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## Illicitly ordained Chinese bishop incurs automatic excommunication

by Carol Glatz by Catholic News Service



A well-wisher kisses the ring of Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin following his episcopal ordination Saturday at St. Ignatius Cathedral in Shanghai. (CNS/Courtesy of UCAnews)

**VATICAN CITY** -- Chinese Fr. Joseph Yue Fusheng has been automatically excommunicated for allowing himself to be illicitly ordained a bishop despite repeated warnings from the Vatican.

"The Holy See does not recognize him as bishop of the apostolic administration of Harbin, and he lacks the authority to govern the priests and the Catholic community in the province of Heilongjiang," the Vatican said in a written statement Tuesday.

It also praised the licit ordination of the new auxiliary bishop of Shanghai, who reportedly was taken away by authorities after his ordination Saturday and whose whereabouts remain unknown.

Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin of Shanghai has been restricted by the government after saying he would give up his role in the government-approved Catholic Patriotic Association.

In recent years, because of government requirements, the priests, nuns and laypeople of Chinese dioceses have elected their new bishops, and most of those elected have applied to the Holy See for approval. When such approval was given, it often was announced at the episcopal ordination.

Yue was ordained bishop of Harbin on Friday without papal mandate following an acrimonious exchange of notifications between the Vatican and Beijing.

Five Vatican-approved bishops took part in the rite, held at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province. Two other Vatican-approved prelates who were invited to the ceremony did not attend, citing illnesses, but sent messages of apology and congratulation.

The Vatican said those bishops who took part in the ordination had "exposed themselves to the sanctions laid down by the law of the church," which entail automatic excommunication.

Bishops' ordinations that are not authorized by the pope generally bring the penalty of automatic excommunication; however, because in some cases there may be mitigating circumstances -- including fear of reprisal, necessity or serious inconvenience -- those bishops in attendance "must give an account to the Holy See of their participation in that religious ceremony," it said.

Yue automatically incurred the penalty of excommunication because he "had been informed some time ago that he could not be approved by the Holy See as an episcopal candidate, and on several occasions he had been asked not to accept episcopal ordination without the pontifical mandate," it said.

On July 3, the Vatican issued a strongly worded statement warning Chinese authorities the ordination of Yue violated church law, jeopardized the future of the Catholic church in China and would incur the automatic excommunication of any prelates taking part in the rite.

The State Administration for Religious Affairs responded July 4, calling the warnings "outrageous and shocking" and saying self-election and self-ordination would continue despite the Vatican's position on the matter.

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The Vatican said Tuesday it was still committed to dialogue with Chinese authorities but warned against continued illicit celebrations and episcopal ordinations without papal approval, saying such acts not only harm dialogue but also "cause division and bring suffering to the Catholic communities in China and the universal church."

The Vatican statement expressed its appreciation for all those who prayed and fasted "for a change of heart" in Yue and for the unity of the church in China.

"All Catholics in China, pastors, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful, are called to defend and safeguard that which pertains to the doctrine and tradition of the church," the Vatican said.

"Even amid the present difficulties, they look to the future with faith, comforted by the certainty that the church is founded on the rock of Peter and his successors," it said.

Writing about Ma's ceremony, the Vatican said papally approved ordination "is encouraging and is to be welcomed."

However, "the presence of a bishop who is not in communion with the Holy Father was inappropriate and shows a lack of consideration for a lawful episcopal ordination," it added.

Local church sources who attended Ma's ordination told the Asian church news agency UCA News that he was led away shortly after the ceremony by an unidentified group of people and has since been prohibited from assuming the duties of his office. The bishop did not show up for his first Mass at St. Ignatius Cathedral after telling the congregation at his ordination that he would step down from the local and national offices of the Catholic Patriotic Association to devote himself entirely to his ministry.

Ma is the first government-approved bishop in recent years to announce publicly that he would give up his duties with the Catholic Patriotic Association, UCA News reported.

On Wednesday, two government-sanctioned Catholic church organizations announced an investigation into Ma's ordination for violations of bodies' regulations. Neither body is recognized as Catholic by the Vatican.

Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 letter to Catholics in China stated that the aim of the patriotic association in upholding the independence of the church in China was incompatible with Catholic doctrine.

A church source in Shanghai said Wednesday that the bishops who participated in the ordination ceremony also have been included in the government investigation.

Questions linger on the whereabouts of Ma, with some suggesting he has been arrested and others saying he has been restricted to the grounds of the Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai.

A Shanghai priest said Ma was having a rough time.

"It is painful, but is good for the conscience of the church in China. His witness is an encouragement for our Catholics, so we can only pray for him," the priest said.

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