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Vatican: Chinese bishop excommunicated

John Thavis Catholic News Service | Jul. 18, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- The Vatican said a Chinese bishop ordained illegitimately in mid-July has been automatically excommunicated and lacks the authority to govern his diocese.

At the same time, the Vatican praised bishops loyal to Rome who resisted participation in the ordination ceremony before being forced by authorities to do so.

"The Holy Father, having learned of these events, once again deplores the manner in which the church in China is being treated and hopes that the present difficulties can be overcome as soon as possible," a Vatican statement said July 16.

The Vatican was reacting to the ordination of Father Joseph Huang Bingzhang July 14 at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Shantou, in southern China's Guangdong province. Bishop Johan Fang Xingyao of Linyin, president of the government-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, was reportedly the main celebrant; he was one of eight Vatican-approved bishops at the ordination.

It was the second ordination of a Chinese bishop without papal mandate in the last month. The Vatican has expressed deepening concern and emphasized that willing participants in such ordinations face severe penalties under church law, including automatic excommunication for the ordained bishop and the consecrating bishops.

In the latest case, the Vatican said, Father Huang "had been informed some time ago that he could not be approved by the Holy See as an episcopal candidate, inasmuch as the Diocese of Shantou already has a legitimate bishop."

The Vatican statement said officials in Rome had learned that some Chinese bishops, when contacted by civil authorities, were unwilling to participate in the ordination and had offered "various forms of resistance" before being obliged to take part.

"With regard to this resistance, it should be noted that it is meritorious before God and calls for appreciation on the part of the whole church. Equal appreciation is also due to those priests, consecrated persons and members of the faithful who have defended their pastors, accompanying them by their prayers at this difficult time and sharing in their deep suffering," the Vatican said.

The Asian church news agency UCA News reported that some bishops were accompanied to the ordination by government officials. Church sources said many of the diocesan priests went into hiding days before the ordination, but that some were found by government officials and had to attend to the ceremony.

The Vatican sees the right of the pope to appoint bishops as fundamental to church unity and as an essential element of religious freedom. China's civil authorities consider it a foreign interference.

"The Holy See reaffirms the right of Chinese Catholics to be able to act freely, following their consciences and

remaining faithful to the successor of Peter and in communion with the universal church," the Vatican statement said.

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