

Editorial

It sometimes happens in the course of human history that the best laid plans and intentions go awry. This has certainly been the case with the canonization on October 1, 2000 of 120 China martyrs. The reaction of the Chinese government to this event can only make us, on the outside, shake our heads and sigh.

How is it possible for an event meant to shed honor on people of heroic virtue, and on the country that produced such strength of character, be so badly misconstrued? What was meant as a joyous celebration has been mired in polemics. How is it possible for an event meant to be completely religious to end up charged with such political overtones? How can an event meant for peace end up misinterpreted as reprisal? How is it possible for an event meant to build bridges of reconciliation end up by fueling division? Are there answers to these painful questions? On reflecting on the situation, it seems that the Vatican's official, reverent, and low key statement provides perhaps the best answers.

"The statement of the spokesperson of Beijing's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sun Yuxi, on September 26, can only be a source of profound grief for anyone who sees the imminent canonization of 120 China martyrs as an exaltation of men and women, most of them Chinese citizens (87 out of 120), who knew how to live their faith commitment consistently, even to the giving of their very life.

"Next Sunday's ceremony has no political motivation whatsoever, and is not directed against anyone, especially not against the great Chinese people, whose cultural traditions have always been recognized and appreciated by the Holy See, and especially by John Paul II.

"To accuse this group of witnesses of 'monstrous crimes' (among whom are defenseless men and women of all ages) is the result of reading history from one side only, and it is baffling to say the least, if concrete proofs are not given.

"Obviously, the misdeeds sometimes committed by the colonial powers is another thing. But whoever reads the biographies of these well-deserving missionary men and women that will be canonized next Sunday, without bias, and objectively, can only be

impressed and in admiration of their self denial, and their desire to serve the Chinese people.

“Furthermore, as has been well noted, the Holy See proceeds with a beatification or a canonization only after a serious and profound examination, not only of sources and testimonies of history, but also of the heroic virtues of persons to be honored. How is it possible to imagine that the Holy See would canonize persons who had committed ‘monstrous crimes’? If it were true that the real story has been distorted, why has the Chinese community—civil and religious—not reacted against the processes of beatification of the 120 martyrs, already celebrated since 1893, under the pontificate of Leo XIII?”

“The canonization is not meant to form a judgment on the total historical period, during which the majority of the 120 martyrs were called to give the ultimate witness. The solemn ceremony rather intends to make the light of their faith in Christ, the Savior of all people, shine throughout the whole world.”

