

AN AID FOR READING THE HOLY FATHER'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN CHINA

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INTRODUCTION

On the occasion of the first anniversary of the Papal Letter to the Catholics in China, in various proposals were put forward in order to commemorate such important event:

1. A Compendium to help in understanding the Letter better.
2. Some clarification on various passages in the Letter.
3. Some guidance for the application of principles contained in the Letter to concrete situations.
4. Commentaries on the Letter.

The Commission for the Church in China took upon itself the task of preparing a Compendium, which became a reality around the second anniversary of the Letter.

The Compendium realizes the first of the four possibilities mentioned above.

There is still plenty of room left for other contributions, both to keep interest in the Letter and to help in its application. I offer this my "Aid" As one such contribution. It does not have the authority of the Commission as does the "Compendium", but is exclusively my personal undertaking. As a brother who has followed with intense concern, the vicissitudes of the life of Church in China for so many years. I humbly share my portion of wisdom. I declare my complete respect for any different position which might in future come from competent higher authorities.

First of all, this "aid for reading" quotes essential parts from the Letter, preserving the original meaning in a shortened version, so it is also a kind of compendium. Of course, its brevity inevitably reduces the warmth of the original. The reader is earnestly advised not to substitute the reading of the actual letter, but to use this "Aid", as a companion.

This "Aid" does not adopt the Q & A form successfully used in the "Compendium", rather, it follows the order of the matters as they are dealt with in the Letter. In this "aid for reading" there are notes and comments which seek to clarify the content of the Letter and, in some cases, I hope, to help in the application of the Letter in the present complicated situation.

1.

The Holy Father begins by **greeting** the bishops, priests, religious brothers and sisters and the lay faithful. He uses the words of St. Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter one, (a) to congratulate them, "*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven*". (b) to bless them, "*We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, May you be strengthened with all power, for all endurance and patience with joy*".

2.

The Holy Father almost repeats what he says in his greeting when pointing out the **purpose** of his letter: firstly, to express, "*With intense **joy** I acknowledge your faithfulness to Christ the Lord and to the Church, 'sometimes at the price of grave sufferings'*". (Note 1, quoting Angelus of 26 December 2006) secondly, to express, "*Nevertheless, some important aspects of the ecclesial life of your country give cause for **concern***". He also says, "*Without claiming to deal with every detail of the complex matters well known to you*", and this is understandable.

3.

The title of this paragraph is, "Globalization, modernity and atheism". The content is **the role of the Church in the society**.

a) (3.1)

The Pope **appreciates the Chinese people** because of "*the splendour of its ancient civilization*". And also because "*in recent times...moved decisively towards achieving significant goals of socio-economic progress*".

b) (3.2-5)

"*The Catholic Church for her part regards with respect such impressive thrust*", "*and with discretion offers her own contribution in the promotion and defence of the human person, and of the person's values, spirituality and transcendent vocation. The Church has very much at heart the values and objectives: solidarity, peace, social justice, the wise management of the phenomenon of globalization*". The Pope also points out that "*there are signs, in China too, of the tendency towards materialism and hedonism which are spreading from the big cities to the entire country*". Although, "*on the other hand, especially among the young, one can detect a growing interest in the spiritual and transcendent dimension of the human person, with a consequent interest in religion, particularly in Christianity*".

The Holy Father recalls that the Church in China has a responsibility: "*the new evangelization demands the proclamation of the Gospel to modern man*". He hopes that, "*in the third millennium, a great harvest of faith will be reaped in the vast and vibrant Asian continent*". His slogan being, "*'Duc in altum' (Lk 5:4), to look forward to the future with confidence; 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever' (Heb 13:8)*".

c) (3.6)

Here the Pope invites us to meditate on the fact that “**History remains indecipherable, incomprehensible**”, as in the vision of the sealed scroll in the Book of Revelation which can be opened only by the Lamb that has been sacrificed. The Pope says, “*The Asian Churches’ dismay at God’s silence in the face of the persecutions to which they were exposed at the time. It is a dismay that can clearly mirror our consternation in the face of the serious difficulties, misunderstandings and hostility that the Church also suffers today in various parts of the world*”.

d) (3.7)

In the last section of this paragraph the Pope asks the Church in China, “**to preach and bear witness to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, the new Man, conqueror of sin and death**”. This proclamation, “*will be possible to the extent that, with fidelity to the Gospel, in communion with the Successor of the Apostle Peter and with the universal Church, you are able to put into practice the signs of love and unity*” (quoting from Jn. 13:34-35, 17:21).

4.

The title of this paragraph is: “Willingness to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue”

The content is: “**The relationship between Church and State**”

a) (4.1)

The Holy Father reiterates the same thought in Paragraphs 1 and 2. “*I wish to manifest sincere gratitude to the Lord for the deeply-felt witness of faithfulness offered by the Chinese Catholic community in truly difficult circumstances*”. At the same time, “*I sense the urgent need to confirm the faith of Chinese Catholics and favour their unity*”.

b) (4.2-4)

The Pope expresses “*the hope that concrete forms of communication and cooperation between the Holy see and the People’s Republic of China may soon be established. Once the misunderstandings of the past have been overcome, such a dialogue would make it possible for us to work together for the good of the Chinese People and for peace in the world*”. In fact, “*This situation of misunderstandings and incomprehension weighs heavily, serving the interests of neither the Chinese authorities nor the Catholic Church in China*”.

c) (4.4)

In order to reassure the Chinese authorities, Pope Benedict quotes what Pope John Paul II said during the commemoration of Matteo Ricci, “*the Catholic Church seeks no privilege from China and its leaders, but solely the resumption of dialogue, in order to build a relationship based upon mutual respect and deeper understanding*”. The Pope is not afraid to repeat again, “*the Catholic Church sincerely proposes to*

