NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Chinese Catholics struggle for unity, says Vatican

Catholic News Service | Apr. 4, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- While Pope Benedict XVI has encouraged Catholics in mainland China to reconcile with one another and form one community united with Rome, some Chinese Catholics believe the only way to be faithful to the universal church is for the clandestine church to continue, said a Chinese Vatican official.

Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai, the Hong Kong-born secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, told the Italian Catholic newspaper *Avvenire*, "The clandestine communities still have a reason to exist."

In the interview published April 1, Archbishop Hon said that while some Catholic bishops have been forced by the Chinese government to participate in public events against their will, other bishops and priests have gone willingly.

The archbishop referred specifically to the ordination in November of a bishop not approved by the pope and to the December session of the National Congress of Catholic Representatives, which elected leaders for the government-approved Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. The bishops' conference and the patriotic association are responsible for the public life of the church in the communist country.

"Not all of the participants were forced to go. Some went spontaneously, just as some spontaneously adhere to the policy of the 'autonomy' of the Chinese church from the pope and the Holy See," the archbishop said.

He said 45 bishops, most of whom have been accepted as bishops by the pope, participated in the national congress in December; "some of them were taken there by force, others were not."

"The number of opportunists has grown," he said, and the only way to counter the trend is to improve the formation of the clergy and for the Vatican to be very, very careful about accepting "compromise candidates" for the office of bishop.

"Selecting good candidates is difficult. The government maintains that in presenting (to the Vatican) lists of the candidates who are acceptable from its point of view, it already is making a big concession. And if the Holy See refuses to gives its 'placet' (or approval), then it threatens to have them consecrated anyway" like it did in November, the archbishop said.

Archbishop Hon told Avvenire that sometimes the government's candidates to be bishop go ahead with an ordination ceremony without Vatican approval thinking that they will go to the pope later, ask for forgiveness and be forgiven.

"Care must be taken to avoid this kind of manipulation. Having said that, though, one must always remember that the church is the body of Christ and if one part of this body is breaking off, we can't just let it go, but must try to recover it with justice and also with mercy," he said.

Source URL (retrieved on *03/12/2014 - 06:28*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/chinese-catholics-struggle-unity-says-vatican