

COLUMNISTS

The story of China's new bishops

Five Chinese bishops were ordained in Beijing last month, the same day that Pope John Paul II was ordaining 12 new bishops in Rome. The suddenly scheduled ceremony was immediately interpreted as a rebuff to the Vatican's recent efforts to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China.

The Vatican surely read it that way. The pope's media spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, said the decision seriously undermined normalization efforts.

The Vatican would have closed Taiwan's present embassy to the Holy See in return for concessions from the Chinese government, particularly the Vatican's freedom to appoint bishops.

In a splendidly balanced article in *The Tablet* ("Why China snubbed the Vatican," Jan. 15), a weekly Catholic journal published in London, Father Jerom Heyndrickx, a missionary with extensive experience in China, points out another side to this story.

He notes that the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), a government-organized group that collaborates with the government in directing the Catholic Church in China, failed to obtain the cooperation of its own members to make the ordination a much more impressive event than it was.



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Over 100 students at the national seminary, even after having rehearsed the day before, refused to serve or attend the ordination Mass. Moreover, nine of the 12 priests whom the government had planned to ordain bishops (to correspond with the 12 whom the pope was ordaining on the same day in Rome) refused to cooperate without permission from Rome. The government quickly added two more names to the list.

Even the five who were ordained were in doubt up to the moment they arrived in Beijing. They told their friends of the strong pressure that had been exerted upon them, and of their unsuccessful attempt to secure the Vatican's approval.

At the end of the ceremony, one of the bishops, speaking for the other four, thanked the congregation. "We want to

live for our flock, and also die for our flock," he said. Then tears choked his voice and there was more than a full minute's silence in the cathedral.

What all this suggests is that, contrary to popular misconceptions outside China, the so-called Patriotic Catholic Church can't be written off as defiantly schismatic, with no loyalty to Catholic tradition or the bishop of Rome.

As Father Heyndrickx states in his *Tablet* piece, "There is only one Chinese Catholic Church, but it is internally divided. For 15 years the Holy See has been aware that bishops and priests of both the official and the unofficial [or underground] groups want to be united with Rome." Indeed, two-thirds of the Patriotic bishops have secretly applied for and received recognition from Rome.

Furthermore, in spite of the present diplomatic chill between the Chinese government and the Vatican, the government did allow one crucial part of the episcopal ordination ceremony to be used again (its having been forbidden since 1958). The presiding bishop asked the candidates in a loud voice if they would be obedient to the successor of Peter, to which the five answered, "Yes." And the prayers of the faithful included one for the pope. Meanwhile, in the

cathedral's gift shop, a postcard of the pope was displayed alongside pictures of Jesus.

Father Heyndrickx infers from comments made by an official spokesman that the Chinese government has no objection to the pope's acting as earthly head of the Catholic Church in matters of faith and morals, but that it does object to the Vatican's insistence on reserving to itself certain administrative decisions, like the naming of bishops.

History provides a useful context. Almost 300 years ago the Emperor Kangxi expelled Catholic missionaries after Pope Clement XI, in 1704, had withdrawn a previously-granted permission to adapt the liturgy to Chinese culture.

That decision proved disastrous for the church's mission in China. In addition to the expulsion of foreign missionaries, Chinese Catholics were persecuted and many missions were closed. It was not until 1939 that the decision was reversed (by Pope Pius XII), but by then it was too late.

The church is only now trying to make up for lost time and opportunities - three centuries' worth.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

We all need to be touched

Sixth Sunday of the Year (Feb. 13): (R3) Mark 1:40-45. (R1) Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46. (R2) 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1.

A man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged him on his knees, "If you will, you can cure me." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. This simple act was remarkable, for no one ever touched a leper.

Hebrew law forbade one to touch a leper. Ritually, a leper was unclean. Moreover, leprosy is a loathsome disease in which the skin putrefies on the body.

But each of us need to be touched. Babies that are never touched may die. Infants need to be held a lot. They have a basic need for physical warmth.

Marcel Gerber was sent by a United Nations committee to study the effects of protein deficiency on Ugandan children. She found, to her surprise, that Uganda's infants were developmentally the most advanced in the world. It was only after two years of age that they began to be seriously damaged. Before that, their mothers constantly held them. The physical contact and the constant movement seemed to be the factors that propelled these infants to maturity beyond Western standards.

Many young parents today understand



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

this principle and routinely massage their infants. That's a wise practice.

Jesus could have healed the leper simply by speaking, but he touched him too. He knew exactly what this man needed. We need to understand that Christ gives us individually what we really need.

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and gave the angels room in the cold basement instead of in the guest room. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, "Things aren't always what they seem."

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hos-

pitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had, the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest. The next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The young angel was infuriated and asked the older angel, "How could you have let this happen! The first family had everything and you helped them; this family had little, but shared everything, and you let their cow die."

"Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied.

"When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so greedy, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it. Last night as we slept, the angel of death came for the farmer's wife. I told him to take the cow instead."

Things are not always what they seem. At times God's ways may seem unfair, but in the end his ways are fair.

Our greatest need is to trust God in everything. Christ can cleanse us and make us whole. Medical science was completely unable to treat leprosy when Jesus healed the leper. There was no

known treatment or medicine that could possibly restore his body, make him "clean" again, revive feeling in the deadened limbs. Only Christ's power could do that.

In the same way, many there are who have lost faith in God's power and purpose in their lives. They, too, are spiritually dead, they have no feeling of purpose in life, yet Christ can cleanse and restore them, giving them not just life, but abundant life.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, February 14
James 1:1-11; Mark 8:11-13
Tuesday, February 15
James 1:12-18; Mark 8:14-21
Wednesday, February 16
James 1:19-27; Mark 8:22-26
Thursday, February 17
James 2:1-9; Mark 8:27-33
Friday, February 18
James 2:14-24, 26; Mark 8:34-9:1
Saturday, February 19
James 3:1-10; Mark 9:2-13

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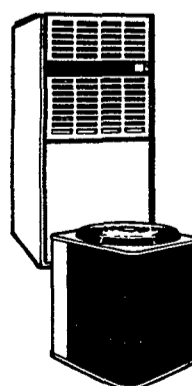
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