*offer **humble and disinterested service** in the areas of her competence, for the good of Chinese Catholics and for the good of all the inhabitants of the country”.*

d) (4.5-6)

Here the Holy Father clearly and accurately expresses that **the nature of the Church is not political.**

He first of all quotes from the document of Second Vatican Council, the Pastoral Constitution, “The Church in the Modern World”, chapter 76, “*The Church is not identified with any political community nor is she tied to any political system. She is at once the sign and the safeguard of the transcendental dimension of the human person. **The political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their fields.** They are both at the service of the personal and social vocation of the same individuals. Their service will be more efficient and beneficial to all if both institutions **develop better cooperation**”.* “*Therefore, the Catholic Church which is in China does not have a mission to change the structure or administration of the State; rather, her mission is to proclaim Christ to men and women, as the Saviour of the world”.*

The Pope also quotes from his own Encyclical, “Deus Caritas Est”, chapter 28, “*The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper”.*

e) (4.7)

The conclusion of this paragraph: “*The solution to existing problems cannot be pursued via an ongoing conflict with the legitimate civil authorities; at the same time, though, compliance with those authorities is not acceptable when they interfere unduly in matters regarding the faith and discipline of the Church. **The Church in her teaching invites the faithful to be good citizens, respectful and active contributors to the common good in their country, but it is likewise clear that she asks the State to guarantee to those same Catholic citizens the full exercise of their faith, with respect for authentic religious freedom**”.*

5.

Communion between particular Churches in the Universal Church.

Here the Holy Father talks about the **fundamental principle of Ecclesiology: The Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic**

a) (5.1-3)

The Pope says the Church in China, although being a, “*little flock, the universal Church is present, the Church of Christ, which is one, holy, catholic and apostolic*”.

*“**The profound unity which binds together the particular Churches found in China,***

and which likewise places them in intimate communion with all the other particular Churches throughout the world, **has its roots not only in the same faith and in a common Baptism, but above all in the Eucharist and in the episcopate.** Likewise, the unity of the episcopate, of which ‘the Roman Pontiff, as the Successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation’, continues down the centuries through the apostolic succession and is the foundation of the identity of the Church in every age with the **Church built by Christ on Peter and on the other Apostles”**.

b) (5.4)

“Catholic doctrine teaches that the **Bishop is the visible source and foundation of unity in the particular Church** entrusted to his pastoral ministry. But **in every particular Church, in order that she may be fully Church, there must be present the supreme authority of the Church**, that is to say, the Episcopal College together with its Head, the Roman Pontiff. It is therefore indispensable, for the unity of the Church in individual nations, that every Bishop should be in communion with the other Bishops, and that all should be in visible and concrete communion with the Pope”.

c) (5.5-6)

This is “*the Mystical Body of Christ. The bond of sacramental communion is the Eucharist*”. “**The whole of the Church which is in China is called to live and to manifest this unity in a richer spirituality of communion. Pastors and faithful are called to defend and to safeguard what belongs to the doctrine and the tradition of the Church**”.

6.

Tension and divisions within the Church: pardon and reconciliation

a) (6.1)

Quoting from “*Novo Millennio Ineunte*” the Pope says: “**the communion (koinonia) embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church; make us all ‘one heart and one soul’.** (Acts 4:32) It is in this communion of love that the Church appears as ‘sacrament’, as the ‘sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race’. The Apostle Paul reminds us that without love, all will come to ‘nothing’. **Love is truly the ‘heart’ of the Church**”.

b) (6.2)

Concerning the Church in China the Pope says, “**Indeed you are aware of the problems that she is seeking to overcome – within herself and in her relations with Chinese civil society – tensions, divisions and recriminations**”.

c) (6.3)

Looking back at the primitive Church, the Pope has occasion to recall, “*from the start the community of the disciples has known not only the joy of the Holy Spirit, the grace of truths of faith and love, but also trials that are constituted above all by disagreements with the consequent wounds to communion. Thus, in the events of the*

world there is always a risk of losing faith, hence, also love and brotherhood”

d) (6.4)

*“The history of the Church teaches us, then, that **authentic communion is not expressed without arduous efforts at reconciliation**. Indeed, the purification of memory, the pardoning of wrong-doers, the forgetting of injustices suffered and the loving restoration to serenity of troubled hearts, all to be accomplished in the name of Jesus crucified and risen, can require moving beyond personal positions or viewpoints, born of painful or difficult experiences. These are **urgent steps that must be taken if the bonds of communion between the faithful and the Pastors of the Church in China are to grow and be made visible**”.*

We retain this whole section because here, the Pope points out to us a very important and urgent task: **the reconciliation of hearts**. The Pope wants us to overcome all difficulties, open our hearts and offer sincere brotherly love.

[The writer makes some analysis which may seem be obvious. The Pope, on the one hand, seems to say to the faithful of the “underground Church”: Regarding the brothers who still live under the strict control of the government, you must appreciate what should be appreciable in them, especially many among those who courageously express their fidelity to the Holy See. On the other hand, to the faithful of the “above-ground Church” the Pope says: Regarding the brothers of the underground community you must appreciate their choice; they endure constant trials to be free from the control of the agencies external to the Church. In fact both the underground and the above-ground Church are under the pressure of the political power. Their division does not come from internal reasons, but from their different choices in the face of external pressure.]

