

# The Catholic Church in China

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## Part I: Elements of the Situation

Much has happened since the death of Mao Zedong (1893-1976), and much has been written about “reconciliation” between the People’s Republic of China and the Catholic Church. China remains Christianity’s monumental challenge of the century — one billion Chinese face one billion Christians. Both groups, Christians believe, are jointly committed to partnership in the service of the Chinese people. This commitment, and its corresponding mission, is acutely felt by the Catholic Church. The sheer number of people involved indicates the magnitude of the task ahead.

### *Official Policy on Religion and the Catholic Church*

The party organ in charge of religious affairs is the United Front Work Department. The United Front controls and staffs the government’s Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), and both organs work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Public Security, the national police system. The RAB controls five “People’s Religious Organisations”: The Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), and the Islamic, Buddhist and Taoist Associations. These five Associations share what is in essence the same political task: to lead their followers in support of party and state goals, such as the Four Modernisations, and to nip any “anti-revolutionary” movements in the bud.

The CCPA was established under duress in 1953. In order to separate the government organisation from the religious organisation, two supplementary bodies were created: the Catholic National Administrative Commission and the Catholic Bishops’ College. In fact, the distinction between the three organs is theoretical. Their staff and the nature of the instructions which they receive from higher authority are largely the same. No decision can be taken without government consent.

Government control must be exercised, theoretically at least, in the spirit of the "freedom of religion" guaranteed by the constitution. In practice, however, it is explicated in an abundance of statements, such as the March 1982 Document 19, which stipulated that "all religious affairs must be conducted only under and through the Patriotic Associations", and "religious infiltration, especially by the Vatican and by Protestant missions, must be resisted". China is wrenching its new version of a Marxist economy into the 20th century. In 1986, there are signs that this could also herald a move towards greater freedom of religion, but the changes are subtle and brittle, and often undermined by reprisals against Catholic leaders. For example, in 1983 Bishop Joseph Fan Xueyan and his vicar-general, Father Huo Binzhang, were accused of "colluding with anti-Chinese foreign forces (the Vatican) with the aim of jeopardising the security of the motherland". The penalty was ten years in prison. The bishop had already been gaoled from 1958 to 1979 for his religious beliefs. There is also, however, another side to the coin: Party Secretary Hu Yaobang [dismissed January 1987 — *Ed.*] declared at a news conference in Rome on 21 June 1986 that "China is willing to discuss relations with the Vatican, after some difficulties have been removed." Officially, these difficulties are two: the diplomatic ties between Taiwan and the Vatican, and the independence of the Chinese Church from the Pope. Both problems, as is well-known, are actively studied by the Vatican, and no doubt open to diplomatic negotiation.

Chinese papers are fond of declaring that "Freedom of Religion Wins Respect".<sup>1</sup> We are told that there are "tens of millions of religious believers in China today". The Central Committee's new regulations, spelt out in Document 19, are credited with having made such "freedom" possible. Under the new regulations: "Non-believers are forbidden to preach atheism in and around temples, monasteries and churches." The results are there for all to see: "After complete renovation, 40,000 temples, monasteries and mosques have opened to the public. Most had been badly damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution." A carping tongue may remark that these repairs were carried out to promote tourism and not to benefit religious believers. This is true, but the shrines also provide an outlet for folk devotions hitherto forbidden as "superstition".

In 1986 tourist guides have expressed a budding pride in "a revival of religion". These guides are, of course, unaware of the 1984 and 1985 Amnesty International reports on China, which state that "it is impossible to estimate the number of people imprisoned for their beliefs, but estimates published by several prisons put the number of

<sup>1</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, 17 November 1985.

'political' prisoners at 3 per cent.'" In China, religion belongs to the domain of politics. Thus the best-known prisoner is the Vatican-approved Bishop of Shanghai, Gong Pinmei, who was arrested on 8 September 1955, and condemned to life imprisonment in 1960 on charges of leading "a counter-revolutionary clique under the cloak of religion". After much foreign pressure had been brought to bear on the government, Gong was released on parole on 3 July 1985, exchanging prison for what looks like house-arrest. Nevertheless, as we shall point out, there are signs of improvement for the Catholic Church.

