

Cardinal Joseph Zen To His Brother Cardinals: The Church is Being Killed In China

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Dear friends and enemies ... we are publishing a letter that Cardinal Joseph Zen sent some time ago to all the cardinals, and that he has now decided to make public. Needless to say, the latest news coming from mainland China only confirms and augments the concerns expressed for some time by many people about the interim agreement signed by representatives of the Holy See and the government of Beijing. Happy reading.

Omnem sollicitudinem vestram proicientes in Eum, quoniam Ipsi cura est de vobis.

["Cast all your cares on him, because he cares for you" 1 Pt 5:7 (Episcopal motto of Cardinal Zen)]

27 September 2019

Dear Eminence,

Please forgive me for the disturbance that this letter will cause you. I am writing you because, in conscience, I believe that the problem that I am presenting concerns not only the Church in China, but the entire Church, and we cardinals have the grave responsibility to help the Holy Father in guiding the Church.

Now, based on my analysis of the Document of the Holy See (June 28, 2019) “Pastoral guidelines of the Holy See concerning the civil registration of clergy in China” it is absolutely clear that it encourages the faithful in China to enter into a schismatic Church (independent of the Pope and under the orders of the Communist Party).

On July 10 I presented my “dubia” to the Pope. His Holiness, on July 3, promised me that he would be interested in it, but until now I have heard nothing.

Cardinal Parolin says that when we speak of the independent Church today, we should no longer mean that this independence is absolute, because the agreement recognizes the role of the pope in the Catholic Church.

First of all, I cannot believe that there is such a statement in the agreement and I still have not seen it (among other things, why should such an agreement be secret and not even given to me, a Chinese cardinal, to see it?), but, even more clearly, the whole situation after the signing of the agreement shows that in reality nothing has changed.

Cardinal Parolin quotes a phrase from the letter of Pope Benedict completely out of context, indeed, in such a way that it is diametrically opposed to the whole meaning of the paragraph [from which it comes].

This manipulation of the thought of the Pope Emeritus is a grave lack of respect; indeed, it is a deplorable insult to the person of the very meek still-living pope.

It also disgusts me that they often declare that what they are doing is in continuity with the thought of the preceding pope, when in fact the opposite is true. I have good reason to believe (and I hope that one day I will be able to prove it with archival documents) that the accord that has been signed is the same one that Pope Benedict had, at the time, refused to sign.

Dear Eminence, can we passively witness this killing of the Church in China on the part of those who should be protecting and defending it from its enemies? Begging you on my knees, your brother

Cardinal Joseph ZEN, S.D.B.

“Dubia” of the Cardinal on the Pastoral Guidelines of the Holy See concerning the civil registration of the clergy in China

(updated July 8, 2019)

First of all, it seems strange that such an important document is issued by the “Holy See” without specifying which dicastery and with no signature of an authority who is responsible for it.

In paragraphs 1 and 2 the document sets out the problem and the general line of the solution.

1) The problem is that the government abandons its promise to respect Catholic doctrine, and in the civil registration of the clergy it almost always requires them to accept the principle of independence, autonomy, and self-administration of the Church in China (it should be completed with what is said in the letter of Pope Benedict XVI section 7.8: “to adopt attitudes, make gestures, and undertake commitments that are contrary to the dictates of their conscience as Catholics”).

2) In the face of a complex situation that is not always the same everywhere, the Holy See gives a general line of how to behave:

On the one hand, it does not intend to force consciences, and so it asks (omitting to say explicitly “of the government”) that the Catholic conscience be respected;

On the other hand, it lays down as a general principle that “the clandestine condition is not a normal feature of the Church’s life” (Letter of Pope Benedict 8.10), that is, it is normal for it to come out in the open.

Regarding the citation of the Letter of Pope Benedict XVI section 8.10, permit me to include the entire paragraph here

(a) “Some of them (bishops), 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.”

(b) “The clandestine condition is not a normal feature of the Church’s life,”

(c) “and history shows that Pastors and faithful have recourse to it only amid suffering, in the desire to maintain the integrity of their faith”

(d) “and to resist interference from State agencies in matters pertaining intimately to the Church’s life.”

Father Jeroom Heyndrickx and Cardinal Parolin love to quote only part (b); Pope Francis (in his message of September 26, 2018) also adds part (c); but to me it seems that parts (a) and (d) are also important.

The paragraph shows clearly that non-normality is not a choice of those who are clandestine; the choice is unavoidable. It is the situation that is abnormal! Perhaps today this situation has changed?