Here, it is of importance to quote Pope John Paul II at the approach of the Holy Year 2000.

e) (6.5)

*“Remember that in the biblical tradition this moment always entailed the obligation to forgive one another’s debts, to make satisfaction for injustices committed, and to be reconciled with one’s neighbour”. Also “forgiving one another whatever needs to be forgiven, by drawing closer to one another, by accepting one another and by breaking down all barriers in order to overcome every possible cause of division,” **These are “the arduous paths of reconciliation and unity”**.*

f) (6.6-7)

“We all realize that this journey cannot be accomplished overnight, but be assured that the whole Church will raise up an insistent prayer for you to this end”. Moreover “your path of reconciliation is supported by the example and the prayer of so many ‘witnesses of the faith’ who have suffered and have forgiven, offering their lives for the future of the Catholic Church in China”

[Here, naturally, I remember the most venerable Bishop Li Du’an and Bishop Jin

Peixian. To me it is a great grace given by God to have known them and have enjoyed their friendship.]

7.

Ecclesial communities and State agencies: relationships to be lived in truth and charity.

In this paragraph Benedict XVI points out very frankly (according to his judgment full of wisdom) what **the obvious causes of the painful situation of the Church in China today** are.

In order to help your reading, we first of all (a) point out sections that denote the problem and then (b) the sections with the solutions to the problem.

a) The problem (7.1, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7)

Some entities imposed by the government on the Church but extraneous to the Church intend to place themselves above the Church and guide the Church

7.1

“A careful analysis of the aforementioned painful situation of serious differences (cf. Section 6 above), involving the lay faithful and their Pastors, highlights among the various causes the significant part played by entities that have been imposed as the principal determinants of the life of the Catholic community. All this has caused division both among the clergy and among the lay faithful. It is a situation primarily dependent on factors external to the Church, but it has seriously conditioned her progress, and it continues to be a weakness in the Church that causes concern”.

7.5

*“Considering ‘Jesus’ original plan’, it is clear that the claim of some entities, desired by the State and extraneous to the structure of the Church, to place themselves above the Bishops and to guide the life of the ecclesial community, does not correspond to Catholic doctrine. **The Church is ‘apostolic’**. She is apostolic in her **origin** because she has been built on ‘the foundation of the Apostles’. She is apostolic in her **teaching** which is the same as that of the Apostles. She is apostolic by reason of her **structure** insofar as she is taught, sanctified and guided until Christ returns by the Apostles through their successors who are the Bishops in communion with the Successor of Peter”.*

7.6

“The declared purpose of the afore-mentioned entities to implement ‘the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church’ is incompatible with Catholic doctrine”. (the Note quotes the Statutes of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, article 3)

7.7

“In the light of the principles here outlined, Pastors and lay faithful will recall that the preaching of the Gospel, catechesis and charitable activity, liturgical and cultic action,

as well as all pastoral choices, are uniquely the competence of the Bishops. Therefore they cannot be subject to any external interference”.

b) The solution can only be the example of Jesus (7.2) and the balance between the demands of truth and charity (7.3, 7.4)

7.2

“Follow the words and modus operandi of Jesus Christ”. He “recognized civil authority and its rights when he ordered tribute to be paid to Caesar, but he gave clear warning that the greater rights of God must be respected”. “but refused to use force to impose on those who spoke out against it. His Kingdom does not establish its claims by force but is established by bearing witness to and listening to the truth and it grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on the Cross, draws people to himself. (cf. Jn 12:32)”

7.3, 7.4

“Truth and charity are the two supporting pillars of the life of the Christian community. If the family of God’s children is to live in unity and peace, it needs someone to keep it in the truth and guide it with wise and authoritative discernment: this is what the ministry of the Apostles is required to do. The Church has a structure, the apostolic succession, which is responsible for guaranteeing that the Church endures in the truth given by Christ, from whom the capacity to love also comes”.

“Those also have a claim on our respect and charity who think and act differently from us in social, political, and religious matters. But love and courtesy of this kind should not, of course, make us indifferent to truth and goodness”.

7.8

This section discusses **a specially delicate problem that “causes painful disquiet in the hearts of Pastors and faithful”.**

[After the publication of the Pope’s Letter, the content of this section gave rise to heated dispute on its different interpretations. Therefore we should read it with great care and try to understand the Pope’s true meaning with absolute honesty.]

The problem lies in *“acceptance of the recognition granted by civil authorities – this is necessary for holding any open activities – on condition that this does not entail the denial of ecclesiastical communion”.* That is to say: **Whether one can apply to the government for its recognition of one’s identity as Bishop and priest.**

[This problem seems to involve only the Bishops and priests of the “underground community”, because those of the “above-ground community” have already been granted recognition. We shall try to explain later how they could remain in that situation. See paragraph 8, section 11]

There are two aspects in the answer to this difficult problem: the principle and the actual situation.

a) The principle: *“The requisite and courageous safeguarding of the deposit of faith and*

*of sacramental and hierarchical communion is not of itself opposed to dialogue with the civil authorities concerning those aspects of the life of the ecclesial community that fall within the civil sphere". We are all citizens of a particular country. Our activities have a civil dimension. Therefore **"There would not be any particular difficulties with acceptance of (or apply for) the recognition granted by civil authorities on condition that this does not entail denial of unrenounceable principles of faith and of ecclesiastical communion"**. But*

- b) **The actual situation:** In fact, is the above mentioned "condition" verified? **"In not a few particular instances, however, indeed almost always, in the process of recognition the intervention of certain bodies obliges the people involved to adopt attitudes, make gestures and undertake commitments that are contrary to the dictates of their conscience as Catholics"**.

[To adopt attitudes, make gestures and undertake commitments means

- To join the Patriotic Association
- To support autonomy and self-management
- To concelebrate with illegitimate Bishops

Since, according to the above mentioned "condition", it is not permitted "to deny unrenounceable principles of faith and of ecclesiastic communion", and not allowed "to adopt attitudes, make gesture and undertake commitments that are contrary to the dictates of their conscience as Catholics"; despite that fact that the government "almost always" demands it, Bishops and priests, in most cases, cannot accept nor apply for the government to grant them recognition].

