

EDITORIAL

The excommunications incurred by two Chinese priests in the summer of 2011 for undergoing episcopal ordinations without Papal approval led to a plethora of articles in the Chinese Catholic press (especially in the official magazine *Catholic Church in China*) defending the actions of the official Chinese Church at that time. The articles cited arguments like: “It was done to carry on the missionary and pastoral work of the Church,” “it was done in order to carry out St. Paul’s directive: ‘to be all things to all men,’” it is a “Chinese way” of being church, or “it was done in accordance with Jesus’ own command: ‘to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’” The argument in the last cited quotation apparently runs in this way: As an independently run Church, we only have to obey the Pope in matters of faith and morals; in matters of administration, the state can appoint bishops!

Thus, we here at *Tripod* decided to devote a special issue to addressing the spurious arguments presented by certain quarters of the Chinese Catholic press in defense of the “self-elected, self-consecrated” episcopal ordinations, which took place last year. Put in a more positive way, for this issue we solicited articles which would support the Holy Father’s role in maintaining the unity and communion of the Church.

A quick look back at the last two ecumenical councils, Vatican I (1869-70) and Vatican II (1962-65), can perhaps give us some perspective on the relationship of bishops to the Holy Father. Vatican Council I famously defined the doctrine of papal infallibility. It declared: “The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra* ...defining a doctrine concerning faith and morals to be held by the whole Church, through the divine assistance promised to him in St. Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer wished the Church to be endowed.” However, due to the Franco-Prussian War, Vatican Council I ended abruptly

within a year. Nothing was declared about the role of bishops and of ecumenical councils in helping the Holy Father to arrive at his decisions.

However, these lacunae were filled in over 100 years later at Vatican Council II. *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, issued by the Council in November 1964, spells out in a more complete way (in paragraphs 21-27) the roles of the Holy Father and the bishops. For instance, paragraph 22 reads: "The Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, are related with and united to one another...The bishops live in communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in a bond of unity, charity and peace." Paragraph 23 further states: "The order of bishops is the successor to the college of Apostles in their role as teachers and pastors...Together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him, they have supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this authority cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff."

In this issue, an interview with Cardinal Joseph Zen, and articles by Fr. Peter Paul Saldanha, Fr. Stephen Lee, Sister Goretti Lau, SPB, Fr. Zhang Xin and Anthony Lam attempt to apply the abovementioned conciliar doctrine about the relationship between the Holy Father and the bishops to the situation of the Catholic Church in China. The communiqué of the 5th plenary session of the Papal Commission for the Catholic Church in China, which we include in this issue, also addresses the question of the selection of bishops for the Church in China. We hope our readers will find all the articles enlightening and useful. (PJB)