

China and Vatican Meeting in Beijing Confirmed

Tripod Staff

According to a series of reports by the *Ucanews* Hong Kong in October 2015, China and the Holy See have been engaged in dialogue, which included a visit to Beijing (11-16 October). These confidential meetings were the second round of talks since discussion last took place in June 2014.

Ucanews broke the news of the Beijing meetings on 16 October, 2015. In Rome, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state, confirmed on 28 October that a Vatican delegation did visit Beijing, and had meetings with officials from the Chinese side.

"It is a part of a process aimed at the normalization of relations," Cardinal Parolin told the media. "The sheer fact we are able to talk about it is significant." The cardinal said the Vatican hoped to "establish normal relations" with China.

The Vatican delegation comprised representatives from the Secretariat of State and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The delegation landed in Beijing on 11 October. At that time neither side made any public statement about the talks. The Holy See delegation is reported to have visited Bishop Joseph Li Shan of Beijing, as well as the National Seminary in Beijing.

Fr. Jerome Heyndrickx, CICM, a veteran China-Church observer, wrote in *UCANews* (22 October) that rumours suggested both sides agreed to "leave aside—for the time being—negotiations on the more thorny questions: the liberation from prison of Bishop James Su Zhimin of Baoding; or clarifying the situation of excommunicated bishops; or normalizing the situation of the bishop of Shanghai, Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who has been under de facto house arrest since 2012." So far, however, there was no way to verify or to deny such speculation.

John Cardinal Tong Hon of Hong Kong holds a positive view regarding the contacts between the two sides. During an interview with *UCANews* in late August, 2015, he believed that "an improvement and a better atmosphere" had lately prevailed between the two sides.

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium, retired bishop of Hong Kong, told *Tripod* in November 2015 that now was not a suitable time for (Sino-Vatican) negotiations to take place. "The Chinese government does not need the Vatican. So any discussion will become one-sided, and go in the direction of forcing the Holy See to surrender."

By way of elaboration, Cardinal Zen cited the situation in Eastern Europe in the 1960s. With its policy of *Ostpolitik* (Eastern Policy) at that time, the Holy See tried to obtain the endorsement of the Communist Government to appoint some bishops who were loyal to the Vatican in those countries. "But did they succeed?" Cardinal Zen asked rhetorically.

Fr. Bernardo Cervellera, Chief Editor of *AsiaNews* in Rome told *Tripod* that the one important thing is that people are in dialogue. But that dialogue should not avoid issues like the underground bishops, bishops in detention, and bishops in the open church under government pressure.

According to his analysis, the Chinese Government would like the Vatican to recognize the government-sanctioned bishops' conference (BCCCC). But according to Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 letter (section 8), this is impossible because "the clandestine" Bishops, those not recognized by the Government but in communion with the Pope, are not part of the conference.

John Cardinal Tong told *Tripod* recently: "Dialogue brings hope. Even though the situation is not satisfactory, it is good to express our point of view to the other side."

He mentioned that he had known the people in charge of Sino-Vatican negotiations, such as Archbishop Claudio Celli, for more than thirty years. "They are intelligent and know how to carry on the dialogue," he said. He asked that we pray for the meetings between the two sides, and leave everything in the hands of God. *Ucanews* (16 October) noted that the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin had attended previous talks held in China before 2009, when he served as the Vatican's deputy foreign minister.