The Pope, however, in his Letter does not exclude, as in extreme cases, the possibility. And so, in conclusion, the Pope understands, *"how in such varied conditions and circumstances it is difficult to determine the correct choice to be made. For this reason the Holy See, after restating the principles, leaves the decision to the individual Bishop who, having consulted his presbyterate, is better able to know the local situation, to weigh the concrete possibilities of choice and to evaluate the possible consequences within the diocesan community"*.

[If the analysis so far is accurate, we can answer the following questions:

Does the Letter of the Pope forbid the Bishops, priests of the underground community to try to obtain the recognition of the government and to come "above ground"? The answer is no.

Does it encourage them to do so? The answer is also no. In fact he advises them to be extremely careful because the above mentioned "condition" is very rarely verified (We can all see that fundamentally the policy of the government has not changed).

Do those who decide to emerge from the underground to above-ground make a mistake? No. But if in doing so they have trespassed the indispensable conditions mentioned above in the Letter, then they have done wrong. This matter has been clarified, briefly, is note No.5 of the Compendium.

The situations in the Diocese are very different. If the bishop and the priests, together, in one "clandestine community" can be recognized by the Government, come out to

operate in the open without being obliged to “adopt attitudes, make gestures and undertake commitments” contrary to their Catholic conscience, that would be very good. It would be even better, if all the priests “above-ground” turn to plede loyalty to the “underground” bishops. But are there such fortunate cases? How many? What we hear that even with the most sincere desire to subject themselves to the underground bishops, those priests in the above-ground community cannot practically do so, because the Government does not allow it.]

“Having consulted his presbyterate”, This detail is of great importance because in doing so the Bishop will be able to make his decision with the help of the wisdom of his priests. It will then be easier to get the unanimous support of his priests in making his decision.

The Pope knows that, *“It could be that the final decision does not obtain the consensus of all the priests and faithful”*. In this situation he hopes that those who hold a different view will accept the decision, *“albeit with suffering”*.

[But if some priests are convinced that the Bishop has done wrong in not respecting the condition laid down in the Pope’s Letter, how can they resolve the conflict in their conscience?]

[It would not be superfluous to say that the problem discussed here in 7.8 and the problem discussed in paragraph 6 should not be taken as one and the same. In paragraph 6, what is discussed concerns the unity of heart, whereas here the concern is with the unity of structure. The unity of heart can be obtained when there is good will. The unity of structure depends, first of all, on the possibility of objectives condition which are very often beyond our control. Someone, following an erroneous interpretation of the letter, tried to come above-ground from the underground, but there they discovered that the Government has in no way changed its religious policy: that of a firmly independent Church. They withdrew underground, but in the process, some division was caused within the underground Community. Some others who came up in the open and discovered that the situation there is wrong, did not even dare to withdraw, erroneously believing that would be disobeying the wishes of the Holy Father. They then have to live a miserable life of contradiction and an unsettled conscience. This matter has also been authoritatively clarified in Note No.2 of the Compendium.]

7.9

This section points out some moral principles intended to help solve some concrete cases.

- *“to avoid giving rise to situations of scandal”*.
- *“to form the consciences of the faithful, with particular Attention to the weakest”*.
- *“all this should be lived out in communion and in fraternal understanding”*.
- *“avoiding judgments and mutual condemnations”*.
- *“ in order to evaluate the morality of an act it is necessary to devote particular care to establishing the real intentions of the person concerned, in addition to the objective shortcoming”*.
- *“every case will have to be pondered individually, taking account of the circumstances”*.

[But application of these principles is not easy. There are still some serious problems of conscience that cannot be solved:

- How can conscience be formed if it is not helped to judge between right and wrong?
- What to do when, on the one hand one should presume the subjective good intention of the person and on the other hand this person has openly done an objective wrong that has given rise to scandal?
- To what extent do “little room for freedom” and “special circumstances” excuse a person who has trespassed the principle laid down in the Pope’s Letter?

We should not forget: the Pope, in the beginning of his Letter says, “Without claiming to deal with every detail of the complex matters well known to you”. The Secretary of State, in his letter to the Bishops in China on 22 April 2008 also said: the faithful in China are happy and heartily and with gratitude received the Letter of the Pope but at the same time pose some questions.]

At least there is a major principle that is valid for those who have the responsibility to solve problems: the respect for truth and the practice of charity.

8.

The Chinese Bishops

First of all, the Pope repeatedly emphasizes the **Church is Apostolic**. At the same time mentions that under the **present abnormal situation, there is a demeaning of the Petrine and Episcopal ministries**.

8.1

“In the Church only the sacred ministers, duly ordained, may exercise the office of teaching, sanctifying and governing”.

8.2

“But (in China) in reality persons who are not ‘ordained’, and sometimes not even baptized, control and take decisions concerning important ecclesial questions, including the appointment of Bishops, in the name of various State agencies. Consequently, we have witnessed a demeaning of the Petrine and Episcopal ministries by virtue of a vision of the Church according to which the Supreme Pontiff, the Bishops and the priests risk becoming de facto persons without office and without power”.

8.3

“Communion and unity are essential and integral elements of the Catholic Church: therefore the proposal for a Church that is ‘independent’ of the Holy See, in the religious sphere, is incompatible with Catholic doctrine”.

The Pope then acknowledges **the good that the Bishops in China have done in recent decades and encourages the Pastors now in office to carry out their ministry**.

8.4

He says, *“I am aware of the grave difficulties which you have to address in the aforementioned situation in order to remain faithful to Christ, to his Church and to the Successor of Peter. I am confident that you will do everything possible, trusting in the Lord’s grace, to safeguard unity and ecclesial communion even at the cost of great sacrifices”*.