### *The CCPA, Mouthpiece of the Government*

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Catholic Church in China is the nature and behaviour of the CCPA. Mention it and one is forced to declare colours. In the foreign press, no other topic has led to so many contradictory statements. For the government and the few Catholics willing to follow its directives, the CCPA, although an "association" and not a "church", is the only fold to which Catholics do or should belong.

It must be remembered that the CCPA was set up by the government in 1957, and that priests and laity were forced to sign a statement pledging allegiance to the PRC and relinquishing loyalty to Rome. Refusal often meant a return to prison. From 1955 onwards, the government ordered the illicit consecration of bishops. Since that time, some fifty or more priests have been consecrated bishops. It is reported that some of them have been asked to swear an oath not to have any dealings with the Pope. A full list of names of the bishops and their sees has never been published. One bishop recently told this author: "I don't know how many bishops there are in China: we have no contact with one another." At irregular intervals the CCPA publishes *The Catholic Church in China*, a government-controlled gyroscope for religious news. Few bishops take it seriously, and not all receive it.

Who belongs to the CCPA? There is no adequate answer to this question, partly because of the secrecy with which the government surrounds the non-official Catholic Church in China. After many visits (the last one being in May 1986), I have come to the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of Catholics refuse to have anything to do with the CCPA and retain a firm allegiance to Rome. It is true that many accept the sacraments from the hands of "patriotic" priests but, at the first opportunity, faithful Catholics will vote with their feet. The visit of Cardinal Sin to Beijing in October 1985, that of

Bishop Wu of Hong Kong in January 1986 when visiting his mother, and an announcement that Bishop Gong Pinmei would say a public Mass in Shanghai all serve as examples. On each of these occasions, thousands of Catholics turned out to pay homage to churchmen who are close to the Pope or who have been imprisoned for their loyalty to Rome. During the visits of Bishops Gong and Wu, the faithful were driven away at the request of the CCPA, who were appalled at the size of the crowds.

### *Impressions of the CCPA*

It is imperative to keep in mind the basic distinction between the CCPA and the Catholic Church in China, not only because the CCPA correctly declares that it is not a church, but above all because, according to the convergent testimonies of many recent visitors, agreement among Catholics with the CCPA is by now a rare phenomenon. As Bishop Fu Tieshan of Beijing put it: "Many Catholics despise the CCPA." In fact, that may even be an understatement. Yet, in all honesty, it must be admitted that not enough is known about the church in China to arrive at any real conclusions. How many "patriotic bishops" feel that they should bow to CCPA directives? How many have secretly contacted the Pope to express their continuing loyalty? If government pressure were removed, how many would in fact refuse to enter in communion with the Vatican? No one knows, but from the repeated utterances of Bishop Fu and Bishop Tu Shihua, rector of the national seminary at Beijing, much is happening that is beyond the control of the government, and there is a thriving "underground church". The government is aware that, by and large, the Catholic Church in China repudiates the package deal which has been imposed on it, and that nobody believes the government's communiqués on religion. New official policy is to leave well enough alone and to deflect foreign attention from the lack of religious freedom in the country. The Catholic Church profits from this benign neglect. It is an open secret that a number of bishops have recently been consecrated with Rome's approval, and that hundreds of young men are being prepared for the priesthood by individual priests all over the country. In all this, it seems, the government is making a leisurely U-turn, as it is doing in matters economic and political.

*The CCPA's Achievements*

What has just been said, it is emphatically stressed, does not imply any judgement on the personal integrity of bishops and others who sincerely believe in the role of the CCPA. One sympathises with well-meaning people long starved of objective news, and who in many cases had spent lengthy periods in prison, who gave their names to the CCPA and allowed themselves to be consecrated bishops. Nor is there any reason to question the material achievements of the CCPA. It claims that some four hundred churches have now been opened. In 1938, there were 2,187 churches and 13,000 chapels. There are now some two hundred seminarians in seven training centres. In 1948, there were 924 seminarians. Recently, priests faithful to Rome have been allowed to say Mass in the patriotic churches, the only churches open to the public, and on 24 December 1985, to the acclaim of thousands of Catholics, the Beitang, Beijing's venerable cathedral, was reopened for worship. The reopening of this church, soon to be followed by the reopening of a fourth Catholic church in the capital, is in line with government policy, which has restored to the care of the CCPA many Catholic churches which had been partially or completely destroyed. The faithful have even been invited to solicit foreign funds to rebuild their churches. Many priests have been released from work camps, although often without restoration of their civil rights, and the release of Bishop Gong Pinmei has been mentioned. The role which the CCPA played in this last matter is uncertain, but the acting Bishop of Shanghai (Gong's illegitimate successor), who has often expressed disapproval of Gong's conduct, now has the venerable prisoner in his care, a charade which, it was reported, prompted Gong to ask permission to return to prison. Many observers are convinced that the government is wisely preparing to abandon the CCPA's sinking ship. This could be done through the establishment of a new *modus vivendi* with the Vatican, about which later. Meanwhile, the government appears to have noted Bishop Fu's words: "There could be three million Catholics in China who retain a secret allegiance to the Vatican."<sup>2</sup> This would mean eighty per cent of all Chinese Catholics. Reconciliation with the Vatican, therefore, is fast becoming a necessity.

