

The 60th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Hierarchy in China

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This year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Catholic Church Hierarchy in China. It is also the 80th anniversary of the ordination of six Chinese priests as bishops. It is an occasion for rejoicing throughout the whole Catholic Chinese world because those events 80 and 60 years ago were signs of the “coming of age” of the Chinese Catholic Church. The establishment of the hierarchy meant that the local Chinese Catholic Church was set up, and that it was on a par with other local Catholic churches around the world.



After the first two Jesuit missionaries, Matteo Ricci and Michael Ruggieri, took up residence in China in 1583, the need to train a Chinese clergy was perceived early on. However, the learning of Latin was a problem. Therefore, in 1613, the Jesuits sent Nicholas Trigault to Rome to ask permission to train a Chinese clergy and to use a Chinese liturgy. On March 26, 1615, the Roman Congregation of Rites, under the leadership of Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, approved of the request. In the same year, Pope Pius V, with his decree *Romanae Sedis Antistitis*, granted permission for the Bible to be translated into Chinese, and for both foreign missionaries (the Jesuits) and Chinese priests to use Chinese for the Mass, the Breviary and for the administration of the sacraments.

However, Pope Pius V's permission was not put into use right

away. Turmoil accompanying the change of dynasties from the Ming to the Qing in 1644 caused the situation to be unsettled, leaving no chance to train a local Chinese clergy. Also, there were as yet no bishops around who could ordain new priests. In the meantime, under the direction of Father Buglio, the Roman Missal was translated into Chinese in 1670, the Breviary in 1674, and the Ritual in 1675. The translation of the whole Bible did not take place until the 18th century.

In 1678, both in January and August, Ferdinand Verbiest wrote to the Jesuit General, expressing the urgency for training Chinese priests. This was absolutely essential for putting the China mission on a solid foundation, he wrote. He observed that foreign priests were allowed to stay in China only because the Emperor was interested in European astronomy. But this could all change, Verbiest cautioned, and foreign priests could be expelled.

Such a circumstance had occurred in 1665, when all the foreign missionaries were expelled to Macao over an altercation with the Chinese Bureau of Rites about the accuracy of the calendar. Father Luo Wenzao, at that time the only Chinese priest in China, traveled throughout ten provinces preaching the Gospel, and baptizing and encouraging the Catholics. Born in 1616, Luo Wenzao joined the Dominicans in 1650. Archbishop Michael Pobleto of Manila ordained him a priest in 1654 or 1656 (both dates are given).

In the early 1670's Father Navaretto, O.P. recommended to Rome that Luo Wenzao be ordained a bishop. At about the same time, Bishop Pallu, one of the founders of the Paris Foreign Mission Society, and one of the Vicars Apostolic appointed by Rome for the Far East in the early 1660's, suggested that Rome appoint some Asian priests as Vicars Apostolic in Asia. Accordingly, on January 4, 1674, Pope Clement appointed Father Luo as Vicar Apostolic of Nanjing, with administration over Zhili (Hebei), Shandong, Shanxi, Henan, Shaanxi and Korea. Father Luo learned the news of his appointment in 1677, but humbly declined the honor. The next pope, Innocent XI, then wrote to the Dominican Superior General telling

him to command Father Luo to accept the appointment. The General's letter reached China only in 1681. Finally, Bishop Bernardo della Chiesa, OFM, of Beijing ordained Father Luo a bishop on April 8, 1685 in Guangzhou. Always in favor of developing the Chinese clergy, Bishop Luo, on August 1, 1688, ordained three Chinese Jesuits in Macao (Wan Qiyuan, 54, Wu Yushan, 57, and Lin Yunde, 60) to the priesthood. Bishop Luo died on February 27, 1691, and appointed his Vicar General, Father John di Leonessa, an Italian, as his successor.

During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, seminaries for Chinese clergy were established on foreign soil. The first was in Ayuthia, Siam, or present day Thailand, in the 1680's, and the second was the Chinese College of the Holy Family established by Father Matteo Ripa (1682-1745), a former missionary in China, in Naples in 1732. A good example of a priest trained at the Siam seminary was Father Andrew Li (1692-1774). He was ordained in 1725, and was the only priest in Sichuan Province for many years during the 18th century. He kept the Church alive in Sichuan during those years. The College of the Holy Family in Naples trained over one hundred Chinese priests. Thirty-three Chinese priests, many of them graduates from Holy Family College, were exiled to the deserts of Xinjiang during a persecution, which began in 1784. Four Holy Family graduates died under the duress connected with this persecution, as well as eight foreign missionaries.