3) The long paragraph 3 [of the Holy See document] attempts to prove that what it will suggest in paragraph 5 is justified.

First proof: the Constitution guarantees religious freedom.

I ask: But what does the long history of persecution say to us, despite the Constitution?

Second proof: After the Agreement, “logically,” independence should no longer be understood as absolute independence, but only relative to the political sphere.

First of all I say: if I have not seen the text of the Agreement, it is difficult for me to believe that they have truly recognized the “role that is peculiar to the Successor of Peter.”

I ask then: Is there anything logical in totalitarian systems? The only logic is that, as Deng Xiaoping said, “a white cat is the same as a black cat,” so long as it serves the purposes of the Party.

Immediately after the Agreement, nothing changed in the party’s religious policy; everything was officially reaffirmed, and the facts prove it.

Third proof: The context of “consolidated” dialogue

I ask: But does the document not recognize that the government has gone back on its promises, as stated in both paragraph 1 and paragraph 9?

Fourth proof: All the bishops are legitimate.

This proves only the infinite generosity of the pope or perhaps the almighty pressure of the government, but in those forgiven and “rewarded” we do not see any change, no sign of repentance, but rather clear acts of audacious triumph, laughing at the others who got on the wrong horse.

4) Paragraph 4 says that the reasons given above justify a new approach. Here at least there is the honesty to say that what is being proposed is a novelty, and that thus it is not in continuity with the past, but negates the past as being already in the past, that is, as no longer valid.

It says also that the Holy See is seeking to agree with the government on a formula (that will have the best of both worlds).

But we ask ourselves: “A formula”? What the government asks for is not a declaration of a theory: it is all a system, in which there will no longer be pastoral freedom, but in everything the orders of the Party will be followed, including the prohibition of minors under the age of 18 from participating in any religious activity.

5) In paragraph 5 contains the true pastoral guidelines. In short: sign everything the government asks you to sign, possibly followed by a written clarification that denies what you have signed. If such a written clarification is not possible, do it verbally, either with a witness or without one. It is enough that you have the intention to not accept in conscience what you have actually signed.

A text is signed contrary to the faith and what is declared is that the intention is to favor the good of the community, a more adequate evangelization, and the responsible management of the Church’s assets.

This general norm is obviously contrary to every principle of morality. If it is accepted, it would justify apostasy.

6) In paragraph 6 it says that the Holy See understands and respects those who in conscience do not accept the above guideline. Obviously this is compassion towards a “stubborn” minority who have not yet succeeded in “understanding” the new guideline. Their attitude is wrong, but the Holy See “temporarily” tolerates them.

7) Paragraph 7 speaks of certain duties of the bishops, citing a document that has nothing to do with this question.

8) In paragraph 8 it says that the faithful welcome the decision of their pastors. What does this mean? Do they not have the freedom to make this choice for themselves? Should not their conscience be respected?

To my brothers who ask me what to do, I always give the same answer: respect the choices of others and remain firm in the conviction of your own conscience. This is because I do not have any authority to impose on others my judgement of what is right or wrong.

But does not the Holy See have the authority and thus the duty to clarify for the members of the Church what is right and what is wrong? Has it done this with these “Guidelines”? Is leaving clandestinity to be encouraged while remaining in clandestinity is only tolerated? Do bishops and priests have a choice while the lay faithful do not?

9) In paragraph 9 it says that the Holy See in the meantime asks (again omitting to say “of the government”) that there be no intimidating pressures placed against non-official Catholic communities, as happened previously. (Not naming the government is a bit like

the traditional reverence shown for the Emperor in not mentioning his name.) Finally, all are encouraged to discern the will of God with “patience and humility.” But I ask myself: when did it stop encouraging firmness in the faith?

Then it says that “the present journey is marked by much hope but also by enduring difficulties.” To me it seems, instead, that the facts destroy every basis for human hope. As for hope in God, it can never be separated from the sincere desire to be ready to suffer according to His will.

Conclusion

This document has radically reversed what is normal and what is abnormal, what is a duty and what is to be tolerated.

The hope of its redactors is perhaps that the pitiable minority will die a natural death. By this minority I mean not only clandestine priests (who for some time have not been given bishops when the old bishops die, but only more Delegates, because the official bishop of the diocese is already considered legitimate), but also many of our brothers in the official community who have worked for a change with great tenacity, hoping to be supported by the Holy See, but now instead being encouraged to accept submission to the government and derision from their opportunistic conquerors.

May the Lord not permit the realization of these desires, the desires of those who want the death of the true faith in my beloved homeland. Lord, have mercy!

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