*Bishop Fu Tieshan, Spokesman for the CCPA*

No-one illustrates better the official attitude of the CCPA than the Bishop of Beijing, Michael Fu Tieshan. In numerous interviews and

<sup>2</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 7 November 1984.

statements, he has never missed an opportunity to attack the Pope and praise the government. The Pope has said that he has tried "on several occasions to make contact with Bishop Fu, but all in vain". The following statements made by Fu Tieshan afford an insight into the nature of the official CCPA leadership, and also, no doubt, into government thinking.

We believe in God. At the same time, we are citizens of the PRC. We support the Communist Party, although we do not believe in atheism . . . It is my duty to help the government to implement the policy of religious freedom under the leadership of the Communist Party until all believers acquire a spirit of patriotism and follow the policies of the state . . . We are not a schismatic church but an independent church . . . The Vatican is interfering with China's internal affairs through contacts with Taiwan Catholics and the secret appointment of Chinese bishops. Such actions by the Vatican, which disregard the right of Chinese Catholics to self-government, have obstructed exchanges between Chinese Catholics and the Vatican and have created confusion amongst Chinese Catholics. As an independent and autonomous religious organisation, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association is willing to conduct friendly exchanges with Catholics worldwide on the basis of equality and friendship. Since the early 1980s the Association has been establishing contacts with religious believers in many parts of the world.<sup>3</sup>

The same article adds:

Bishop Fu was elected as a standing committee member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on 11 April. Over the past few years, he has met more than 30,000 Catholics from other countries and visited Canada (1981), Belgium (1985), and the United States (1986). He has been active in the development of Sino-foreign Catholic exchanges.

### *Bishop Jin as Mediator?*

Over the last two years Aloysius Jin Luxian, the Patriotic Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai, has practically stolen the limelight from Bishop Fu Tieshan. He has travelled to Hong Kong and Macau, to Manila, and in April-May 1986 to Germany, where he spent twenty days. Jin

<sup>3</sup> This quotation is taken from an interview given by Bishop Fu to the official New China News Agency, 12 April 1986.

has spent long years in prison, and worked in the service of the government as a translator. He speaks several European languages, is a self-taught reader of Russian, is affable and articulate and is universally considered extremely capable. He is perhaps the best spokesman for China's religious policy, not because he defends it, but because he puts the burden of blame for the situation squarely on the Vatican. During a ninety-minute conference at St Augustin near Bonn on 19 April, Jin repeated all the old arguments: Rome's intent to dominate the Chinese Church; its colonialist and aggressive attitude towards China; its refusal to go along with communism, its slowness in appointing Chinese bishops, etc. There was no mention of the persecution under which the church has suffered and continues to suffer; not one word about the complete subservience of the CCPA to the government or about the abnormal canonical situation in which the Chinese bishops find themselves. Jin hints at the possibility of his serving as a mediator between Beijing and Rome, and it has been reported — without any evidence — that Rome would not be averse to using his services.

Jin is rector of the Sheshan seminary near Shanghai. The seminary has recently been enlarged, thanks to Jin's worldwide fundraising. The new seminary cost US\$705,000, of which Shanghai diocese paid half. In an interview on 13 May 1985, Jin clearly outlined his doctrinal position:

We really do have religious freedom, and it is permanent. We are Catholics. We want communion as brothers, not as subjects. Our relationship with the Vatican is a complex problem. We want to be autonomous, but united with the whole church. Seminarians do not have to join the CCPA. I myself am not a member. The government helps us in our religious life — it gives us a free hand.

