

EDITORIAL

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI's address to the crowd in St. Peter's Square (which we re-produce in this issue of *Tripod*) on May 18, 2011 was longer than usual, and its words displayed his anxious concern for the situation of the Catholic Church in China.

His appeal for prayer on the upcoming May 24 feast of Our Lady Help of Christians was not simply a general call for the faithful to keep that Church in their prayers. Rather, the Holy Father elaborated over a couple of paragraphs, the purpose and direction this prayer should take. Perhaps he feels that the Church in China is slipping out of communion with the universal Catholic Church. So, his appeal took on an added sense of urgency.

He said, "Chinese Catholics, as they have said many times, want unity with the universal Church, with the Supreme Pastor, with the Successor of Peter. By our prayers we can obtain for the Church in China that it remain one, holy and catholic, faithful and steadfast in doctrine and in ecclesial discipline. She deserves all our affection."

The Holy Father went on to say that he knows that some of his brother bishops (in China) find themselves under pressure in the exercise of their episcopal ministry. He encourages Catholics throughout the world to keep them in their prayers: "By our prayers we can help them to find the path to keep their faith alive, to keep their hope strong, to keep their love for all people ardent, and to maintain in its integrity the ecclesiology that we have received from the Lord and the Apostles, which has been faithfully transmitted to us right down to the present day. By our prayers we can obtain that their wish to remain in the one universal Church will prove stronger than the temptation to follow a path independent of Peter."

The Holy Father's fears were not misplaced. For an article appeared in the May 14, 2011 issue of Hong Kong's *Wen Wei Po*, entitled "China Church Requests the Vatican Not to Interfere in Its Work of Election and Consecration." The article quotes the chairperson of the Catholic Patriotic Association, Bishop Fang Xingyao, who said that 11 dioceses have elected episcopal candidates, and they are awaiting the approval of the bishops conference. The *Wen Wei Po* reporter then asked the vice-chairman of the Patriotic Association, Mr. Liu Bainian, to confirm Bishop Fang's statement. Mr. Liu appealed to the Vatican not to, from a political point of view, interfere in the Chinese process of "the self-election and self-consecration" of bishops. Rather, he urged them, from an evangelistic point of view, to recognize and support the bishops who have already been elected. He also said that, when conditions are ripe, they would continue to expand the election and consecration work.

Liu Bainian went on to say that, of the 11 candidates, besides Liang Jiansen, whose consecration as bishop of Jiangmen has already taken place, an assessment of the other 10 candidates is still going on. When this assessment is completed, the Bishops Conference will most likely approve them. He said that the ordination of bishops is in accordance with the needs of evangelization in China, and that it belongs to the sphere of the normal development of church work on the mainland. He added that because the Chinese Catholic Church "self-elects and self-consecrates" its bishops, it is not necessary to obtain the Pope's approval. That last statement would seem to confirm the Holy Father's fears that the Catholic Church of China is moving in the direction of independence from the universal church.

Moreover, the Holy See has always sought the best candidate to be bishop from a spiritual and religious point of view, not from a political one. Rather, it has taken the initiative to admonish bishops and priests, who have accepted to serve in public office, to step down from such positions. For instance, who can forget the picture of Pope John Paul II wagging his finger in front of a kneeling

Father Ernesto Cardenal in 1983, when he visited Nicaragua? Fr. Cardenal at the time was Minister of Education in the Sandanista government of Nicaragua. That picture went all around the world for all to see. Another priest advised to step out of office was Father Miguel d'Escoto, who was Foreign Minister in the same government.

The United States was not exempted. Father Robert Drinan served in the House of Representatives for 5 terms, from 1971 to 1981. However, when, in 1980, Pope John Paul II commanded that he step down, Fr. Drinan obeyed, and did not seek re-election.

In fact, one reason some episcopal candidates in China may not be acceptable to the Holy See these days is because of their political connections, e.g. being members of the National Peoples' Congress (NPC), or the Chinese Peoples' Political Consultative Congress (NPPCC). Rather the Holy See is concerned about the spiritual qualifications of episcopal candidates. This is so because the bishops must be shepherds to guide the faithful in the practice and development of their faith. They must be good examples in the spiritual life for their priests. Of course, they must also be concerned about evangelization, about spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have not yet heard it. These are the kinds of candidates the Holy Father seeks to be bishops.

As it is now, politics and religion are mixed together in China. They used to talk about "the separation of church and state," but not anymore. In fact, vice-director Liu, mentioned above, in addition to being honorary chairman of the Patriotic Association (CPA), is also honorary president of the Bishops Conference (BC). Bishop Fang Xingyao, a Holy See appointed bishop, is chairman of the Patriotic Association, while Bishop Ma Yinglin, not approved by the Holy See, is president of the Bishops Conference. In the official church, the spiritual branch (BC) is wrapped tightly in the embrace of the political branch (CPA). It has most likely always been the case, but now the relationship is more explicit.

Another illicit ordination was scheduled to take place in Wuhan on June 9, 2011. Now we hear that it has been cancelled,

otherwise it would have been the second Holy See unapproved one after the one in Chengde in November 2010. One wonders if the state has considered the effect of such non-papal approved ordinations on the Catholics. They are very straightforward. The first question they ask a new bishop is: "Do you have the approval of the Holy Father?" And not just the Holy Father's "approval" ('pi zun'), but his "appointment" ('ren ming') is required. The candidate needs to have received the Holy Father's mandate. Otherwise the Catholics will avoid him. One hears of the case of the Catholics in northern Fujian, around Easter time this year, not allowing an unapproved bishop to enter a church in his area, until, as they said, he had the approval of the Holy Father to be a bishop. As more unmandated bishops appear, will scenes like that in Fujian multiply? What then will happen to the "Harmonious Society?"

The main topic of this issue is the Church and Social Communications, in honor of the 40th anniversary of the publication of the "Magna Carta of Church-communication," as one of our authors calls it, of the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*. The authors writing on this topic urge the Church to use all the means of social communication to set forth its position on various issues facing it. This is what I have tried to do with this editorial. That, and the intercession of Our Blessed Mother, which the Holy Father has appealed for, can hopefully be of some help to the Church in China. "Our Lady of Sheshan, pray for us!" (PJB)