

## DOCUMENTATION

### *Vatican's Communique on Illicit Ordination*

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*Vatican Press Office*

*An episcopal ordination took place in mainland China on November 30, 2006, without the Holy See's approval. In response to this, the Vatican Press Office issued a communique. The following is the complete text.*

VATICAN CITY, DEC 2, 2006 (VIS) — The Holy See Press Office today released the following communique:

“The Holy See feels the duty to communicate its position regarding the episcopal ordination of Fr. John Wang Renlei, which took place on November 30 at Xuzhou, in the province of Jiangsu, China.

“The Holy Father learned the news with great sadness, because this episcopal ordination was conferred without the pontifical mandate, in other words without respecting the discipline of the Catholic Church concerning the appointment of bishops (cf. canon 377 para. 1 of the Code of Canon Law).

“That of Xuzhou is just the latest—in order of time—of the illegitimate episcopal ordinations which have been afflicting the Catholic Church in China for a number of decades, creating divisions in diocesan communities and tormenting the consciences of many ecclesiastics and faithful. This extremely grave series of acts, which offend the religious sentiments of all Catholics in China and the rest of the world, is the fruit and consequence of a vision of the Church that does not correspond to Catholic doctrine and undermines the fundamental principles of her hierarchical structure.

Indeed, as Vatican Council II makes clear, ‘one is constituted a member of the episcopal body in virtue of sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body.’

“The Holy See, having learned only at the last minute of the planned episcopal ordination in the diocese of Xuzhou, did not fail to take the steps possible in the brief time available in order to prevent an act that would have produced a fresh laceration in ecclesial communion. In fact, an illegitimate episcopal ordination is an act objectively so serious that Canon Law lays down severe penalties for those who confer or receive it, assuming the act was carried out in conditions of true freedom (cf. canon 1382 para. 1 of the Code of Canon Law).

“It is a consolation to note that, despite past and present difficulties, almost the entirety of bishops, priests, religious and lay people in China, conscious of their status as living limbs of the Universal Church, have maintained a profound communion of faith and of life with Peter’s Successor and with all Catholic communities around the world.

“The Holy See is aware of the spiritual crisis and suffering of those ecclesiastics—consecrating bishops and ordinands—who find themselves compelled to be an active part of illegitimate episcopal ordinations, thus contravening the Catholic tradition which, in their hearts, they would like to follow faithfully. The Holy See also shares the interior disquiet of those Catholics—priests, religious and laity—who find themselves obliged to accept a pastor whom they know is not in full hierarchical communion with the head of the College of Bishops or with other bishops around the world.

“As regards these episcopal ordinations, the Holy See cannot accept being faced with a ‘fait accompli.’ Therefore, it deplors the procedure with which the ordination of Fr. Wang Renlei in Xuzhou was carried out, and hopes that incidents of this kind will not be repeated in the future.”