Jin's statement raised more than a few questions. But then, so does the nature of the CCPA itself.

### *The Church Survives*

Catholic doctrine insists on the sacramental life, a life which depends on the presence of priests and bishops under normal circumstances. A church without priests and bishops could not long survive. Hence the need for seminaries. Here, it would seem, the wishes of the CCPA coincide with a greater openness on the government's side, and seven new seminaries have recently been established — parallel to similar institutions among Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists and Taoists. A

considerable amount of information about these Catholic training institutes is available. Visitors have reported on their curriculum — the traditional one — and on their students, who are alert and eager to learn. According to Bishop Jin, they are also undisciplined, but they recently made an excellent impression on this author.

The management of the half dozen or more Catholic seminaries is entrusted to the CCPA. The students are often housed in restricted quarters, teaching staff are not always competent, and there is a shortage of books. It has been reported that some students are not *bona fide* candidates for the priesthood but government agents — an allegation vigorously denied by Bishop Jin. More disquieting is the attitude of at least one well-known seminary rector, Bishop Tu Shihua, who said:

After being selected by the clergy and the laity in the local church concerned, each bishop is immediately empowered to govern his church by virtue of his episcopal consecration . . . The bishop of a local church neither receives his powers by the appointment or ratification of the Pope, nor exercises them as his delegate. The local church, headed by the bishop, enjoys the right of independent self-rule and self-management . . . No other bishop is allowed to interfere with, restrict, or still less deprive a bishop of the ordinary, immediate, and proper power accorded to him by God. On the contrary, that power must be respected.

We shall return to this difficult question, which seems greatly to exercise the CCPA and the government.

Recent visitors have brought back abundant details of Catholic life outside the major cities. Increasingly, reports tell of the fervour of the faithful in attending Mass and receiving the sacraments, and visitors are convinced that there is a significant increase in the number of Catholics. Catholics in China are usually said to number from about three to six million. As about 1,400 priests and 2,000 religious sisters have been sent to work as private citizens in the former communes, or are in gaol or labour camps, the task of teaching the faith to children and catechumens is borne by parents, friends, and “barefoot catechists”, most of them women. The loss of clergy and the attitude of the CCPA — who accept without question the government’s directives and moral standards on marriage, divorce, abortion and contraception — throw a number of delicate problems on the path of pastoral workers. The new type of “evangelist” is known to and appreciated by the masses.

We also know about their life of prayer and mutual support. One practical expression of this support is seen in predominantly Catholic villages where people help one another to observe the one-child quota



by arranging the adoption of children by otherwise childless couples. They bow to the government, and accept official work, but without putting their faith at risk. In many Christian villages, particularly in the north, the local officials are Catholic, and grant complete freedom to their communities. Many ministries which are usually reserved to priests, such as the dispensing of some sacraments, have been taken over by the laity, but it is not rare to see Catholics travel a hundred kilometres and more to attend a Mass celebrated by a visiting foreign priest. There have been reports of wondrous events, even miracles. Be that as it may, the greatest miracle is the very survival of these simple people under extreme duress. As one old man told me: "The most they can do is send us back to gaol!"

As Chinese, Catholics have retained the essential qualities of their noble nation: moderation and inclination to compromise rather than violence and revolt; respect for authority and the natural order of things; strength of will concealed within a courteous gentleness; gay and brave resignation coupled with endless and resourceful patience; boundless self-respect contained in a lasting sense of humour. They quote the age-old saying: *Shen chu, gui mo* or "Gods appear, ghosts vanish." History is unpredictable, but in the book of life theirs will surely be a glorious chapter.

## Part II: The Vatican and the Church in China

### *Towards Reconciliation: An Independent View*

Father Louis Wei, a former Chinese diplomat once stationed in Rome, is a well-known historian and author. In 1984, Wei went to Rome and presented a lengthy document which stated, perhaps for the first time, a set of conditions on which an understanding between Beijing and Rome might be possible. This document has been published in its entirety in *China Update*, 15 (Spring 1986), and is strongly recommended as a concomitant to the present article.

