

# ***The Communion of the Church in China With the Universal Church***

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***John Cardinal Tong***

*(Editor's note: Cardinal John Tong wrote this article in view of recent news speculations on the China-Vatican dialogue. Cardinal Tong has been the director of the Holy Spirit Study Centre since its beginning in 1980. He has been studying the Church in China for more than 36 years. Through this article, he wants to show his concern for the Church in China and to offer his opinion on the communion of the Church in China with the universal Church from a theological point of view. He began writing this article on May 24 this year, the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China. The purpose of this article is to help promote dialogue between the Church in China and the universal Church, and between China and the Holy See.)*

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## **Prologue**

The Catholic Church is founded by Christ and transmitted through the apostles as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. From the day Catholicism entered China, China's Catholic Church has always kept these four marks. However, since the establishment of the new China in 1949, the unity between the Catholic Church in China and the universal Church has become more and more difficult. Following the expulsion of Archbishop Antonio Riberi, the Apostolic Internuncio of the Holy See to China, in 1951, contact between the Catholic Church in China and the universal Church has been deeply wounded. Therefore, it can be said that from this point on the Catholic Church in China lost its communion with the universal Church in an external sense, but in an essential sense, is not a schismatic Church. On the contrary, it is a Church that actively seeks to resume its communion with the universal Church.

But communion with the universal Church should not just be a spiritual connection, it should also be expressed through the concrete action of the Roman Pontiff appointing local bishops. From the point of view of the Catholic Church, the appointment of bishops by the pope is an internal and purely religious affair that has nothing to do with politics. But over the last 60 years this has not been understood by the Chinese government, so it has been difficult for the pope to formally appoint Chinese bishops and the communion between the Church in China and the universal Church has not been manifest.

Fortunately, after working for many years on this issue, the Catholic Church has gradually gained the reconsideration of the Chinese government, which is now willing to reach an understanding with the Holy See on the question of the appointment of bishops in the Catholic Church in China and seek a mutually acceptable plan. On one hand, the goal is not to harm the unity of the Catholic Church and the essential right of the Roman Pontiff to appoint bishops, and on the other, not to let the pope's right to appoint bishops be considered an interference in the internal affairs of China.

While being glad that the effort of the last few popes has finally achieved some early results, many people in mainland China and in the international arena who are concerned about the Catholic Church in China are worried. They doubt the possibility of reaching an agreement; they wonder if Vatican officials or the pope himself may go against the principles of the Church and aim their criticism and strong reproaches at certain Vatican officials. They even directly pinpoint their attack on the current pope, claiming that Pope Francis has violated the principles of the Church upheld by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Even though the concrete terms of the mutual agreement have not been made public, we believe that Pope Francis, as the protector of the unity and communion of the universal Church, would not accept any agreement that would harm the integrity of faith of the universal Church or the communion between the Catholic Church in China and the universal Church. He would only sign an agreement that would promote the unity and communion of the Church in China with the universal Church.

Since there are many Chinese priests who are concerned about the Church in China, I think we ought to give them a clear and comprehensible explanation of these issues of concern, clearly stating the consistent stance of the Church regarding the following questions in order to avoid any unnecessary misunderstanding:

- Why does the Holy See persistently insist on dialogue rather than confronting the Chinese government?
- What does it mean by communion between the particular Churches and the universal Church?
- On what criteria should the bishops in the local Churches of mainland China be appointed?
- What role does the so-called *Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China* have? and what is its relationship with individual dioceses?

### **The Significance of Sino-Vatican Negotiations**

When the gospel enters into any country, ethnic group or culture, it is not to replace, destroy or to harm the country, ethnic group or culture, but to fulfil the primordial purpose of God at the beginning of creation, which is to bring people to participate in the life of God. Pope Francis said during his interview with *Asia Times* on January 28 this year that it is the responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church to respect all civilisations and this is true also with respect to the Chinese civilisation, which the Catholic Church honours extremely highly. Yet the gospel does not enter into a country, ethnic group or culture in an abstract way, but concretely through the person of Christians. It is these messengers of the gospel that have put human cloaks on the gospel.

People will more easily experience, understand and accept the gospel if Christians themselves live out its spirit and values—charity, peace and mercy. Yet if Christians themselves, due to some constraints that they themselves are facing, have caused the expression of the gospel to become a kind of “threat,” or the Christians themselves have no intention to “threaten,” but due to their identity as “outsiders” are suspected of having “conspired,” then, the spread of the gospel will be hindered.

The reasons the transmission of the Christian gospel into the society and culture of China have met stumbling blocks and several-times been prohibited from developing are none other than these. In fact, the spread and development of Catholicism in China still face these challenges; at least some Chinese are still doubtful in their hearts about the spread of Catholicism in China. In dealing with this scepticism of the Chinese people, we should not complain that the kindness of Christians is not being understood, since complaint does not positively transform the doubts of others, and nor should we wait passively for these doubts to automatically disappear sometime in the future. The evangelical mission of the Catholic Church to the people in China urges us to act pro-actively, so that we do not just wait and wander along passively. Therefore, the way to help certain people to let go of their misunderstanding and scepticism about the Catholic Church is through proactive dialogue and communication.