8.5

“Many members of the Chinese episcopate who have guided the Church in recent decades have offered and continue to offer a shining testimony to their own communities and to the universal Church. It must not be forgotten that many Bishops have undergone persecution and have been impeded in the exercise of their ministry, and some of them have made the Church fruitful with the shedding of their blood”.

8.6

The Pope quotes John Paul II: *“The Bishop, a successor of the Apostles, is someone for whom Christ is everything”*. He also quotes the Second Vatican Council, *“Bishops should devote themselves to their apostolic office as witnesses of Christ to all”*.

8.7

To the Bishops now in office the Pope says, *“The Bishops are primarily responsible for building up the Church as a family of God. You received with Episcopal consecration three special offices: the munus docendi (teaching), the munus sanctificandi (sanctifying) and munus regendi (governing). Closely linked to the offices of teaching and of sanctifying, that of governing – the munus regendi precisely – constitutes for the Bishop an authentic act of love for God and for one’s neighbour”*.

8.8

“The offices of teaching and governing, by their very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college of Bishops”

8.9

In this section the Pope begins to speak of **the concrete situation of the Church in China**. First of all he says, *“The Catholic Church in China, by a particular grace of the Holy Spirit has never been deprived of the ministry of legitimate Pastors who have preserved the apostolic succession intact. The constant presence, not without suffering, of Bishops who have received Episcopal ordination in conformity with Catholic traditions, that is to say, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, Successor of Peter, and at the hands of validly and legitimately ordained Bishops in observance of the rite of the Catholic Church”*.

8.10

Then he says that **some Bishops chose to stay underground**. They *“not wishing to be subjected to undue control exercised over the life of the Church, and eager to maintain total fidelity to the Successor of Peter and to Catholic doctrine, have felt themselves*

constrained to opt for clandestine consecration The clandestine condition is not a normal feature of the Church's life, and history shows that Pastors and faithful have recourse to it only in the desire to maintain the integrity of their faith and to resist interference from State agencies in matters pertaining intimately to the Church's life".

[Because the Pope says that "the clandestine condition is not a normal feature of the Church's life", some people made a big issue in saying that from now on there should be no more underground communities. This is clearly taking what the Pope has said out of context. Of course it is not a normal feature to stay underground, but they are forced to do so by the abnormal situation. As long as this abnormal situation continues to exist, there is reason to stay underground. Otherwise, one has to "accept interference from State agencies in matters pertaining intimately to the Church's life". If this wrong interpretation is accepted it will force the underground community to surrender to the interference of the government. Whereas the Pope's Letter is meant precisely to encourage them to resist such interference. (See 8.11)]

8.11

The Pope then speaks of the **above-ground community (which is the official or open community)**. *"Other Pastors, under the pressure of particular circumstances, have consented to receive Episcopal ordination without the pontifical mandate [The words used by the Holy Father in narrating those facts are kind enough, full of understanding, but an "Explicative Note", which came out together with the Letter, described the facts with expressions much too laudatory, saying that they (the illegitimate bishops) accepted their ordinations because "they cared for the good of the faithful and looked far into the future"(!?) (see Sunday Examiner, 8 July 2007)], but have subsequently asked to be received into communion with the Successor of Peter and with their other brothers in the episcopate. The Pope, considering the sincerity of their sentiments and the complexity of the situation, as universal Pastor of the Church, has granted them the full and legitimate exercise of episcopal jurisdiction. This initiative of the Pope resulted from knowledge of the particular circumstances of their ordination and from his profound pastoral concern to favour the reestablishment of full communion".*

[What the Pope says can be understood as: The reason for the Holy Father to grant legitimacy to these Bishops is that he was told that these Bishops were severely pressurized to accept the ordination. Now they realize that their situation is not regular. They ask the Pope to forgive them and declare that they do not accept the principle of an independent Church. They promise to fight for the normalization from within the abnormal situation.

We can understand why the Holy See in accepting these Bishops did not demand that they leave the Patriotic Association or the above-ground community even though the above-ground community (albeit reluctantly) accepts interference by the illegitimate agencies.

Some people find that there are two different ways in treating the two communities: It says in section 7.8 that the underground community should not join the Patriotic Association and here it says that the above-ground community can stay in the Patriotic Association. This has to be seen in the historical context. In the past, especially at the beginning of the process of "legitimization", if it is asked of the Bishops who request "legitimization" to leave those agencies, the government would strongly oppose and make

it impossible for the process of “legitimization” to continue. When we look back, we are happy that the Church has allowed this kind of compromise, and because of this, the reaction of the government was also restrained and accepted the gradual change.

But now the Pope in his Letter thinks it is time to state clearly the principle and declare that those agencies are “not acceptable”.

We have said that the situation of those Bishops who have been legitimized but stay above-ground is a contradiction, since the agencies they join are objectively illegitimate and are not acceptable, but in their heart, subjectively, they do not accept them and only tolerate them temporally, hoping to make a change when the chance comes.

We should not think that there is contradiction in the Pope’s Letter.]

Concerning the recognition or approval granted to Bishops above-ground the Pope points out two problems: (1) *“Unfortunately, in most cases, priests and the faithful have not been adequately informed that their Bishop has been legitimized”*. (2) *“Some legitimized Bishops have failed to provide any clear signs to prove that they have been legitimized”*. So the Holy Father instructs them: (1) *“that legitimization, once it has occurred, is brought into the public domain at the earliest opportunity”*. (2) *“that the legitimized Bishops provide unequivocal and increasing signs of full communion with the Successor of Peter”*.

[So there is no contradiction in the Pope’s Letter. The contradiction lies with some Bishops who have been granted recognition or approval. On the one hand they have obtained understanding from the Holy Father who has so generously accepted them into full communion with the Hierarchy but on the other hand they do not live according to the new situation. In fact, how can they be in communion with the Holy See if they openly and repeatedly declare that they support the independent Church?]

