

The Pain and Worries of Faithful Catholics in Mainland China

by Sergio Ticozzi, PIME

Some conversations I had during my last visit to the mainland upset me and gave me pause. I fully realized the worries that trouble the heart of so many brothers and sisters—whether clandestine or attending the open churches—who truly want to be loyal to their faith and to the Catholic Church.

First of all, they are deeply aggrieved by the cunning pressure of civil authorities and the people who collaborate with them. Through enticements, as well as oppression, and even violence, the authorities try every means to control and to choke the official section of the Church; on the other hand, the authorities try to eliminate the unofficial Church through mandatory control and registration of its members. In their daily life, these brothers and sisters have to deal with opportunists and two-faced people who lie to them, or give them the runaround. In their work, they have to suffer from undue interference and abuses of corrupt local authorities.

Within the Church, these brothers and sisters frequently feel quite confused in their interactions with bishops and clergy. There are bishops who are recognized by the Holy See, but who also take up posts in the Patriotic Association which publicly proclaims “principles incompatible with Catholic doctrine.” Then there are bishops who take part in illegitimate episcopal ordinations, and who concelebrate with excommunicated bishops. There are priests who proclaim themselves bishops. And there are priests who are ordained by illegitimate bishops, etc. Consequently, many ask, “Who is our true shepherd?” and “Can we receive sacraments from them?” or “Do they still belong to the Catholic Church?”

Observing the behaviour of the Holy See, some brothers and sisters are shaking their heads too; they feel doubtful and suspicious. Some unofficial priests even asked me if Rome had accepted the government policy to eliminate the underground Church; or whether it is still necessary to refuse to join the Patriotic Association. Mistrust is rather widespread.

These our brothers and sisters are suffering, sad, confused and apprehensive. Some of them put their hope on the eventual agreement between China and the Vatican, believing perhaps unrealistically that that will bring an end to all their worries and sufferings. Others close themselves off in their small community, and rely on the clergy to provide them a secure basis for their faith.

Yet, the Holy Spirit continues to work in them and strengthen their faith. It is deeply touching to see these brothers and sisters live the Christian faith in simple yet extraordinary ways. Only their sincere faith guarantees the perseverance of the life of the Church in the country.

We must show our full solidarity with them through prayer and support.