### *The Pope and the Church in China*

Pope John Paul II's pronouncements and interventions on behalf of the church in China are too many for enumeration here. On the occasion of the election of Bishop Fu Tieshan to the see of Beijing in

1979, the Vatican press bureau let it be known that "The Holy Father did not authorise, let alone approve of, the election." A few days later, on 19 August, Tang Ludao, General Secretary of the CCPA, angrily retorted: "We denounce the Vatican's blatant interference in the internal affairs of churches in other countries . . . The power to nominate bishops comes directly from God. The voice of the people is the voice of God." Similar attacks have since become familiar. On the Pope's side, there have been frequent references to "an improvement in the situation, justifying hope for the future", the earliest one appearing on 27 August 1979.<sup>4</sup> Bishop Fu reacted angrily: "The onus is on the Vatican to recognise the independence of the Chinese Catholic Church. Until this happens, there is no room for dialogue with the Vatican on religious matters."<sup>5</sup> Since then, it would seem, Fu has not changed his mind. Meanwhile the Pope has continued to voice his inmost feelings:

As Christmas draws near, I send my greetings and good wishes to the sons of the Catholic Church in China, as to all the members of that great nation, renewing the hope that there may be positive developments which will mark for our brothers and sisters of the Chinese continent the possibility of enjoying full religious freedom.<sup>6</sup>

At the Ricci celebration in Rome on 25 October 1982, the Pope referred to "the common heritage of the church in China, which is a solemn and symbolic reference point for a constructive dialogue directed toward the future since, as I said in Manila on 18 February 1981, it is the future to which we must look."<sup>7</sup>

In the same vein as the Manila speech, the Pope pleaded with the CCPA from Seoul, Korea, "to live the faith in full communion with the universal church, to the joy and enrichment of all". Since the Manila speech, it is no secret that the Pope desires some day to visit China.

Meanwhile, many keep vigil with the Pope at the Vatican. "The Vatican acknowledged yesterday that, despite repeated efforts, it had not been able to establish any official contact with government or Catholic Church authorities in China." To these words, Cardinal Casaroli, the Pope's Secretary of State, added: "An extremely bold gesture might be needed to establish regular contacts with China."<sup>8</sup> Cardinal Casaroli's remarks were obviously an indirect reference to the results of Cardinal Sin's trip to China.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, Eng. ed.

<sup>5</sup> *Le Monde*, 29 August 1979.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 August 1979.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 November 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Associated Press, Vatican City, 19 November 1984.

We have mentioned what seem to be two main obstacles to reconciliation, one of them being Vatican-Taiwan diplomatic relations. Casaroli is on record as having said that "this matter could conveniently be solved". There remains the second obstacle. As the Associated Press report puts it, it is "the refusal by the CCPA to accept papal authority". But is this the case? Cardinal Sin and other visitors to China have pointed out that the refusal to enter communion with the Vatican which is voiced by the CCPA does not represent a refusal on the part of Chinese churchmen, but is simply the voice of their master, the Communist Party. It might be said that for the Chinese government to clear their name with the civilised nations of the world on the question of religious freedom, all they would have to do would be to open free communications between the Chinese Church, Patriotic and/or other, so that Catholics in China could begin serious conversations with Rome. Why should the government hold back when it has the opportunity of gaining world-wide respect, and of allaying all misgivings related to the freedom of religion in their country? What does it have to fear from a tiny minority?

In March 1986, the Vatican organised a secret three-day summit meeting on relations between Communist China and the Catholic Church. The meeting, attended by 15 experts, was called by Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples (*Propaganda Fide*). It was rumoured that guidelines concerning contact with the CCPA and other Catholics are about to be published. According to Bishop Sanchez, Secretary of the Congregation, the meeting discussed "the delicate problem of the Chinese government's attempts to control the Catholic Church".<sup>9</sup> This last statement is important, although its implications are often forgotten, even by Catholic writers. To put it bluntly, should a reconciliation between the Chinese government and the Vatican occur, it will not be dictated or inspired by the CCPA, but by Beijing's pragmatic interests. Whatever the government's decision, it will be meekly followed by the CCPA. This fact determines the parameters of mutual dialogue, not only from the political but, above all, from the theological point of view.

### *Obstacles to Reconciliation*

From a Roman Catholic point of view, it is necessary to put the obstacles to reconciliation in their true theological light. Anything less would be irrelevant and counter-productive. Let us review the main obstacles, assuming the fidelity to the faith and to the Pope of the

<sup>9</sup>*Sunday Examiner*, 25 April 1986

overwhelming majority of the Chinese Catholics, priests and bishops.