8.12

Of course the Pope does not leave out the fact that there are certain Bishops in China who *“have been ordained without the Pontifical mandate and who have not asked for or have not yet obtained, the necessary legitimization. They are to be considered illegitimate, but validly ordained, as long as it is certain that they have received ordination from validly ordained Bishops and that the Catholic rite of episcopal ordination has been respected”*. The Pope hopes that, *“the necessary conditions having been established, these Pastors too were to enter into communion with the Successor of Peter and with the entire Catholic episcopate”*.

8.13, 8.14

In this last section of paragraph 8 the Pope explains what the **“Episcopal Conference”** is in the Church and why the so called “Episcopal Conference” of the “above-ground community” cannot be recognized as an Episcopal Conference. It includes illegitimate bishops and excludes those legitimate in the underground.

[As far as we know: The so called “Chinese Episcopal Conference” does not exist at all. Although all the Bishops are listed in the “Chinese Episcopal Conference” they cannot hold any meetings unless convoked by the government. At the meetings convoked by the government it is, of course, the government that commands and gives order. Outside these,

a lay person, one of the vice-chairpersons of the Patriotic Association, controls the Church in the name of the “Bishops Conference”.

In order to have a clearer understanding of the above-ground community we have to mention also that there is another agency called “The General Assembly of Catholic Representatives” over the Patriotic Association and the “Bishops Conference”. Its function is to approve or amend the Constitutions and of the Patriotic Association and the “Bishops Conference” and to elect the heads and office bearers of the two organisms. The members of the “General Assembly of Catholic Representatives” include all the Bishops, many priests, religious sisters and lay representatives (chosen by what kind of election?), but the meeting is conducted by the lay person mentioned above. There are a great number of government officials present who practically preside over the meeting.]

9.

The appointment of Bishops

This is definitely “*one of the most delicate problems in relations between the Holy See and the authorities of China*”

9.1

The Pope says “*It is understandable that **governmental authorities** are attentive to the choice of those who will carry out the important role of leading and shepherding the local Catholic communities*”. But at the same time he clearly affirms that, “***The Holy See** follows the appointment of Bishops with special care, as the appointment of Bishops is the guarantee of the unity of the Church and of hierarchical communion*”.

9.2, 9.3

The Pope specially emphasizes: In this matter, “*The Pope exercises his **supreme spiritual authority**. This authority and this intervention remain within the strictly religious sphere. It is not unduly asserting itself in the internal affairs of a State*”. This is stated “*in international documents, as a constitutive element of the full exercise of the right to religious freedom*”.

9.2

After affirming this right the Holy Father makes the following compromise, “*Considering the recent particular developments of the Church in China, I trust that an **accord can be reached with the Government** so as to resolve certain questions regarding the choice of candidates for the episcopate, the publication of the appointment of Bishops and the recognition – concerning civil effects where necessary – of the new Bishops on the part of the civil authorities*”.

9.4

In fact, what is most important is to choose **suitable persons to be Bishops**. Bishops should “*be worthy priests, respected and beloved by the faithful, models of life in the faith, and that they should possess a certain experience in the pastoral ministry so that they are equipped to address the burdensome responsibility of a Pastor of the Church*”. Here he

also mentions that, “the cooperation of Bishops in neighbouring dioceses can help to identify suitable candidates”.

The following part concerns “Guidelines for Pastoral Life”

10.

Sacraments, governance of dioceses, parishes

These are the questions discussed in this paragraph: (a) Circumscription of the Bishops’ ministry and incardination of priests. (b) Concelebration and participation in the Eucharist. (c) The right to receive valid sacraments. (d) The agencies that help to strengthen communion and cooperation in the diocese and in the parish. (e) The registration of the property of the Church. (f) Strengthening communion.

10.1, 10.2, 10.3

(a) Circumscription of the Bishops’ ministry and the incardination of priests

“Individual Bishops exercise their pastoral office over the portion of the People of God assigned to them, not over other Churches nor over the Church universal”.

“Every cleric must be incardinated in a particular Church...and must exercise his own ministry in communion with the diocesan Bishop. Only for good reason may a cleric exercise his ministry in another diocese, but always with the prior agreement of the two diocesan Bishops, that is, the Ordinary of the particular Church in which he is incardinated and the Ordinary of the particular Church for whose service he is destined”.

[As there exists a so called above-ground community and an underground community, it is difficult to implement these rules. If in a diocese there is no underground Bishop, even though the above-ground Bishop is legitimized, how can the faithful of the underground community receive pastoral care? According to Canon Law there is the possibility of nominating, for the underground community, an Auxiliary Bishop, an Episcopal Vicar or a priest-in-charge. If it is deemed inconvenient to make such nomination, it seems reasonable for the underground Bishop of a neighbouring diocese to send priests to care for these underground faithful. The said underground Bishop should inform the above-ground, legitimate Bishop of what he has undertaken for the underground community. It seems unreasonable however for the above-ground Bishop to insist that the underground priests must join the above-ground structure until this is under the control of Government.]

10.4

(b) Concelebration and participation in the Eucharist

Concelebration “presupposes, as conditions, profession of the same faith and hierarchical communion with the Pope and with the universal Church. Therefore it is licit to concelebrate with Bishops and with priests who are in communion with the Pope, even if they are recognized by the civil authorities and maintain a relationship with entities desired by the State and extraneous to the structure of the Church,

provided that this recognition and this relationship do not entail the denial of unrenounceable principles of the faith and of ecclesiastical communion”.

[Some people may question the sentence following “even” and the one following “provided that”. Can they co-exist? We have answered the question and given an explanation in section 8.11: Objectively it is a contradiction, it is a compromise. The Pope presumes that, in the heart of the persons concerned, there is no acceptance of such an objective contradiction.

