

## *Interview with Bishop John Tong on 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of His Ordination*

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Translated by Peter Barry, M.M.

*Recently the Hong Kong diocesan Chinese newspaper, Kung Kao Po, interviewed Auxiliary Bishop John Tong about the future needs of the diocese on the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of his ordination. The interview appeared in the January 10, 1999, issue of the newspaper (p. A4). Bishop Tong listed six areas that he thought should receive emphasis during 1999. The first five dealt with the Diocese of Hong Kong: training lay Catholics, on-going education of the clergy, the religious education of students in church-run schools, the development of Bishop Francis Hsu College into a tertiary educational institution, and support for the apostolate among Filipinos. The sixth dealt with concerns for the Catholic Church in Mainland China. We reprint the contents of this sixth point for our Tripod readers.*

### *The Chinese Catholic Church*

Regarding concerns for the Chinese Catholic Church, I wish to make two points: the first concerns support for the material and personnel needs of the church in Mainland China. In recent years much growth has taken place in the Chinese Catholic Church. Personnel have been trained, and more and more resources are coming into their hands. Therefore, they can now bear their own responsibilities, and they are actually doing so. This includes teaching and administrative duties. This is a healthy phenomenon, and one that we should support and encourage.

The second point concerns the “independent and autonomous administration of the church”, which is frequently mentioned on the mainland. First of all we should make a distinction between “autonomy” and “independence”, because the meaning of these two words is different. From the point of view of the universal church’s faith, the “autonomy” of the local church is permitted, and even affirmed. Every local bishop, following the concrete conditions which exist in his local area, and in accordance with the laws and spirit of the universal church, governs his own local church. On the

other hand, the local church cannot separate itself from the universal church and become “independent”. The embodiment of this principle is in the appointment of bishops.

According to Catholic Church tradition, the procedure for nominating bishops is open to discussion, and precedents can be cited. But as for the authority to appoint bishops, this belongs absolutely to the successor of the head of the apostles, the Pope himself. No other authority can intervene. For a local church to become “independent” and depart from this relationship with the Pope would mean that no longer could such a church be call a Catholic Church.

On the China mainland, the underground bishops are basically in full communion with the Holy Father. They are valid and legitimate bishops. As for the open church bishops, most of them desire to be in full communion with the Holy Father, and wish to obtain his approval and appointment. Actually, several of these bishops have already succeeded in arriving at full communion with the Pope, and have become valid and legitimate bishops.

History has proven that as governments have more trust in the church and permit the local church to maintain a hierarchical connection with the universal church, the contributions of this local church to society will be considerable and the international prestige of such a government greater. We sincerely hope that the central government authorities in Beijing will realize this point.

Bishop Tong  
at Mundelein  
Chicago,  
giving a  
retreat to  
young Chinese  
priests and  
Sisters  
studying in  
the USA.

