

EDITORIAL

The Holy See issued two documents earlier this year, which have immense importance for the Catholic Church in China, namely, a *Compendium*, issued on May 24, of Pope Benedict's 2007 *Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and Catholics of China*, and the Holy Father's June 19 announcement of the *Year for Priests*.

The *Compendium* clarifies certain questions, which arose as different individuals read the original letter. It quotes the Holy Father's words in the original letter to answer these questions. However, footnotes #2 and #5 of the *Compendium* are especially helpful in shedding light on the meaning of some vocabulary in the original letter. One of these words is "reconciliation." It is true that the Holy Father in his original letter encouraged reconciliation between the members of the "open" Catholic Church and the members of the "clandestine" Catholic Church. This led to confusion in the minds of some Catholics. Was the Holy Father urging the "clandestine" Catholics to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA)? Footnote #2 of the *Compendium* explains that the Holy Father was talking about "spiritual reconciliation," and not "structural reconciliation." In other words, at this preliminary stage of the "journey of reconciliation," Catholics from both communities can be working on efforts of loving one another, and leave "structural reconciliation" for sometime in the future. The time may not be ripe for "structural reconciliation." Indeed, in his original letter, the Holy Father pointed to "agencies" controlling the Church, which are "incompatible with Catholic doctrine." In a footnote in the original letter he mentioned the CCPA. Even without the *Compendium's* explanation in footnote #2, Catholics should realize that they should not join an organization that is incompatible with Catholic doctrine.

A related issue is dealt with in footnote #5. It concerns recognition of a Catholic community by the government. Footnote

#5 states that civil recognition may be accepted “on condition that this does not entail the denial of unrenounceable principles of faith and of ecclesiastical communion.” However, “almost always” people are obliged “to adopt attitudes, make gestures and undertake commitments that are contrary to the dictates of their consciences as Catholics.” Bishops and priests are urged to exercise caution and to consider the “constraints imposed.” Footnote #5 adds that help with the decision can be sought from the Holy See.

The second document from the Holy See this year was the Letter of Pope Benedict proclaiming the Year for Priests on the 150th anniversary of the death of St. John Vianney. The Holy Father wrote that the Year of Priests is “meant to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world.” According to a Fides news report on June 19, the Feast of the Sacred Heart this year, many parishes in China marked the beginning of the Year for Priest with Masses, Adoration and prayers for priests all over the world. Catholic websites offered special features on the priesthood, and reflections on the life of St. Vianney. Father Peter Zhao Jianmin, vicar general of the Diocese of Beijing and director of the Beijing Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture, offered to priests and seminarians 5,000 copies of the new edition of his book *Priests Today: A Reflection on the 1965 Second Vatican Council Decree Presbyterorum Ordinis*.

In China, as old bishops and priests are passing away, 40-some year old young priests are more and more taking up positions of leadership in their dioceses. There are no middle-aged clergy. So, the young priests need the support, encouragement and graces that this Year for Priests will hopefully bring.

The theme of this issue of *Tripod* is a continuation of the last issue, namely the 60th anniversary of the Founding of the People’s Republic of China. Articles by Ching Cheong, Leo Goodstadt, and Anthony Lam address this topic. Before ending, we must give credit to PIME’s *AsiaNews* for the interview with Bishop John Tong of Hong Kong, carried in *Tripod* No. 153, which was originally done for them. Due to an oversight, we neglected to do this. (PJB)