1. The first obstacle, at least in the government's view, is Taiwan and the fact that the Holy See maintains diplomatic relations with that "part of China". This obstacle has no real substance. The Vatican has discussed all future eventualities with the bishops of Taiwan; their faithful would accept whatever solution their pastors proposed. As for the Beijing side, if, as they claim, the matter is of a diplomatic nature, it could be solved through diplomatic negotiations. Mr Hu Yaobang's recent visit to Rome, and his reluctance to meet Vatican representatives, seems to indicate that no serious dialogue has begun. China blames the Vatican for a diplomatic impasse, and yet refuses to engage in such diplomatic dialogue. With regard to the PRC's view of Vatican relations with Taiwan, some observers spot serious contradictions. They note that, although Taiwan receives all sorts of help from the USA, China still maintains good relations with that country, and also, that Beijing claims repeatedly that the nuncio, Archbishop Riberi, left China for Taiwan. The truth is that the communists threw him out. Why, then, should the Vatican representative not be asked to return to Beijing?

2. The second obstacle is raised by Article 36 of the 4 December 1982 constitution, which refers to religion. It is one of 24 articles defining the "Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens". This is the text:

Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organisation or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state safeguards normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion in order to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.

The Bishop of Beijing, Fu Tieshan, commenting on Article 36, said he believed that it would assure "a healthy development of all religions". He accused "some foreign churches" of trying to control the churches in China, adding: "The provision in the new constitution which stipulates that no foreign churches may dominate Chinese churches reflects the desire of Chinese Catholics, who run their churches independently." The publication of Fu's comment was followed by a flood of similar remarks. Most analysts deplored the vagueness of the

terms used in the Article. Others quite plainly read in them that “if a Catholic is not a member of the CCPA, he is acting against the constitution”. Or in other words: “If you are pro-party and pro-government, you can enjoy freedom of religion.” In China (and elsewhere) policy is one thing, implementation is another. It must be said, however, that in the four or five years which have passed since the constitution was agreed, with a few exceptions, it has not been applied lopsidedly against Catholic believers. This is entirely due to the goodwill of the government, rather than to that of the CCPA. We shall discuss the problem of “independence from foreign domination” hereafter. Meanwhile let it be said that the whole problem of freedom of religion lies in the context of respect for basic human rights. By no other standard should the new constitution be judged; with no other standard can the Catholic Church — or the Chinese people — be satisfied.

3. The third obstacle is the constitutional clause: “Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.” I have meticulously analysed all available comments on this phrase, also comparing them with China’s former constitutions. Legal minds have complained about the imprecision of the clause. Its intent has been clearly expressed by Anglican Bishop K. H. Ting, president of the Protestant Three-Self Movement:

The last statement says that religion is not to be controlled or dominated by a foreign country. I personally supported it. That is, supported the inclusion of this sentence in this article . . . When our committee discussed and decided to put in this clause, we were thinking entirely of the interference of certain Roman Catholic groups in the domestic scene of China.

K. H. Ting may be right as to its origin and intent, but he is not an authoritative exegete of the constitution. Meanwhile, the “independence” of the Chinese Church from the Vatican has been stressed much more often by the CCPA than by the government. Recent official statements seem to leave the door wide open for future accommodations. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish between the “political” implications of the clause and its “theological” content.

As to the political aspect, since Vatican II, the Vatican has repeated time and again, with the agreement of the world-church, that papal authority excludes any form of “domination” — it is essentially a service dedicated to the unity of the church. To ignore this betrays either gross ignorance or ill will. In the case of China, we need not take either for granted. To clear up this point, let us now consider the theological aspects of the matter.

While one can understand that the Chinese government might think of the papal government as similar to itself, that is, one which behaves as did the emperors of yore, disposing of the life of its citizens, and arrogating to a few leaders all authority over the nation — People's Congresses and "the will of the masses" notwithstanding, such are the undisputed facts — it would in fact be a travesty to project such a pattern of rule onto the leadership of the church. Any CCPA bishop knows that much. Since Vatican II, the practice and formulation of papal authority has undergone considerable change. When Patriotic Bishop Jin Luxian says that "the churches, the Patriotic Church, and Rome, are equal — equal like the Persons of the Holy Trinity" — he is talking theological nonsense, as we now hope to show.