Of course, concelebration would be a problem if this subjective reservation actually did not hold true. How can one concelebrate with a Bishop, even if he has been legitimized, who openly and constantly say that he supports an independent Church?]

10.5

“The lay faithful, must not hesitate to participate in the Eucharist celebrated by Bishops and priests who are in full communion with the Successor of Peter and are recognized by the civil authorities. This same applies for all the other sacraments”. [Same principle as above]

10.6

(c) The right to receive valid sacraments

If the conditions are verified, *“Bishops whose consecrations took place without the pontifical mandate...their ordinations are illegitimate but valid, just as priestly ordinations conferred by them are valid, and sacraments administered by such Bishops and priests are likewise valid”.*

“Therefore the faithful, (where the Eucharistic celebration and the other sacraments are concerned, must within the limits of the possible, seek Bishops and priests who are in communion with the Pope,) nevertheless, where this cannot be achieved without grave inconvenience, may, for the sake of their spiritual good, turn also to those who are not in communion with the Pope”.

[This right has always been confirmed in the tradition of the Church. During the 80s the Holy See proclaimed it in the “Eighty articles”. It is unfortunate that some underground brothers did not believe it. But now the Pope clarifies this in his Letter.

There are other points that need to be clarified:

- The faithful have the right to receive the valid sacraments but they are not obliged to do so. If a person feels that he can hold strong to his faith without the sacraments for a time and if this person feels that to receive the sacraments in this situation is to support the illegitimate structure, this person can renounce the right to receive the sacrament from the hands of illegitimate clergy.
- If the faithful decide to receive the sacrament from illegitimate clergy it does not mean that they must join the above-ground structure because this is not normal.

We must remember that the Letter cannot deal with every detail of the problem.]

10.7

(d) The agencies that help to strengthen communion and cooperation in the diocese

...These are “*the diocesan curia, the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, the diocesan pastoral council and the diocesan finance council*”.

10.8

Agencies that help to strengthen communion and cooperation in the parish

...These are “*the parish pastoral council and the parish finance council*”.

[These structures exist in the Universal Church and proved to be efficacious means of communion and corresponsibility. But in the situation of the “official” Church in China, they the also run the risk of being controlled and manipulated by the regime.]

10.9

(e) Registration of the property of the Church

The registration must be “in the name of the diocese or parish and never in the name of individual persons”.

[But very often the diocese or the parish is not a legal person and here lies the problem. For the moment it is not possible to implement this rule. However it is useful to remind people the normal way to proceed.]

10.10

(f) The conclusion of this paragraph: “*Real solution (to all problems) will be rooted in the promotion of communion, which draws its vigour and impetus, as from a source from Christ*”.

[In whatever situation, no one can prevent the strengthening of communion in the parish, in the underground or above-ground community, in the diocese and in the universal Church, because the foundation is Jesus Christ.]

11.

Ecclesiastical provinces

Regarding the circumscriptions and ecclesiastical provinces, the Holy See is prepared “*to address the entire question in an open and constructive dialogue with the Chinese Episcopate and with the governmental authorities*”.

12.

Catholic communities

12.1

In this section the Pope says, “It is **consoling** for me to note that, the diocesan and parochial communities, spread over the vast Chinese territory, demonstrate a **particular liveliness of Christian life, witness of faith and pastoral initiative**. They maintain a profound awareness of being living members of the universal Church, in communion of faith and life with all Catholic communities throughout the world. **They know in their hearts what it means to Catholic. And it is precisely from this Catholic heart that the commitment must likewise issue forth to make manifest and effective, both within individual communities and in relations between different communities, that spirit of communion, understanding and forgiveness**”. He is sure that, “the Spirit of Christ, just as he helped the communities to keep the faith alive in time of persecution, will today help all Catholics to grow in unity”.

12.2

In this section the Pope also says that **unfortunately**, “members of Catholic communities in your country are not yet allowed to live and to express fully and visibly certain aspects of their belonging to the Church and their hierarchical communion with the Pope, since free contact with the Holy See and with other Catholic communities in various countries is ordinarily impeded...It cannot be denied that **grave limitations remain that touch the heart of the faith and that, to a certain degree, suffocate pastoral activity**”. **The Pope hopes that “a respectful and open dialogue between the Holy See and the Chinese Bishops on the one hand, and the governmental authorities on the other, the difficulties mentioned may be overcome and thus a fruitful understanding may be reached that will prove beneficial to the Catholic community and to social cohesion”**.

13.

Priests

This section includes three points: (a) The importance of priestly spirituality. (b) As there are so few priests it is hoped that the priests whose position was questionable, would return to full communion. It is also suggested they be given a public occasion to express their faith and communion with the Church. (c) The need for on-going formation.

13.1

- (a) The Pope addresses priests, especially the young ones, “*The current ecclesial and socio-political situation renders ever more urgent the need to draw light and strength from the well-springs of priestly spirituality, which are God’s love, the unconditional following of Christ, passion for proclamation of the Gospel, faithfulness to the Church and generous service of neighbour. How can I fail to recall the shining examples of Bishops and priests who have testified to an unflinching love for the Church, even by the gift of their own lives for her and for Christ?*”

13.2

- (b) The Pope first of all encourages the priests to be steadfast in the ministry (especially thinking of those places where there is a lack of priests), *“I know that among you there are confreres who have had to deal with difficult times and situations, adopting positions that cannot always be condoned from an ecclesial point of view and who, despite everything, want to return to full communion with the Church”*. The Pope appeals to Bishops, *“with a paternal spirit they may evaluate these questions case by case and give a just response”*.

The Holy Father also requests, *“In the community... a gesture ...on the occasion of Holy Thursday, as happens in the universal Church, other occasion the profession of faith, as a witness to the full communion attained for the edification of the Holy People of God entrusted to your care”*.

