006

“The Da Vinci Code” stormed box offices in major Chinese cities on the first day of its general release on Friday, despite the Chinese Catholic Church’s call for all believers to boycott the Hollywood movie.

By 5 pm, a 10 metre queue had built up outside the Cineplex in Beijing’s up-scale Oriental Plaza, one of the dozens of cinemas showing the film in the city.

“Even the worst seats are selling like hotcakes,” said the ticket –seller at the Cineplex, who identified himself only with the surname Zhang. “It is the most exciting time of the year.”

The Cineplex is showing “The Da Vinci Code” on all six of its screens. It offers 14 shows a day – nine of the subtitled version and five of the dubbed version.

In Guangzhou, capital of South China’s Guangdong Province, more than half the seats in cinemas affiliated with *China Movie Southern New Line* were sold during the day on Friday, said Xie Weijia, general manager of *CMSNL*, one of the two companies to screen the movie in the city.

He expected most cinemas to be filled to capacity this weekend, adding his company has reaped ticket revenue

of more than 3 million yuan (US\$370,000.00) on the first day.

Also on Friday, the Chinese Catholic Church issued a notice to all its branches nationwide asking all followers to “firmly boycott” the “Da Vinci Code,” accusing the movie of going against and distorting the tenets and history of the Catholic Church, the *Xinhua News Agency* reported.

“The contents of both the movie and the novel, are totally fictional,” said the notice jointly issued by the China Patriotic Association and the Bishops’ Conference of the Chinese Catholic Church.

All those who went to the movie and were interviewed by *China Daily* in Beijing said they were not religious. In Gunagzhou, Huang Chenxing, an office worker, said: “I did not quite understand the religious content of the film, as I have never read the book and I have little background knowledge of the religion.” ■

**BISHOPS ARRIVE IN BEIJING FOR GOVERNMENT-
ORGANISED MEETING**
(Sunday Examiner 28th May, 2006 Hong Kong UCAN)

Mainland bishops who have been ordained in recent years, have reportedly arrived in Beijing for a meeting organized by the Chinese government. An elderly bishop confirmed on May 19 that a meeting had been co-organised by the United Front Work Department and the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). He noted that “some young bishops were accompanied to the meeting by provincial officials of the two departments,” but could not provide any other details.

According to a May 19 report in the *Ming Pao Daily*, about 20 ordinaries and auxiliaries would be attending.

Other sources reported that coadjutor Bishop Anthony Dang Mingyan of Xi’an, ordained in July 2005 – and coadjutor Bishop He Zeqing of Wanzhou, ordained in October 2005 – both of whom have Holy See approval – had also gone to Beijing.

An unofficial priest, who has been detained many times, said on May 12 that the recent ordinations showed the two bishops to be weak. “It is impossible that the government would have put them in jail, as it is not an offence to refuse ordination,” he said.

He questioned their sense of the Church, “As they were not able to stand up and give witness to their faith by refusing the ordinations, how can they be proper bishops and perform their episcopal ministry?” ■

DON'T BLAME THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SAYS**OBSERVER**– *Anthony Lam Sui-ki**(Sunday Examiner, 28th May, 2006.)*

The recent illicit ordinations of bishops in China have generated a great deal of thoughtful reflection and dialogue. On May 17, the *South China Morning Post* published an interesting analytical article by FrankChing, the well known and well-informed journalist on China matters, entitled, "Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics." Almost simultaneously, the Holy Spirit Study Centre received an article on much the same subject matter, entitled, "Confrontation and Lack of Dialogue Cause a New China-Vatican Conflict" by Father Jerome Hendrickx, also an expert on China matters. While dealing with the issue in different ways, both men argued that the illicit ordinations, which took place in Kunming and Wuhu on April 30 and May 3 respectively, were a strategy of the Chinese central government.

In this brief article, I will limit myself to commenting on Father Hendryckx's article. He claims that "it is obvious to all of us that Anthony Liu Bainian or even the whole CCPA (Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association) do not have the clout to cause, all by themselves, such a conflict in China. Higher authorities are behind this."

He may be right, but that all depends on what he means by "higher." My opinion is that the matter goes no higher than the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), called the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), at the national level.

Whether or not such actions were initiated by the central government is immaterial. The fundamental blame still lies with the CCPA and the RAB. Contrary to Father Hendryckx's opinion, we know from different reliable sources, the endorsement from the central government came rather late. Even if frontline CCPA members had changed the date for the ceremony at the last minute, the central government would not have taken any disciplinary action against them. The case of Bishop Liu Xinhong is a clear example. I myself met him on April 7. He clearly told me that the local government had been pressuring him to go through with his ordination.

It was his decision to delay the ceremony. He expected the approval of the Holy Father to arrive soon. Up to that moment, the central government may have been totally unaware of what was happening at the local level.

For now, it is difficult to judge the extent of the central government's involvement. However, it is worth noting that it evinces a typical Chinese mentality towards these events, endorsing all the actions of the CCPA and RAB whatever these may be. After all, they are its off-spring. No matter how troublesome, the central government will give them full support, at least before the outside world.

Father Hendryckx says that pressuring legitimate bishops to attend illicit ordinations is an insult to the Holy Father. "Never was the Holy See so humiliated," he writes. The CCPA might think that this is the case, but others around the world outside China may not feel that way at all.

Actually Father Hendryckx knows that "other bishops were told that the application for the two young bishops' ordinations had long been sent to Rome for papal approval and that the Pope "had silently approved the ordinations." If the action were meant to insult the Holy Father, it would not have been necessary to make a false statement to mislead the consecrators.

When people viewed the television on April 30, they saw that the principal consecrator was in a wheelchair and trembled badly. Could the CCPA not find another? They were actually demeaning themselves.

There were rumors that these consecrations were in retaliation for the Vatican having made Hong Kong's Bishop Joseph Zen Ze-kun a cardinal. Father Hendryckx even mentions that those who had hoped that the bishop would become more low-key were mistaken. Almost daily, the media have been publishing Bishop Zen's frank and astute remarks regarding how he would advise the Pope regarding China.

If the Chinese government is using these ordinations to attack or punish Bishop Zen, they have already lost the battle. He felt deeply saddened to see his beloved Church in China making such serious mistakes. Bishop Zen lost nothing. Instead he gained worldwide support and respect, even in mainland China.

It is a pity that Father Hendryckx limited his analysis only to these two cases. He is well acquainted, I am sure, with the case in eastern Guangdong when a Father Huang in that area finally got the approval of the RAB. Father Huang refused to be consecrated without papal approval. The local government could not force him to do anything. Nobody can really force anyone who insists on abiding by Canon Law to change his mind.

Don't blame the central government. It is Liu Bainian and his gang who deserve condemnation!

Anthony Lam is a senior researcher with the Holy Spirit Study Centre, and editor of the Chinese section of 'Tripod'. He is also the author of several books on the Catholic Church in China. ■