According to Vatican II and its authoritative commentators, the universal Church consists of the community of the local churches. By "local church" is meant any religious community that has a social organisation such as a parish, a diocese, or a larger cultural area, say, China. About such churches, Vatican II asserts: "The individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal church; it is in these, and formed out of them, that the one and unique Catholic Church exists."<sup>10</sup> This doctrine serves as a substantial corrective to a view of the local church as an administrative division under the sway of the universal Church. The truth is that the one Church exists in the local churches and that the one Church exists out of the local churches. The universal representation of this fact — held sacred since the beginning of the Church — is the community of the bishops together with the Bishop of the Church of Rome. In this sense the Pope can be called the visible principle and foundation of the unity of the bishops and the multitude of the faithful, and the bishops the visible principle and foundation of the unity of their local churches.<sup>11</sup> As for the relation between the Bishop of Rome and the other bishops, here too Vatican II has restored the authentic tradition: when a bishop is given his canonical mission by the Pope, he does not receive the power to perform sacred actions (such as the ordaining and consecrating of priests and bishops), from the Pope's "fullness of power". This is perhaps the view which the Chinese bishops have been taught, but it is one which developed only in the later Middle Ages, when the appointment of bishops was reserved more and more to the Popes, and a distinction was made between the "canonical mission", on the one hand, and sacramental ordination on the other. Post Vatican II theology asserts that episcopal ordination transmits the fullness of the episcopal

<sup>10</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Para. 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Para. 13.

ministry as a united office of sanctifying, teaching, and governing — an office which is naturally transmitted and accepted in fellowship with the other churches and their bishops.<sup>12</sup> Bishops are not deputies of the Bishop of Rome. They possess their own authority, which is not *suppressed* by the Pope's universal authority but, on the contrary confirmed, strengthened, and defended by it.<sup>13</sup> By virtue of their office, bishops act on their own responsibility, without prejudice to the competence of the Pope to reserve certain matters to himself when those matters genuinely affect the common interest and leave the bishop's normal competence intact. Such is church unity and orthodoxy.

Both the Pope and the bishops act in and from the community of their apostolic college, the seat of unity within the one church. Rome has always been the centre of that unity. Hence, the Bishops of Rome, because of their special responsibility for this unity, have, since ancient days, exercised authority over all the churches and their bishops. The whole matter has been competently examined in the international theological periodical *Concilium*, June 1986.

It is then, surely, possible to apply this doctrine to the church in China, and so lay to rest a number of the misgivings and misconceptions which have appeared in the discourses of Chinese bishops.

The implementation of the doctrine on the true nature of the local church and the universal primacy of the Pope, as seen by the Second Vatican Council, has made more progress than most Chinese bishops — and also the Chinese government — could imagine. Some possibilities, therefore, spring to mind. If necessary, the Pope, to promote unity, could allow the Chinese bishops to be chosen by their clergy and faithful. If necessary, the Pope could even grant the government a right of veto, as long as its interference was not prompted by its traditional hatred of religion. For the rest, the Chinese bishops, both as individuals, and as members of their Episcopal Conference, would be in charge of their own affairs.

As for the constitutional clause on religious bodies and “foreign domination”, it makes little sense when applied to the Catholic Church. The principle of unity and orthodoxy is not based on “domination” but on “communion”. This communion operates both internally and externally. In so far as it is internal, the government could not object to it. In so far as it is external, its acceptance by church and state in China would achieve the establishment of friendly relations with foreign churches which is sought by the constitution.

<sup>12</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Para. 21; new *Codex of Canon Law*, Canon 375, Para. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Para. 21.

*Conditions for Reconciliation on the Catholic Side.*

If our previous survey of the situation is correct, the Catholic Church in China is, by and large, anxious to be seen to be in communion with the world church and with the Vatican. To talk about "two churches opposing one another" is to misrepresent the situation. It must be repeated time and again that any such "opposition" would melt away as soon as a spring of government tolerance appeared. Most observers agree that some 95 per cent of the faithful are anxious to leave the official ghetto. It is a public secret — even if the assertion is frequently ridiculed by representatives of the CCPA — that not a few of the bishops, who are officially on their side, are known for their allegiance to the Pope. The CCPA did not arise out of the ashes of a xenophobic nationalism: it was established as the result of government pressure. The pressure continues: so far, no Roman prelate or other bishop has had free access to the Chinese bishops. Why this quarantine? Could it be that they cannot be trusted because, in their heart, they are loyal to the Pope? But, in the light of what we have said, what is wrong with such loyalty?

