

EDITORIAL

On February 22, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI announced the elevation of Bishop Joseph Zen, ordinary of the Hong Kong Diocese, to the rank of Cardinal. Bishop Zen, 74, will thus become the 6th Chinese Cardinal in history, and with the retirement last year of Cardinal Paul Shan, 82, of Kaohsiung, the only active Chinese Cardinal.

Bishop Zen brings a wealth of experience to his new position. Born to a Catholic family in Shanghai on January 13, 1932, he entered the order of Salesians of Don Bosco at an early age. After studies in Rome during the 1950s, Joseph Zen was ordained a priest on February 11, 1961. While serving in a variety of posts for the Salesian Order, including a term as Superior of the China Province (Mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) from 1978 to 1983, Father Zen taught courses in philosophy and theology at Hong Kong's Holy Spirit Seminary.

In 1989, Father Zen became the first priest from abroad to teach in seminaries in China. He did this until 1996, when on December 9 that year, Cardinal John Baptist Wu consecrated him and Father John Tong coadjutor and auxiliary bishops of Hong Kong respectively. On September 23, 2002, upon the death of Cardinal Wu, Bishop Zen became ordinary of the diocese.

Exercising a prophetic role in the church, in his years as bishop, Bishop Zen has often spoken out on justice issues in society. Such issues included the right of abode for illegal immigrants in Hong Kong, the Article 23 anti-subversion bill, and on behalf of more democracy. Often misconstrued as "involvement in politics," Bishop Zen's words and actions are motivated by Holy Scripture and the social teachings of the Church.

Appropriately, one has only to read the following passage from Matins for Ash Wednesday (March 1st this year) to understand from where Bishop Zen gets his motivation: "This rather is the fasting I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke;

setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.” (Isaiah 58: 6-8)

The new Cardinal-elect has said that he hopes to play a role in normalizing relations between China and the Vatican. It is hard to see how Cardinal Zen, as the only active Chinese Cardinal, would not be consulted during any future negotiations.

At the same time, it must be noted, diplomatic relations as an end in itself is not the most urgent matter for Chinese Catholics. What is more disturbing is an apparent campaign taking place in Hebei Province. One reads of the arrest of two unofficial priests, Fathers Lu Genjun, 44 and episcopal vicar, and Guo Yanli, 39, of the Baoding Diocese on February 17, 2006. They join the ordinary and auxiliary bishops of Baoding, Su Zhimin, 72, and An Shuxin, 54, already in detention since 1996 and 1997 respectively.

This is in addition to a campaign in Hebei to get all the open churches to register and to set up the Patriotic Association. Then, according to sources, this association would rule over the Church, and even issue licenses to priests so they can function. However, in the clergy and Catholics eyes this organization wants to cut the Church off from the Pope. So they have little desire to cooperate with it. Thus freedom of religion seems to be a more pressing matter than diplomatic relations.

In this issue we reproduce an article by our former English editor, Sister Betty Ann Maheu, which originally appeared in *America* magazine in November 2005. We also have two articles by elderly Chinese priests, who, though born in China, now live abroad. Their essays show the love and concern that these priests still have for their motherland and for the Catholic Church there. Related to news about church property disputes at the end of last year, we have an article on this topic by Anthony Lam, and a translation by Michael Sloboda of 1980 government regulations regarding church property. (PJB)