

Appeal Letter to the Government in Response to the Illicit Episcopal Ordination in Chengde

*Priests of Cangzhou Diocese
Translated by Purple Kwong*

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are priests of Cangzhou Diocese, and as with any other person in the nation, we enjoy the benefits brought about by the reform and opening up of our country. We find ourselves particularly fortunate to be priests in Xian County, a place of fervent Catholic faith, to do our evangelistic work. We see the sincere cooperation between the county government and the diocese, experience stability and harmony in our diocese, and are aware of the support and help that you and the county government have given to our diocese all these years. Under the leadership and encouragement of our bishop, we have been leading our laity to obey the law and to actively participate in the construction of the two civilizations in our nation. We want to serve our country and contribute to society in our specific role as clergy. We affirm that we are clergy who love our nation and its people. We have responded to God's call and have become priests because we want to be priests in China, and according to the will of God, spread the good news of truth, justice and charity throughout our country for the benefit of the over one billion of our fellow citizens. We wish to bring about "the union of heaven and humankind" and the ideal of a "harmonious society," which our ancient sages pursued. However, a series of incidents took place in our diocese recently that made us confused, saddened, and even angry. Therefore we earnestly request

that you and other persons in the leadership give us a clear explanation in order to dispel our uncertainty.

- (1) The decision to attend an Episcopal ordination or not should be made out of one's own free will. There is no law or regulation in China that obliges a person to attend such a ceremony. This is a right of freedom of choice, which the Constitution bestows on the citizens. However, when the illicit episcopal ordination in Chengde took place, whether through deceit or house arrest, some people forcibly "sent" the bishop of our diocese to Chengde to attend the ceremony. What sort of act was that? Where is the right of personal freedom guaranteed by the Constitution?
- (2) The ordination of bishops and priests is basically internal affairs of the Church, and is within the sphere of canon law and the dogma of the Church. Why then should the government coerce people to attend the ceremony? Does our nation want to have government-run churches? This not only makes us church people feel anxious and unfairly treated, but even Mr. Ren Yanli, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, felt perplexed and disappointed at the Chengde ordination. He said, "It's really ridiculous. Since the conflicts of 2006, in these last 4 years, episcopal appointments have been taking place rather smoothly. This was especially the case this year (2010), when the first ten bishops ordained had the approval of both sides. It seemed that China and the Vatican had reached a consensus. ... However, this latest action seems like a continuation of the extreme leftist policy on the part of the authorities, and regrettably we are back to the state of self-electing and self-ordaining bishops of 2006. These last four years have been spent in vain!"
- (3) Our bishop had no choice but to attend this illicit episcopal ordination against his conscience. Since our bishop could not bear the immense pressure, he still has not returned to

the diocese, and we do not know where he is. In such a situation, whether out of kindness or reason, our government should give an explanation to the family and relatives of the bishop, and to his diocese too. They should also convey their regards to us. However, we find it bizarre that some government bureaus use methods that are unacceptable to the faithful — they encircled the diocese with public security cars, as if they are on guard! This extreme measure has a grave impact not only on the diocese but also on people outside the Church. Is this the characteristic of a democratic country? Is this the behavior of a harmonious society? Is the “Cultural Revolution” back again? How can such actions still take place in this liberal and democratic era, when people are working together to build a harmonious society? We feel bitterly disappointed!

The above questions continually trouble us, and we wonder whether the religious policy of our country is retreating. All the priests and the 85,000 Catholics of our diocese are very worried about the safety of our bishop. Peaceful Christmas is just around the corner. To maintain the harmony and stability of our county, and to continue the years of the good relationship between the county government and the diocese, we urgently hope that you and responsible personnel of the government can give us a clear explanation concerning the above questions as soon as possible. Thus further misunderstandings and grievances, which destroy the harmony of Christmas, would be avoided.

From all priests of the Cangzhou Diocese
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