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, a deep and respectful sensibility to Chinese culture, past and present, is now required of the church. The point was eloquently made by the Pope in his address of 25 November 1985. "The church is deeply interested in all aspects of that delicate moral sensitivity, valued by traditional Chinese humanism."<sup>14</sup> The sensitivity now required of the church has many facets. It demands:

1. A sympathetic understanding of the church which must no longer be a "mission church", but a totally indigenous church, similar to the church in France and other countries. The inculturation which this presupposes should not be undertaken by antiquarian enthusiasts trying to construct a local Chinese Church which would display the classical features of the missionary past. Instead, the church must express its national identity in contemporary terms, using an idiom which develops alongside the idiom of the times. Such an inculturation must be left to the Chinese themselves. Specifically, it must be left to the church leadership how best to lead the faithful in patriotic collaboration with the modernisation of their country, as well as in pastoral and liturgical renewal based on Vatican II.

2. A thorough study of the history and present condition of the Catholic Church in China in an effort "to learn from the facts". In 1986 it must no longer be taken for granted that the Beijing government intends to separate the CCPA membership from the

<sup>14</sup>*L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 November 1985.



overwhelming majority of the faithful. There are good reasons to believe that the contrary is true. Beijing stands to gain from the internal unity of the Chinese Church, and from its acceptance by the world church. Here as in other areas, their pragmatism will prevail.

3. A further study of the evolving position of Chinese communism and Chinese atheism. We have entered on "A New Age of Capitalism".<sup>15</sup> Marx has been publicly ridiculed, and his theories said to be antiquated. Former ideological distinctions have been thrown overboard. The leadership, in my own experience of a few months ago, seems anxious to obtain Catholic collaboration.<sup>16</sup> Traditional fears of a communistic regime are less warranted. Instead, the world-wide church should enter into open collaboration, through cultural and scientific exchange, through contact with Chinese officials and bishops, through joint educational efforts, such as scholarships, etc.

4. Such a spirit of understanding and flexibility would involve a persistent effort which could facilitate diplomatic contact between Beijing and the Holy See. It is, indeed, at this level that the matters of Taiwan and the official standing of the CCPA must be broached. The Churches of Asia must share in this effort by showing their concern for China and its church and by serving as examples of neighbouring churches which are free from all "domination by a foreign power". In turn, the unwavering loyalty of millions of Chinese Catholics should be their inspiration.

5. Goodwill and diplomacy call for mutual trust and openness. Such openness was expressed recently by the retired Archbishop of Taipei, Lo Kuang:

Our stand is that we must keep the unity of the church, union with the universal Church, union with the Pope. That is an article of faith . . . For the Holy Father and the Holy See, it is very important to recognise Chinese Catholics. We will also recommend that the Vatican recognise them.<sup>17</sup>

Lo Kuang does not distinguish between "patriotic" and "loyal" Catholics. We have already pointed out the reasons for this stand: it deserves imitation.

6. Taking the church in China as a whole, which means without paying undue attention to the divisions under which it labours, and

<sup>15</sup> *Time*, 28 July 1986.

<sup>16</sup> *China Update*, Autumn 1986.

<sup>17</sup> *Asia Focus*, 13 September 1985.

leaving aside the fact that the government severely restricts its activities, the common goal of Catholics should be to invent a new point of encounter with that church. No turning back to the past, no yearning for the unfortunate privileges of the French Protectorate. Instead, we must honour and hold in esteem this great people with its common sense, its exacting morality which strives to put community above self, its patience and forbearance under suffering and oppression. Mutual mythologies on both sides must be dispelled. On his recent visit, Mr Hu Yaobang did not speak with the Pope; he did not talk to any Vatican dignitary. One wonders whether, on such occasions, diplomatic niceties could not give way to diplomatic daring. Both the Vatican and Beijing have often been blamed for their bureaucratic inertia. The stakes here are too high. Could there not have been, as Cardinal Casaroli suggested, "an extraordinary gesture?"

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