Gianni Criveller, a researcher at Holy Spirit Study Centre, has uncovered and translated into English two remarkable Italian documents written by Monsignor Stefano Borgia in 1787 (during the abovementioned persecution), in which he advocated the formation of indigenous clergy in China as soon as possible. Monsignor Borgia was secretary of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide from 1770-1789, and prefect from August 1802 until his death in November 1804.

The number of Chinese priests in China gradually grew. Father Pascal D'Elia, S.J., from whose small book, *Catholic Native Episcopacy in China, 1300-1926*, much of the above material has

been taken, mentions that among the 456 members of the Society of Jesus (priests and lay brothers) who worked in China during the first two centuries of missionary activity (1581-1780), 81 were Chinese, of whom 48 were priests. He points out that during the first Catholic synod of China, held in Sichuan in 1803, of the 14 priests who participated, 13 of them were Chinese.

For a period of about 120 years, from the prohibition of Christianity by the Yong Zheng emperor in 1724 to after the Opium Wars in 1844, foreign missionaries were for the most part absent from China, unless they returned surreptitiously. It fell to the Chinese priests to preach the Gospel, often in arduous circumstances, and to develop the Church. After the missionaries returned in 1844, they established seminaries in China itself. Thus by 1870, there were 167 Chinese priests, in 1908, 609; and in 1926, when 6 Chinese priests were ordained bishops, there were 1,219 Chinese priests. There were also 1,864 foreign missionaries in China that year.

With the rise in numbers of Chinese clergy, the time became ripe to consider the next step, that is, raising native Chinese priests to the level of the episcopacy. During the first decades of the 20th century the names of two French Vincentian Fathers spring to mind as being associated with this cause, namely, Fathers Vincent Lebbe and Anthony Cotta. Their letters to Rome urging the creation of Chinese bishops influenced Pope Benedict XV to write his encyclical *Maximum Illud*, in which he advocated the building up a native clergy on the missions, to the point that the foreign missionary can turn the running of the local Church over to them. When a well-trained native clergy exists in sufficient numbers in a mission territory, Pope Benedict XV wrote, "There the missionary's work must be considered brought to a happy close; there the Church is founded."

In 1922, Celso Costantini, a fervent believer in raising Chinese priests to the episcopacy, was appointed as the Holy See's first Apostolic Delegate to China. The movement to put Chinese bishops in place in China began to gain momentum. Two Chinese

Prefects Apostolic were appointed to govern prefectures in 1924: Father Odoric Cheng, OFM, over Puqi in Hubei Province and Father Melchior Sun, CM over Lixian in Zhili (Hebei) Province. They both attended the first Plenary Synod of China, held in Shanghai, May 15-June 12, 1924, with all the other Vicars and Prefects Apostolic from throughout China.

On February 28, 1926, the next Pope, Pius XI, issued his famous mission encyclical, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, in which he returned to the same topic as his predecessor, Pope Benedict XV, namely the ordination of native bishops. "What is to prevent native clergy from governing their own people," he wrote. After the publication of the encyclical, the announcement of the appointment of six Chinese priests as bishops came in rapid succession during the following months. Two of the new bishops were Franciscans, two were Vincentians, one was a Jesuit, and one belonged to the diocesan clergy. The six priests and the vicariates over which they would be in charge were: Father Philip Zhao Huaiyi in Xuanhua, Father Melchior Sun Dezhen in Lixian, Father Odoric Cheng Hede in Puqi, Father Aloysius Chen Guodi in Fengyang, Father Joseph Hu Ruoshan in Taizhou, and Father Simon Zhu Kaimin in Haimen. The six new episcopal candidates traveled to Rome, where on October 28, 1926, Pope Pius XI ordained them bishops in a moving ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica. This year was the 80th anniversary of that great event.

The Establishment of the Hierarchy in 1946

Under the next Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, who assumed office in February 1939, further signs of growth in the Chinese Catholic Church were acknowledged. In 1939, Rome abolished the prohibitions against the Chinese Rites, which had been imposed 200 years previously, in 1704, 1715 and 1742. In 1943, diplomatic relations between the Vatican and China were established. In the Fall of 1945, Pope Pius XII nominated 34 Cardinals. Among them was a Chinese bishop from the vicariate apostolic of Qingdao in

Shandong Province, Thomas Tian Gengxin. Some people thought that a better choice would have been Bishop Paul Yu Bin of the Nanjing Diocese, who being a counselor to the Nationalist Government, was more famous. However, Father Stanislaus Luo Guang, who at that time was working in the Vatican, observed that, since Bishop Yu Bin was still young, there were many chances for him to become a Cardinal in the future. Bishop Yu Bin eventually became a Cardinal in May 1969.

