

EDITORIAL

This issue of *Tripod* commemorates the 10th anniversary of Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI's pastoral letter to the Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church of China. In the Letter, Pope Benedict warmly addresses his audience as "Brother Bishops, dear priests, consecrated persons, and all the faithful of the Catholic Church in China." He tells them his purpose is to address some important aspects of ecclesial life in China which give cause for concern. He expresses the hope for "some form of dialogue" with the authorities of the PRC. He expresses "admiration and sentiments of friendship for the entire Chinese people."

Regarding problems internal to the Church, Pope Benedict states: "Every Bishop should be in communion with other Bishops, and that all should be in visible and concrete communion with the Pope." He urges that there be a pardoning of wrong-doings, a forgetting of past injustices, and the accomplishment of reconciliation through Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Father then points to the causes of division in the Church in the past. These are external to the Church and have been imposed on the Catholic community. Recognition from these agencies make a community, a person or a religious venue legal and "official." The Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles, and the bishops are their successors. It is these who have the responsibility to pass on the teachings of Jesus. Pope Benedict writes: "It is clear that the claim of some agencies, desired by the State and extraneous to the structure of the Church, to place themselves above the Bishops does not correspond to Catholic doctrine." He goes on to say: "Likewise, the declared purpose of the afore-mentioned agencies to implement 'the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church' is incompatible with Catholic doctrine." The Holy Father says: therefore, the preaching of the

Gospel, liturgical and charitable activities, as well as pastoral choices to be made, belong uniquely to the Bishops, and cannot be subject to any external interference.

Pope Benedict then addresses a concrete problem: does recognition by the civil authorities compromise communion with the universal Church? He points out that the safeguarding of the deposit of faith and hierarchical communion is not in itself opposed to dialogue with the authorities on those matters that fall within the civil sphere. He continues: “There would not seem to be any particular difficulties with the acceptance of the recognition granted by civil authorities on the condition that this does not entail the denial of unrenounceable principles of faith and ecclesiastical communion. In not a few particular instances, however, indeed almost always, in the procedure of recognition the intervention of agencies obliges the people involved to adopt attitudes, make gestures and undertake commitments that are contrary to the dictates of their consciences as Catholics.” The Holy Father then gives a concrete example: “In recent years...Persons who are not ‘ordained’ and sometimes not even baptized, control and make decisions concerning important ecclesial questions, including the appointment of bishops, in the name of various State agencies...” A church that is ‘independent’ of the Holy See, in the religious sphere, is incompatible with Catholic doctrine, the Holy Father concludes.

Our authors: Archbishop Savio Hon, Father Paul Han, and *Tripod* English editor, Peter Barry address Pope Benedict’s Letter from various angles. *Tripod* Chinese editor, Anthony Lam, comments on the Revised Regulations on Religious Affairs which will come into effect on 1 February, 2018.

May our readers enjoy a Holy Christmas and a Blessed New Year! (PJB)