13.3

- (c) The Pope says, *“The need for an adequate ongoing formation of the clergy is emerging”*. He invites Bishops *“to think especially of the young clergy who are increasingly subject to new pastoral challenges”*. He quotes Pope John Paul II: *“Ongoing formation of priests ‘is an intrinsic requirement of the gift and sacramental ministry received; and it proves necessary in every age. It is particularly urgent today, not only because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions, but also because of the ‘new evangelization’ which constitutes the essential and pressing task of the Church’”*.

14.

Vocations and religious formation

14.1

The Pope gives thanks to God for *“The Church in China has never lacked an abundant flowering of vocations to the priesthood and to consecrated life”*. He especially affirms the *“indispensable contribution women religious make”*.

14.2

The Pope is aware of *“not a few difficulties”...“the need for more careful vocational discernment and for more in-depth education and instruction of aspirants to the priesthood and religious life”*.

14.3

The Holy Father says, *“The formation for celibacy of candidates for the priesthood deserves particular mention. Celibacy bears witness to an undivided love for God and for his people, and configures the priest to Jesus, Head and Bridegroom of the Church”*.

14.4

As for the religious vocation, it is necessary that its two dimensions be seen ever more

clearly: *“On the one hand, the witness of the charism of total consecration to Christ through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and on the other hand, the response to the demand to proclaim the Gospel”.*

15.

The Lay Faithful and the Family

15.1

The Pope appreciates *“the lay faithful who have shown total fidelity to the Gospel, even paying a personal price for their faithfulness to Christ”.* Again he says, *“You are called, today too, to incarnate the Gospel in your lives and to bear witness to it by means of generous and effective service for the good of the people and for the development of the country, active in spreading the word of God and ever more engaged participation in all areas of Church life”.*

15.2

The Pope says, *“I consider it indispensable and urgent that lay people should promote family values and safeguard the needs of the **family**”* Because, *“the family is the normal place where the young grow to personal and social maturity. It is also through the family, life is passed on from generation to generation. Family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions”.*

15.3

The Pope also notices that, unfortunately, *“In your land there is no lack of forces that influence the family negatively in various ways”.* Therefore the lay faithful, *“must have a keener and more urgent sense of the mission to proclaim to all people God’s plan for marriage and the family, ensuring the full vitality of each”.*

16.

Christian initiation of adults

16.1

The Pope says, since *“a large number of adults coming to the faith,”* The Pastors should *“devote particular care to their Christian initiation via an appropriate and serious period of catechumenate”.*

16.2

The Pope reminds that *“Evangelization is never purely intellectual communication, but rather includes experience of life, purification and transformation of the whole of existence”.*

16.3

He says again, *“Looking to the past, many adults have not always been sufficiently*

initiated into the complete truth of Christian life. It therefore seems necessary and urgent to offer them a solid and thorough Christian formation, in the shape of a post-baptismal catechumenate”.

17.

The missionary vocation

17.1

The Pope says, *“the Church, always and everywhere missionary. The Church in China must also sense in her heart the missionary ardour”.*

17.2

Pope Benedict XVI quotes John Paul II: *“At the moment of his Ascension, Jesus gave his disciples a mission...Now, at the dawn of the third millennium, it is your turn. It is your turn to go out into the world to preach the message of the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes...to speak of truth and goodness, of grace and freedom: of all that is necessary to enter into Christ’s Kingdom”.*

17.3

In the conclusion of this paragraph, the Pope says, *“Now it is your turn, Chinese disciples of the Lord, to be courageous apostles of that Kingdom”.*

Conclusion

18.

Revocation of faculties and of pastoral directives

18.1

“Considering some positive developments of the situation of the Church in China and greater ease in communication...and the requests by various Bishops and priests,” the Pope decides “to revoke all the faculties previously granted in order to address particular pastoral necessities that emerged in truly difficult times”.

18.2

“Let the same be applied to all directives of a pastoral nature, past and recent. The doctrinal principles that inspired them now find a new application in the directives contained herein”.

[After the publication of the Pope’s Letter, owing to the fact that the present situation of the Church in China is not yet fully normal, some people questioned whether some faculties should be kept. The Holy See said they are ready to answer any question and offer positive help. Some such questions have been answered in appendices 1 and 2 of the Compendium.]

19.

A day of prayer for the Church in China

19.1

The Pope says, *“The date 24 May is dedicated to the liturgical memorial of Our Lady, Help of Christians. In the future, this day could become an occasion for the Catholics of the whole world to be united in prayer with Church in China”*.

19.2

“I would like that date to be kept by you as a day of prayer for the Church in China, to celebrate it by renewing your communion of faith in Jesus our Lord and of faithfulness to the Pope...to pray for those who persecute us”. The Pope quotes Saint Paul’s First Letter to Timothy: *“That supplications, prayers be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions. God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”*.

19.3

“On that same day, the Catholics of the whole world - in particular those who are of Chinese origin – will demonstrate their fraternal solidarity and solicitude for you, asking the Lord of history for the gift of perseverance in witness” The Pope again uses the words of his audience on 25 December 2006, *“that your sufferings past and present for the Holy Name of Jesus and your intrepid loyalty to his Vicar on earth will be rewarded, even if at times everything can seem a failure”*.

20.

Blessing

20.1

The Pope uses the words of the First Letter of St Peter, chapter one for his farewell blessing, *“I pray that you may, ‘rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith is tested...may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.’”*

20.2

“May Mary Most Holy, with maternal solicitude, intercede for all of you, together with Saint Joseph and the countless Holy Martyrs of China”.

20.3

The Pope, in this blessing, assured (**us**) of his constant prayer, *“with a particularly affectionate remembrance of the elderly, the sick, the children and young people”*.