

After the 2012 Shanghai Episcopal Ordination: Whom Should We Interrogate?

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Since November 2010, the Chinese Church has entered into a painful period, like “10,000 horses standing mute.” The Chinese brothers and sisters, and all who are concerned about the Church are perplexed and sad. Some were even indignant. Everyone reflected on it, regretted it, prayed over it, was critical of it, and even lost hope over it. But God loved China. The ordination in July 2012 in Shanghai brought new light to the Chinese Church and to all those concerned about the Church in China. The great mass of brothers and sisters jumped for joy and clapped hands over the faithful witness of Bishop Ma Daqin. Some even cried tears of joy. But with the passage of time (the ordination took place over 5 months ago), the media, which originally gave a lot of coverage to the event, gradually lost interest. Of course, we do not wish that the media continue to stir up the matter. But we Christian brothers and sisters cannot allow ourselves to become indifferent over time. As the months roll by, we cannot forget the matter. As Christian brothers and sisters, we must shine with the light of Christ. We must ask ourselves: Do we cry out? Do we pray? Do we become indignant? Do we criticize, Do we ask questions? Are we suspicious?

With the light of faith and the attitude of a Christian, I only want to reflect upon the event and to give voice to my reflections. So, I offer this essay to all the brothers and sisters, whether at home or abroad, who love the Church in China. Let each one of us together ask our consciences: whom should we interrogate about this ordination?

1. According to official reports, Father Ma Daqin was validly and legitimately ordained as auxiliary bishop of Shanghai. Bishop Ma Daqin affirmed this, and he was considered worthy to be raised to that position. As everyone knows Bishop Jin Luxian is already 96 years old. However, he is as elegant in demeanor as in the past. He is much praised by his fellow countrymen, and his influence has spread far and wide. Although his body is weak and he is subject to many illnesses, his spirit is still effervescent. To ordain a new auxiliary bishop brings new hope to the Shanghai Diocese. From this we can realize that the ordination for him was for the sake of the future of the local church, and was a final stand and witness for the principles of the faith. The ancient sages of China said: man has one life, and bushes and trees have one autumn season. The book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible also tells us: vanity of vanities; all things are vanity. Although we are outsiders, we can sense Bishop Jin's predicament and thoughts at this time. He is usually straightforward in his speech. However, speaking from the point of view of the church, his attitude must be: that of a true man, who has the courage to accept the consequences of his actions. Bishop Jin Luxian should bear the responsibility of protecting his auxiliary bishop, and guiding him to follow the correct road for pastoral work and administration. He should even be willing to sacrifice his own life for this. This is the spirit of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and of the teachings of the Church. It is also the hope of the people.

2. The message of Bishop Ma Daqin's ordination was sonorous and forceful. It rang out as a testimony of faith. It was like the Word of God, producing a life-giving force. The great mass of brothers and sisters at home and abroad were given a great grace. It is both a prayer and a long awaited word. We all believe that Bishop Ma Daqin's testimony of faith is gradually producing fruit and exciting hearts. It will have a broad and deep influence.

3. After the consecration ceremony, we examined all the Catholic websites in China to find out what they were reporting about it. The criticisms of this consecration said that it violated the regulations and that it was under investigation. This kind of explanation was the outcry of the Chinese official "one association,

and one conference.” On July 11, the universal Church knows that the May 27, 2007 letter of the present Holy Father clearly rejected the methods and stance of the “one association and one conference.” On August 22, 2012, the website of the “one association and one conference” once again reported that the so-called president of the Chinese Bishops Conference, Ma Yinglin, announced that he represents all the bishops and priests at a meeting of the “one association, one conference,” in solemnly declaring that the Shanghai ordination seriously violated discipline, and was now undergoing appraisal. We have no way of knowing whether the results of this evaluation will be made known to the public. Would it really convince people? Many people have this feeling. Most likely the Church in China is today going through a period when truth and falsity are interchanged. The illegitimate ones criticize the legitimate ones. They are making laughing stocks of themselves. We do not know if it is for their own advantage, or due to government pressure. It certainly gives rise to many suppositions among the people. This ordination once again gives a true picture of religious freedom in China. It also shows how weak and feeble is the government’s expression of the religious policy. From the present history of the Chinese Church we can learn that the Chinese Catholic Church’s “one association, one conference,” with the government’s help, chooses a policy of alternating between intimidation and bribery regarding episcopal ordinations. They go so far as to use extreme methods to carry out the policy of running the church independently. They spend a lot of money and human energy to do this. As a result, only those who benefit from it subscribe to this government policy. This arouses strong feelings of dissatisfaction within the Chinese Church. The Church has people who dare to be angry, but say nothing, and those who are willing to give voice to their anger. These are reasons for the chaos and disharmony in today’s society. This is just the opposite of the harmonious society, which the central government is promoting these days. I think the government certainly knows this. But it is difficult to understand why they continue to promote the independent administration of the church, which is the path the Chinese Church has followed for over half a century. This road is getting narrower and narrower. For a long time now people have

not appreciated it. It is already at a dead end. Why do they continue to wildly follow it? Is this not obstinately sticking to the wrong course of action?

4. The Church's theology and Canon Law tell us that once a bishop is legitimately ordained, he becomes a member of the college of bishops throughout the whole world. Of course, he receives the support and love of all the world's bishops too. We were happy to see that after the Shanghai ordination, the Vatican, Cardinal Zen, Cardinal Tong, the Asian Bishops Conference, and all the foreign communications media around the world widely praised Bishop Ma Daqin's courage and wisdom. At the same time, they have not been quiet about the circumstances Bishop Ma now finds himself in. Moreover, we know that the power and the influence of the universal church is not just temporary, but is everlasting. Therefore, the great mass of Chinese Catholics hopes that, from beginning to end, the universal church will continue to use all kinds of means to show their concern for Bishop Ma.

5. We all belong to Christ's Church. We are brothers and sisters of one another. We should all love and help one another. Christ's teachings ring in the ears of each one of us. However, what causes people's hearts to seize up is: from concerned reports and from apparent signs, the Chinese bishops are all unconcerned about the matter. Their lack of concern is apparent for all to see. Each one only sweeps the snow in front of his own door. Not one bishop raised his voice on behalf of their brother bishop, Ma Daqin. On the other hand, some bishops, with the government's support, go on junkets. This really causes misunderstandings and disappointment among the people. What causes people to lose even more hope is that on July 27 the "one association, one conference's" directors and vice-directors held a meeting in Gansu. Regarding Bishop Ma Daqin, both in speech and in writing, they displayed an arrogant attitude. One could not help but think of the poem which has the words: "All come from the same root; when dealing with one another, why are you in such great haste?" We hope that history will not repeat itself. Now everyone is calling for a return to the spirit of Christ and of the early Church. The Chinese bishops should

be witnesses for the truth, models of love, and signs of communion. In view of this matter, and facing the present realities of the Chinese Church, there is always a large group of people, whose every other word is: “we are the loyal church.” However, Bishop Ma Daqin has given us a lesson: loyalty is to bear witness to the faith.

6. As everyone knows, in modern church history, the Catholics of the Shanghai Diocese were famous for shedding their blood and tears in order to bear witness to the faith. Many moving articles were written about their love of country and of the church. They received the praise and the respect of the universal church and of the great mass of Catholics. This is the fruit of the unity in faith of the pioneer Catholics in the Shanghai Diocese. Likewise, the great mass of clergy and Catholics are of one mind and one heart, are not tempted by the secular world, and together overcome many difficulties. We believe and we wait for the time when Christ will conquer all. He is our victor and our king. In this present time of testing, are the clergy, religious and Catholics united with one mind and heart? And is it also not the time for Catholic brothers and sisters in neighboring dioceses to support the Shanghai Catholics?

7. At last, what I want to say is that every Catholic claims that he/she observes the principles of the Church. But in our lives, a lively witness is the most important thing. I fervently hope that, in the future, people will give outstanding witness to their faith. That would really be good fortune for the Church in China!

This writer suggests that while we are praying for and supporting Bishop Ma Daqin, all the brothers and sisters should support one another. More importantly, each one of us should examine, in the deepest recesses of our hearts, whether we are living in the love of Christ, and whether we are carrying out our responsibilities in the great family of the church. At this time in history, each one of us must ask ourselves what our conscience tells us about this ordination. The Chinese bishops especially must ask themselves where their faith principles, their witness and their influence are.