Without doubt, the process from not understanding, misunderstanding to understanding, trust, acceptance and friendship, cannot be achieved overnight. Just as mutual recognition and trust between people are not simply realised through the language each other uses, but is built upon acts of mutual goodwill, our mutual understanding does not rely only on language, but also on how we act towards one another. What is more, mutual trust cannot be completely achieved through a one-time action; the only way is through long-term and consistent goodwill and action. Since the reopening of mainland China in the 1980s, the Catholic Church has countless times, through Pope John Paul, Pope Benedict and the current Pope Francis, actively extended olive branches to China, to communicate its goodwill for dialogue. Both sides have also sent delegations for mutual visits to carry out face-to-face meetings. In its two-decade-long goodwill and patient communication, the Holy See has responded with persistent humility and patience rather than hostile words when being misunderstood. This demonstrates the respect the Catholic Church has for the people of China. She wishes to give time for the people of China to slowly come to know her, so that they will come to understand that she is not an enemy of the country or an outside invader. She has no hostility towards the people of China. She is their friend and is willing to help them to

better pursue their own meaning of life. As I have stressed many times, what can unlock the heart is humility, patience and persistent dialogue—this exactly is the road of heaven.

Even though God is the master of the universe, he did not use violence to impose his own plans on humanity. On the contrary, when his plan was misunderstood and rejected by human beings, he spoke patiently with them. The bible records that he first sent the prophets, but they were not accepted by men and were even killed. But God did not give up. In the end he sent his only-begotten Son. But his Son was also killed by men. If we were to think humanly, God is the greatest loser. Yet, it is the death of his Son that is the greatest opportunity for God to reveal his love and the best opportunity for us to know who God is. The death of his Son is the strongest word God has spoken to mankind and is the climax of the dialogue between God and humanity. God does not use violence to conquer the human race. He uses dialogue, humility and patience to move mankind, so that it may willingly and whole-heartedly accept the invitation of God.

The method of dialogue between God and humanity is what we Christians should model ourselves on in seeking dialogue with other parties. The several-decades-long dialogue between the Holy See and Beijing has also shown these characteristics; gentility, humility, sincerity, patience. The agreement, as a first step between the Holy See and Beijing, is the exact fruit of this kind of dialogue. It is a move from not understanding and not trusting to understanding and trust. It is a win-win situation, for friends will support each other and enrich each other's lives. The agreement between the Holy See and Beijing is an example of human dialogue, the beginning of the normalisation of a mutual relationship. Dialogue can henceforth continue based on this mutual trust.

### **The Purpose of Dialogue: Religious Freedom and the Communion between the Catholic Church in China with the Universal Church**

As mentioned above, the objective of dialogue between the Holy See and Beijing is to remove any misunderstanding the Chinese government has and allow the people of China to know in

a more objective manner the positive meaning and value the Catholic Church has to society and to the people of China. In sum, the goal of the dialogue between the Holy See and Beijing is to strive for and protect the rightful religious freedom and rights of the Catholic Church in China that are written in the Chinese Constitution. Through dialogue, the Holy See hopes to point out that the Catholic Church respects the legal sovereignty of the country, the legitimate power and responsibility of its rulers and its laws. Thus, the religious freedom pursued by the Church is not only the natural right of man as man, but what helps mankind strive for truth, kindness, beauty and holiness, as well as improve human relationships together with the harmony and stability of society.<sup>1</sup> What is spread by the Catholic Church in China is not just a gospel for the individual, but also a gospel for the whole of society.

Some people criticise the content and objective of the dialogue between the Holy See and Beijing, claiming that the Holy See has not openly criticised China's policies on human rights and has not attempted to change certain political policies of the Chinese government. They say it seems that the Holy See has given up certain values that it has upheld. This kind of criticism is unfair. Pope Benedict has clearly stated in his 2007 *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China* that the Church is certainly concerned about social justice and will not give up striving for social justice, but the Church should not confuse its duty and jurisdiction with that of the government. The mission of the Catholic Church is not to change the institution or administrative agency of nations. It cannot and should not intervene in political struggles. Rather, it should realise the above targets through rational thought and the awakening of spiritual power. Without giving up its principles, it should resolve problems through communication with the legitimate political power and not through continuous confrontation.<sup>2</sup> Christ the Lord did not use the sword, but in his sacrifice won salvation and true freedom for humanity. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, prologue, nn.7, 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*, n.4.

the Catholic Church should also dialogue with Beijing with an attitude of “respect and charity.” The dialogue is of course not to sacrifice its principles.<sup>3</sup> If it were not for the purpose of protecting the truth and the principles of the Church, why would the Church repeatedly try to dialogue with Beijing?

### **Communion between the Church in China and the Universal Church**

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). As is said in the Gospel of St. John, the salvific plan of God is for all people. Therefore, there is only one people of God and this kingdom is not of an earthly, but heavenly nature. Its citizens come from among all peoples. To realise this plan of the Father, the Lord Jesus has from the beginning called 12 apostles and “he formed them after the manner of a college or a stable group, over which he placed Peter, who was chosen from among them. He sent them first to the children of Israel and then to all nations (cf. Romans 1:16), so that as sharers in his power they might make all peoples his disciples, and sanctify and govern them.” “Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he gathered together the universal Church, which the Lord established on the apostles and built upon blessed Peter, their chief, Christ Jesus himself being the supreme cornerstone.”<sup>4</sup> In sum, “The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful.”<sup>5</sup> It is only through communion with the Roman Pontiff that there is communion with the universal Church and that anyone can become a member of the Catholic Church. Communion with the Roman Pontiff is a manner of realising communion with the universal Church and a sign of communion with the universal Church.

The above principles are applicable to the Catholic Church in China too. In both spirit and in form, communion with the universal

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., n.7.

<sup>4</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n.19.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., n.23.

Church is necessarily achieved through communion with the Roman Pontiff, so that the Catholic Church in China becomes part of the universal Church. