

EDITORIAL: *An Unjust Action against Bishop Ma Daqin and the Catholic Church of China*

Just as we were preparing this issue of *Tripod* to go to press, (December 10, 2012) we received the disheartening news that the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference had revoked the appointment of Bishop Ma Daqin as coadjutor bishop (auxiliary bishop, in the Holy See's eyes) of the Diocese of Shanghai. In these modern times, when a validly and legitimately ordained bishop can be arbitrarily removed from office for no apparent reason, it is indeed a sad day for the Catholic Church of that local country.

It will be recalled that at the end of his ordination Mass on July 7, 2012, Bishop Ma announced that, since he would be busy with his pastoral work as bishop, he had to withdraw from any duties he might have had in the Catholic Patriotic Association. During the Mass, he had also prevented a bishop, who had not been approved by the Pope, from laying hands on him. That very evening, government officials detained him and held him incommunicado at Sheshan Seminary. He was also prevented from exercising his episcopal ministry.

Now, in addition to having his episcopal appointment cancelled, the Shanghai Diocese has also suspended Bishop Ma from his priestly ministry for two years, and removed him from his posts as dean of the Pudong district and pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Tangmuqiao. Although the Bishops' Conference and the Shanghai Diocese are cited as the sources of these orders, no signed document has been released to show who is really responsible for the punishments imposed on Bishop Ma.

An educated guess would say that the party responsible was the state-supported Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the very organization that Bishop Ma resigned from. The reason for saying this is that in the phrase "yi hui, yi tuan" (one association, one conference), the "hui" (association) always appears first, and the "tuan" (conference) second. This shows that the association is above the conference, and the conference must obey the directives of the association. In no other country in the world (to this writer's knowledge) can a political organization remove a Catholic bishop from office.

There is a rumor going around China in official church circles, which lays all the blame on Bishop Ma. It goes like this: It is OK for one person to be a hero, but what about the Church in Shanghai? It is suffering. The seminaries are closed, the Sister superior has been replaced, and the priests, Sisters and seminarians must undergo political education.

However, what about defending church doctrine? The Holy Father, in his 2007 pastoral letter, the fifth anniversary of which we commemorate in this issue, stated that certain entities placed above the church hold positions (independence and autonomy), which “are incompatible with Catholic doctrine.” The footnote cites the 2004 statutes of the Catholic Patriotic Association. Bishop Ma was merely backing the position of the Pope.

Also, what is wrong with disassociating oneself from a strictly political organization, which is not part of the church, to devote oneself full time to the pastoral ministry of the church? That seems to be what a bishop, priest or Sister should be doing, and what they were ordained, or took vows, to do. Also, Bishop Ma may have been trying to clear up a misconception in the minds of some Catholics. In a booklet commemorating the Eighth Assembly of Catholic Representatives, which took place in December 2011, Bishop Ma’s picture is displayed prominently as a participant in the assembly. If the Patriotic Association displayed his picture publicly, why could Bishop Ma not disavow his membership in the association publicly?

Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, graciously acceded to our request for an article commemorating the fifth anniversary of Pope Benedict’s letter. He emphasizes the need for dialogue between the Holy See and China to iron out any problems existing between the two entities. Other contributors are Father Lazzarotto, Sister Beatrice Leung and Annie Lam, and three priests living in China. Finally, Father-professor Hans Waldenfels comments on Professor Peter Paul Saldanha’s article in *Tripod*, No. 165.

Dear Readers, please pray for Bishop Ma and all the Shanghai Catholics, and pray that China’s new leadership, which takes office in March 2013, will carry out a much needed overhaul of China’s religious policy, one which would grant believers real religious freedom. (PJB)