



## Guidelines on China from the Vatican

### Directives On Some Of The Problems Of The Church In Continental China

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*(These Guidelines have been revoked by Pope Benedict the XVI's Letter to the Chinese Church signed on May 27, 2007 and released on June 30, 2007)*

(Reference --- Prot. 3314/88 September 3, 1988)



1. The Catholic Doctrine clearly affirms that only those are fully incorporated into the society of the Church who "accept her entire system and all means of salvation given to her, and through union with her visible structure are joined to Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the Bishops. This joining is effected by the bonds of professed faith, of the sacraments, of ecclesiastical government and of communion". (L. G. n.14)  
Since the Roman Pontiff in the Catholic Church is "a permanent and visible principle and foundation of unity of Faith and fellowship" (L. G. n.18) those who don't profess or don't preserve the communion with the Pope, cannot consider themselves to be Catholic. Communion with the Pope is not only a question of discipline but of Catholic faith. For this reason, the Holy See keeps in deep esteem and admiration the Bishops, priests, religious and lay people who in the course of time and in all the regions of the world have

always maintained the integrity of their Faith, including their fidelity to the Roman Pontiff. And it encourages them to continue and to grow in the same Faith.

2. In so far as China is concerned, history records in 1957 the constitution of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association whose expressed intent was to renounce to the fundamental bonds with the Roman Pontiff and the Holy See and to place the community of the Faithful under the direct control of the civic authority.

Although more recently some of the representatives of the Patriotic Association have taken positions which seem to indicate a certain change of attitude and the tendency on the part of the same Association to assume a role that is more political than religious as a channel of communication between the Church and the Government, nonetheless the constitutive documents as well as the official declarations of the Representatives of the Association do confirm its initial intention.

Furthermore, it is a fact that the Patriotic Association tries to control until now the election and ordination of the Bishops in every diocese and the activities of the various diocesan communities.

In accordance with the doctrinal principles exposed above, the Catholics cannot accept in conscience the principles of an Association which demands the rejection of a fundamental element of their faith, namely the indispensable communion with the Roman Pontiff, visible head of the Church and of the College of Catholic Bishops which cannot exist without him as head.

3. Since 1958, by the initiative of the Patriotic Association, numerous Episcopal ordinations have taken place without the necessary consent of the Roman Pontiff (*mandato apostolico*). In accordance with the Doctrine of the Church and the canonical discipline, such ordinations are to be considered graviously illicit; those who receive the ordination and those who confer it, incur in the excommunication "*latae sententiae*", reserved to the Holy See. (cfr. Decree of the Holy Office of April 9, 1951 and Canon 1382 in the codex of Canon Law)

Judging from the information at our disposal, it seems that in these ordinations no such elements are present as to make them *per se* invalid. Naturally in such situations no definitive judgment is possible until each case is carefully and duly examined under all aspects.

4. With regard to the sacraments administered by priests ordained by Bishops not recognized by the Roman Pontiff, the presumption is in favor of the validity of their ordination and therefore also of the sacraments they administer. With regard to the question whether or not is licit to assist at their Masses and receive their sacraments, the Catholics must look for faithful priests, i.e. in communion with the Pope.

However, for the sake of their spiritual welfare, they may have recourse also to the other priest, provided that they avoid the occasion of scandal and the danger to thus jeopardize the exact notion of the Catholic faith, which, as has been already recalled, demands the full communion with the Roman Pontiff.

5. The Church has the right and the duty, even in China, of having her own seminary for the training of her clergy.  
But, if this is forbidden and if it is not possible to give even privately an adequate formation to the candidates for the priesthood, then, these can be sent to the seminaries that are opened under the control of the Patriotic Association. But only under the condition that the general orientation and formation imparted there, follow the teaching and directives of the Church.  
This possibility is to be evaluated according to the local circumstances and keeping in mind also the persons in charge of such formation centers.
6. The religious books, liturgical texts, catechisms and other religious materials (printed by the Patriotic Association) can be used only and to the extent that they faithfully convey the doctrine of the Church.
7. Subsidies must be directed towards initiatives which serve to the maintenance of the right doctrine and of the spirit of faith of the Catholic Church. For subsidies to persons or initiatives which do not offer such guarantees each individual case must be examined in the light of the moral principles about cooperation