

Excommunicated Chinese bishop joins episcopal ordination

Can only happen in southern China as tradition of faith in the north is stronger and

Catholics would not allow it, says priest



Bishop Joseph Tang Yuange of Chengdu (in white) and other bishops and nuns after the ordination on Nov. 30. Excommunicated Bishop Lei Shiyin of Leshan can be seen standing first left among the others in red vestments. (Photo supplied)

[China](#)

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Catholics in China and reportedly the Vatican are perturbed that an excommunicated bishop took part in one of the two episcopal ordinations held in China on Nov. 30, the feast of St. Andrew.

Excommunicated Bishop Lei Shiyin of Leshan concelebrated in the ceremony at the Pinganqiao Cathedral for Bishop Joseph Tang Yuange of Chengdu, based in southwestern Sichuan province.

Bishop Lei is rumored to have a girlfriend and fathered a child and was publicly declared excommunicated by the Holy See in 2011.

To the dismay of Catholics, he concelebrated in the ceremony that was attended by about 400 priests, nuns and laypeople at the cathedral in the city of Chengdu.

The ordination was presided over by Bishop Fang Xinyao of Linyi, chair of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) with the assistance of Bishops Luo Xuegang of Yibin and He Zeqing of Wanxian (Wanzhou).

The news of Bishop Lei's participation in the ordination has come at a sensitive time with Beijing and the Vatican conducting secret talks about episcopal appointments in the communist-run country.

The proposed deal involves Beijing's acceptance of some 20 candidates that the Vatican has appointed in recent years and 30 underground bishops who are not recognized by Beijing. In exchange, the Holy See will pardon eight China-appointed bishops who have no papal approval.

"The Holy See is certainly unhappy to see Lei in the ordination but would not likely make any comments as it is not the first time," a source close to the Vatican told ucanews.com.



Bishop Joseph Tang Yuange of Chengdu during his ordination on Nov. 30. (ucanews.com photo)

Bishop Lei's participation in the ordination has concerned many Catholics across China.

"The atheist Communist regime knows the church rules well," said a priest-observer in China who asked not to be named.

"By sending Bishop Fang, chair of the CCPA whose position is senior to that of Lei — a vice chair of the CCPA and the most senior church official in the province — it will avoid the sacrament being illicit," he said.

"I expect that the authorities are permitting Lei and another excommunicated bishop who has not been pardoned by the Holy See, to continue to play a role in other coming episcopal ordinations," said the priest.

"But if even such a small issue could not be settled, what is the use of the negotiations?" he asked.

Bishop Joseph Tang and the new Coadjutor Bishop John Baptist Wang Xiaoxun of Ankang in northwestern Shaanxi province are both approved by the Vatican and the Chinese government.

Coadjutor Bishop Wang's episcopal ordination was less controversial and smaller in scale being. It was held in Ankang's Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral that only accommodates 200 people.

"The church is so small that even the parents of the new bishop could not attend," a church source told ucanews.com.

The ceremony was presided over by Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yan'an, vice-chair of the government-sanctioned bishops' conference, with the assistance of Bishops Dang Mingxian of Xi'an and Yu Runchen of Hanzhong.

Bishops Han Yingjun of Sanyuan, Tong Changping of Weinan and Wu Qianjing of Zhouchi concelebrated in the ceremony. All the bishops come from the same province and are approved by the Vatican and the government. Bishop Ye Ronghua of Ankang, 85, did not appear at the ordination.

Father Anthony, a priest who has served in both Shaanxi and Sichuan, said that an excommunicated bishop could only appear at a consecration in southern China. "The tradition of faith in northern China is much stronger," said Father Anthony. "The Catholics would not allow an excommunicated bishop to get onto the altar," he said.



*Coadjutor Bishop Wang Xiaoxun of Ankang and Catholics in a group photo after his ordination on Nov. 30.
(ucanews.com photo)*

New bishop profiles

Bishop Tang was born to a Catholic family on Nov. 17, 1963 and was ordained a priest in 1991. Besides serving in Chengdu, he also served temporarily in southern Hainan Diocese during 1997-1998. He was elected an episcopal candidate in May 2014 and his approval by the Holy See was made known in October 2015.

Bishop Tang will lead 20 priests and nine nuns to serve 100,000 Catholics in Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan.

"I am very grateful to the Holy See's appointment of me, such an ordinary man. Through this, I could see the mercy, acceptance and love of the church as well as the Holy See's understanding on the church in China," Bishop Tang told ucanews.com.

In the near future, he will unite his priests and nuns to develop pastoral work in the diocese while raising their spiritual formation, he said.

Bishop Wang, 50, was born to a Catholic family in Shaanxi on Jan. 19, 1966. He was ordained a priest in 1992. He became the parish priest of Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in 2005. He received his episcopal appointment from the Vatican before he was "elected" as a candidate for the post of Coadjutor Bishop in 2010.

Bishop Wang will serve about 4,000 Catholics in his diocese along with Bishop Ye, nine priests and six nuns.

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