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Government-sanctioned groups revoke Shanghai bishop's appointment

by Catholic News Service

Shanghai — The government-sanctioned Catholic bishops' conference has revoked Shanghai Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin's appointment, saying he violated their rules for episcopal ordinations, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News.

Joseph Liu Yuanlong, a vice chair of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, confirmed Wednesday that the association and the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China had decided to revoke Ma's approval letter as "coadjutor" bishop and dismiss him from all posts in the association and conference.

They also called on the Shanghai Diocese to "deal with Ma in a serious manner," he said.

At his ordination July 7, the Vatican-approved bishop became the first to publicly quit the patriotic association, saying he wanted to devote himself to his ministry.

Since then, Ma has been in "retreat" at the Sheshan Regional Seminary in a Shanghai suburb.

The patriotic association and the bishops' conference -- neither of which is approved by the Vatican -- accused Ma of deliberately preventing an illegitimate bishop and two other participating bishops from laying hands on his head during his ordination and forbidding them from receiving Communion, sources told UCA News.

"They also charged him with not publicly distinguishing whether he is coadjutor or auxiliary bishop, a title given by the pope," and said his oath "was incomplete as a result of deliberate damage to the sound system," sources said.

In addition, they blamed him for the absence of many diocesan priests and nuns at the ordination and determined the declaration he made in his thanksgiving speech would have a damaging influence on others, the sources said.

Anthony Lam Sui-ki, senior researcher at the Hong Kong Diocese's Holy Spirit Study Center, said members of the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China risk the canonical consequences laid down in Canon 1375 of the Code of Canon Law for impeding a person from exercising ecclesiastical power or ministry.

In a statement released Thursday at the Vatican, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai, secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, said even legitimately established and Vatican-recognized bishops' conferences "do not have the power to name or approve a bishop, to revoke his mandate or to impose sanctions on him." The Chinese government-sanctioned bishops' conference, which is not recognized by the Vatican, has even less power, and the decision regarding Ma "lacks any juridical value," he said.

The only thing the decision does, Hon said, is "create division."

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The archbishop said Ma "acted with laudatory fidelity to the church and professed his sincere love for his country."

In addition, he said, Catholics from around the world have written to the Vatican "to demonstrate their sadness over the abuse committed by the so-called bishops' conference of Catholic bishops of China and by the patriotic association."

"That abuse is even more painful because it attacks the communion and discipline of the Catholic Church precisely during the Year of Faith," he said.

Hon called on Catholics around the world to pray and join prayer services organized in their dioceses to demonstrate their solidarity "with Bishop Ma and those in China living in similar situations."

The secretary to Shanghai Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian told UCA News the 96-year-old prelate is sick and unable to comment.

UCA News reported that, according to sources, Ma can meet people and update his blog occasionally during his "retreat." He currently posts his reflections on the daily gospel on his Weibo, a Twitter-like microblog, every morning.

However, he has not been allowed to concelebrate with other priests at the seminary since Dec. 4, sources said.

The Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China is strongly linked to the Catholic Patriotic Association at the national level. The national president of the patriotic association serves as a vice

president of the conference, and vice versa.

One source familiar with the situation in China told Catholic News Service he believed the Vatican-China conflict is being fueled by the Catholic Patriotic Association. He said that, if there were agreement between the Vatican and China over bishops' appointments, the patriotic association would lose its whole reason for existence: "to promote the autonomy of the church."

The patriotic association "is about power and money. It's not for faith," the source said.

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