

## **“Dubia” by Cardinal Zen**

### **on the pastoral guidelines of the Holy See concerning the civil registration of the clergy in China**

<https://oldyosef.hkdavc.com/?p=1264>

First of all I find strange that the document is issued by “The Holy See”, without specifying which Department and no signature of the responsible Officer.

In paragraphs 1 and 2 the document explains the problem and the general solution.

1. The problem is that the government has reneged on its promises to respect Catholic doctrine. In the civil registration of the clergy, it almost always requires the clergy to accept the principle of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation of the Church in China (this could be completed with what the letter from Pope Benedict XVI says in point 7.8: “to adopt attitudes, make gestures and undertake commitments that are contrary to the dictates of their conscience as Catholics.”)

2. Faced with this complex situation, which is not always the same everywhere, the Holy See provided a general outline on how to behave:

On one hand, it says it does not intend to force people; hence calling (but omitting to explicitly say “the government”) for respect for the conscience of Catholics.

On the other hand, it states as a general principle that “The clandestine condition is not anormal feature of the Church’s life (see Pope Benedict’s letter 8.10)”, that is, it is normal for her to come out of it.

With respect to the quotation from Pope Benedict XVI’s letter at 8.10, I take the liberty of quoting almost the entire paragraph:

(a) “Some of them, 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.”

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

The paragraph clearly shows that non-normality is not the choice of the underground clergy, the choice is inevitable. It is the situation that is abnormal! Has this situation changed now?

3. The third, long paragraph tries to list the justifications of what will be suggested in par. 5.

First justification: the Constitution guarantees religious freedom.

What does the long history of persecution tell us, the Constitution notwithstanding?

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

First of all, if I cannot see the text of the Agreement, it is difficult for me to believe that they have

really recognised the “particular role of the successor of Peter”.

Then the question is: “Is there anything logical in a totalitarian system? The only logic is that, according to Deng Xiaoping, a white cat is the same as a black cat, as long as it serves the purposes of the Party.

In the immediate post-agreement period, nothing has been changed. Everything has been officially restated and the facts prove it.

Third justification: The context of the “consolidated” dialogue.

Does the document not acknowledge that the government has reneged on its promises, as noted in both the first and ninth paragraphs of this document?

Fourth justification: All bishops are legitimized.

This only proves the unlimited generosity of the pope or perhaps the all-powerful pressure of the government, but we see no change on the part of the forgiven and “rewarded”; no sign of repentance; only clear acts of bold triumph, laughing at others who have bet on the losing horse.

4. Paragraph 4 states that the aforementioned reasons justify a new attitude. Here at least there is the honesty of saying that what is proposed is something new, and that it is thus not in continuation with the past, but a denial of the past as something already bygone, something no longer valid.

It is also said that the Holy See is trying to agree with the government on a formula (and have it both ways).

But my question is: “A formula“? What is being asked from our brothers is not the statement of a theory: it is to accept a system, a regime in which there will be no pastoral freedom, in which everyone will follow orders of the Party, including minors under 18 banned from taking part in any religious activity.

5. In par. 5 we find the pastoral guidelines proper. In short: It is alright to sign everything the government requires, possibly with a written clarification that denies what is signed. If the written clarification is not possible, let it be done verbally, with or without a witness. As long as there is the intention of conscientiously not accepting what was actually signed.

A text is signed against the faith and it is stated that the intention is to promote the good of the community, a more suitable evangelisation, and the responsible management of Church assets. This general rule is obviously against all fundamental moral theology! If valid, it would justify even apostasy!

6. In par. 6 it is said that the Holy See understands and respects those who, in good conscience, do not accept the aforementioned rule. Obviously, this is “compassion” towards a “stubborn” minority that still fails to understand the new rule. Their attitude is wrong, but the Holy See, for time being, tolerates them.

7. Par.7 speaks of certain duties that fall on bishops, citing a document that has nothing to do with our issue.

8. In par. 8 it is said that the faithful should accept the decision of their pastors. What does that mean? That they do not have the individual freedom to choose? Mustn't their conscience be respected as well?

[When brothers from China ask me what to do, I have always given the answer: respect the choices of others and remain firm in the conviction of one's conscience. This is because I have no authority

to impose my views on others about what is right or wrong.]

But doesn't the Holy See have the authority and therefore the duty to clarify precisely this to the members of the Church? Are the Pastoral Guidelines doing that? Are they not saying that it is good to come out of clandestine situation and it is tolerated if some refuse to do so? Are they not saying that the Bishops and priests have a choice, but not the faithful?

9. In par. 9 it is said that in the meantime the Holy See asks (and omits again the word "the government") that unofficial Catholic communities not be placed under undue pressures, like in the past. The decision not to mention the word "government" is almost like the traditional reverence in not mentioning the name of the emperor.

Finally, it is recommended that everyone discern God's will with patience and humility. I wonder though: did the steadfastness of the faith get lost somewhere?

Then it says that "the journey of the Church in China, marked by much hope in spite of enduring difficulties". It seems to me, instead, that the facts have destroyed every foundation of human hope. As for hope in God, it can never be separated from the sincere desire to suffer in accordance with His will.

Conclusion:

This document has radically turned upside down what is normal and what is abnormal, what is rightful and what is pitiable. Those who wrote it hope perhaps that the pitied minority will die a natural death. By this minority I mean not only underground priests (who have been deprived of the leadership of a bishop, and recently even of a simple delegate – because the above ground bishop is legitimized) but also the many brothers in the official community who have worked with great tenacity to achieve change, hoping for the support of the Holy See, but now are asked to "enter the cage" amid the laughter of the winning opportunists.

May the Lord not allow the fulfilment of the wishes of those who want the death of the true faith in my dear homeland. Lord, have mercy on us.