

May the Face of Church Shine Forth with Clarity in the Midst of the Noble Chinese People

Vatican Information Service

Vatican City, 26 April 2012 (VIS) - The Commission for the Catholic Church in China, established by Benedict XVI in 2007 to study questions of major importance regarding the life of the Catholic Church in that country, held its fifth meeting in the Vatican from 23 to 25 April. At the end of the gathering the commission released a communique in English and Chinese, the text of which is given below.

“With deep spiritual closeness to all brothers and sisters in the faith living in China, the Commission recognised the gifts of fidelity and dedication which the Lord has given to His Church throughout the past year.

“The participants examined the theme of the formation of the lay faithful, in view also of the ‘Year of Faith’ which the Holy Father has announced will be held from 11 October 2012 to 24 November 2013. The words of the Gospel, ‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man’, set out the task to which the Catholic lay faithful in China are called.

“In the first place, they must enter ever more deeply into the life of the Church, nourished by doctrine, conscious of their being part of the Catholic Church, and consistent with the requirements of life in Christ, which necessitates hearing the word of God with faith. From this perspective, a profound knowledge of the Catechism of the Catholic Church will be a particularly important aid for them.

“In the second place, lay Catholics are called to take part in civic life and in the world of work, offering their own contribution with full responsibility: by loving life and respecting it from conception until natural death; by loving the family, promoting

values which are also proper to traditional Chinese culture; by loving their country as honest citizens concerned for the common good. As an ancient Chinese sage put it, ‘the way of great learning consists in illustrating noble virtues, in renewing and staying close to people, and in reaching the supreme good’.

“Thirdly, the lay faithful in China must grow in grace before God and men, by nourishing and perfecting their own spiritual life as active members of the parish community and by involving themselves in the apostolate, also with the help of associations and Church movements which foster their ongoing formation.

“In this regard, the Commission noted with joy that the proclamation of the Gospel by Catholic communities, which are sometimes poor and without material resources, encourages many adults to request baptism every year. It was thus emphasised that the dioceses in China should promote a serious catechumenate, adopt the rite of Christian initiation of adults, and care for their formation after Baptism as well. Pastors, both bishops and priests, should make every effort to consolidate the lay faithful in their knowledge of the teachings of Vatican Council II, and in particular of ecclesiology and the social doctrine of the Church. Moreover, it will be useful to dedicate special solicitude to the preparation of pastoral workers dedicated to evangelisation, catechesis and works of charity. The integral formation of lay Catholics, above all in those places where rapid social evolution and significant economic development are occurring, is part of a commitment to make the local Church vibrant and thriving. Finally, an adequate response to the phenomenon of internal migration and urbanisation is to be hoped for.

“Practical indications, which the Holy See has proposed and will propose to the universal Church for a fruitful celebration of the ‘Year of Faith’, will undoubtedly be heeded with enthusiasm and with a creative spirit also in China. These suggestions will stimulate the Catholic community to find adequate initiatives to put into practice what Pope Benedict XVI has written regarding the lay faithful and the family in his Letter of 27 May 2007 to the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China.

“The lay faithful, therefore, are called to participate with apostolic zeal in the evangelisation of the Chinese people. By virtue

of their Baptism and Confirmation, they receive from Christ the grace and the task to build up the Church.

“In the course of the meeting, attention then focused on the pastors, in particular on bishops and priests who are detained or who are suffering unjust limitations on the performance of their mission. Admiration was expressed for the strength of their faith and for their union with the Holy Father. They need the Church’s prayer in a special way so as to face their difficulties with serenity and in fidelity to Christ.

“The Church needs good bishops. They are a gift of God to His people, for the benefit of whom they exercise the office of teaching, sanctifying and governing. They are also called to provide reasons for life and hope to all whom they meet. They receive from Christ, through the Church, their task and authority, which they exercise in union with the Roman Pontiff and with all the bishops throughout the world.

“Concerning the particular situation of the Church in China, it was noted that the claim of the entities, called ‘One Association and One Conference’, to place themselves above the bishops and to guide the life of the ecclesial community, persists. In this regard, the instructions given in the Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, remain current and provide direction. It is important to observe them so that the face of the Church may shine forth with clarity in the midst of the noble Chinese people.

“This clarity has been obfuscated by those clerics who have illegitimately received episcopal ordination and by those illegitimate bishops who have carried out acts of jurisdiction or who have administered the Sacraments. In so doing, they usurp a power which the Church has not conferred upon them. In recent days, some of them have participated in episcopal ordinations which were authorised by the Church. The behaviour of these bishops, in addition to aggravating their canonical status, has disturbed the faithful and often has violated the consciences of the priests and lay faithful who were involved.

“Furthermore, this clarity has been obfuscated by legitimate bishops who have participated in illegitimate episcopal ordinations. Many of these bishops have since clarified their position and have requested pardon; the Holy Father has benevolently forgiven them.

Others, however, who also took part in these illegitimate ordinations, have not yet made this clarification, and thus are encouraged to do so as soon as possible.

“The participants in the plenary meeting follow these painful events with attention and in a spirit of charity. Though they are aware of the particular difficulties of the present situation, they recall that evangelisation cannot be achieved by sacrificing essential elements of the Catholic faith and discipline. Obedience to Christ and to the Successor of Peter is the presupposition of every true renewal and this applies to every category within the People of God. Lay people themselves are sensitive to the clear ecclesial fidelity of their own pastors.

“With regard to priests, consecrated persons and seminarians, the commission reflected once again on the importance of their formation, rejoicing in the sincere and praiseworthy commitment to provide not only suitable programmes of human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation for the seminarians, but also times of ongoing formation for priests. In addition, appreciative mention was made of the initiatives which are being undertaken by various female religious institutes to coordinate formation activities for consecrated persons.

“It was noted, on the other hand, that the number of vocations to the priestly and religious life has noticeably declined in recent years. The challenges of the situation impel the faithful to invoke the Lord of the harvest and to strengthen the awareness that each priest and woman religious, faithful and luminous in their evangelical witness, are the primary sign still capable of encouraging today’s young men and women to follow Christ with undivided heart.

“Finally, the Commission recalls that this upcoming 24 May, the liturgical memorial of the ‘Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians’ and the Day of Prayer for the Church in China, will provide a particularly auspicious opportunity for the entire Church to ask for energy and consolation, mercy and courage, for the Catholic community in China”.