Pope Pius XII bestowed the Cardinal's red hat on Bishop Tian Gengxin on February 18, 1946. He became the first Cardinal in East Asia. On the same day, the new Cardinal sent a letter to the Congregation of Propaganda Fide requesting that the Catholic Church Hierarchy be set up in China. Two months later, on April 11, 1946, with the decree *Quotidie Nos*, Pope Pius officially established the Chinese Catholic Hierarchy, putting the Chinese Catholic Church on an equal footing with other national churches around the world. The local Chinese Catholic Church came into existence. On the same day Pope Pius also appointed Cardinal Tian Gengxin archbishop of Beijing.

The decree *Quotidie Nos*, established 137 ecclesiastical divisions in China: 20 provinces (archdioceses), 79 dioceses (the former vicariates apostolic were raised to dioceses) and 38 prefectures (not very well developed mission territories). Three Chinese bishops headed provinces (becoming archbishops in the process). They were Cardinal Tian in Beijing, Archbishop Paul Yu Bin in Nanjing and Archbishop Zhou Jishi in Nanchang. Eighteen Chinese priests were appointed bishops to head 18 dioceses, and 7 Chinese priests were appointed to head prefectures. Thus 28 Chinese clergymen became members of the Chinese hierarchy. Foreign missionaries headed the other ecclesiastical territories, but as time went on, more and more Chinese leaders were appointed to replace them.

The bishop of each diocese is the real pastor of that place. An archbishop is the supervisor over a province or region containing a number of dioceses. The diocesan bishops (ordinaries) are suffragan bishops to the archbishop, who is sometimes called a metropolitan.

The archbishop has the power of supervision and discipline over the diocesan bishops. He also has the responsibility for calling a provincial synod.

The archdioceses and dioceses in the hierarchical structure are listed (in today's romanization) below (the first named city is the metropolitan see, or the place where the archbishop resides, followed by the names of the suffragan sees):

1. Mongolia: Suiyuan, Ningxia, Siwanzi, Jining.
2. Manchuria: Shenyang, Jilin, Fushun, Xipingjie, Yanji, Rehe.
3. Hebei: Beiping, Anguo, Zhaoxian, Xianxian, Zhengding, Baoding, Xingtai, Xuanhua, Tianjin, Yongnian, Yongping.
4. Shandong: Jinan, Yantai, Zhoucun, Yizhou, Caozhou, Qingdao, Yanggu, Yanzhou.
5. Shanxi: Taiyuan, Fenyang, Lu'an, Shouzhou, Datong, Yuci.
6. Shaanxi: Xi'an, Fengxiang, Nanzhong, Sanyuan, Yanan.
7. Gansu: Lanzhou, Tianshui.
8. Jiangsu: Nanjing, Haimen, Shanghai, Xuzhou
9. Anhui: Anqing, Bengbu, Wuhu.
10. Henan: Kaifeng, Zhengzhou, Zhumadian, Guide, Luoyang, Xinyang, Weihui.
11. Sichuan: Chongqing, Chengdu, Jiading, Ningyuan, Shunqing, Xufu, Kangding, Wanxian.
12. Hubei: Hankou, Hanyang, Yichang, Jizhou, Laohekou, Shinan, Wuchang.
13. Hunan: Changsha, Changde, Hengyang, Yuanling.
14. Jiangxi: Nanchang, Ganzhou, Ji'an, Nancheng, Yujiang.
15. Zhejiang: Hangzhou, Ningbo, Taizhou.
16. Fujian: Fuzhou, Xiamen, Funing.
17. Guangdong: Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Jiaying, Jiangmen, Beihai, Shaozhou, Shantou.
18. Guangxi: Nanning, Wuzhou.
19. Guizhou: Guiyang, Anlong.
20. Yunnan: Kunming, Dali.

(From Yang Chuanliang of Bibliography, pp. 190-191)

Although many of the names have changed, and some dioceses have been combined with others, the above basically represents the hierarchical structure of the Chinese Catholic Church in existence in China today.

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The newly consecrated Chinese bishops, October 28, 1926.

From left: Bp. Zhu Kaimin (Haimen), Bp. Hu Ruoshan (Taizhou), Bp. Chen Guodi (Fengyang), Bp. Zhao Huaiyi (Xuanhua), Bp. Cheng Hede (Puqi), and Bp. Sun Dezhen (Lixian).



Bp. Zhu of Haimen with his seminarians.