

Catholics' situation in China worsens

by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

The situation of the Catholic Church in China, subjected to a new wave of persecutions and arrests, has become increasingly critical. Particularly after the Tiananmen massacres, the Chinese leaders have fully implemented the directives put out on Feb. 17, 1989, in what is known as "Document No. 3," which detailed to Communist Party cadres the aims and methods of a new persecution to be launched against Catholics.

The document expresses concern over the Catholics' growing numbers and the expansion of the clandestine church, which is not subject to the "Association of Patriotic Catholics," the tame, party-run church which tries to control Catholics' activities by keeping them divided from Rome and the Pope.

All local authorities are admonished to reinforce the structure of the Patriotic Association both organizationally and economically, and to step up "the ideological formation of the clergy and the masses of believers." The document is very harsh toward Catholics who remain faithful to Rome. Government estimates are that 25 bishops have been consecrated and 200 priests ordained clandestinely.

Since the end of 1988, and continuing throughout 1989, more than 30 bishops and priests had been arrested in a nationwide police dragnet by spring 1990. At the end of 1989, in the province of Hebei, the manhunt led to the arrest not only of priests, but also of the most devout lay people. Monsignor G. Fan, former bishop of Baoding, already under tight surveillance, suddenly vanished from his home. At the outset of 1990 another six bishops were arrested, including Monsignor G. Wenzhi, bishop in the province of Heilongjiang, an elderly prelate hated by Mao, who included him among the "five black categories" during the Cultural Revolution. The aim of such a ruthless attack is to disperse and annihilate the Catholic Church, such that in the event of a possible future liberalization, the Chinese authorities will only have to talk to the hierarchy of the subservient "patriotic" church.

The Beijing clique also believes that the Holy See will be forced, at that point, to deal with the regime's church. But the calculations of the Chinese rulers do not take into account the irrepressible desire for freedom which inspires that immense people, still held hostage by the Communist dictatorship.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church is living through its own

"Tiananmen" under the most incredible silence from Western governments. Even the Holy See, at the moment, is saying nothing about the new wave of arrests. One reason is that the Vatican authorities, in an excess of caution, do not wish to give credence to the Beijing regime's thesis that the Pope and the Holy See are pulling the strings of the clandestine Catholic forces.

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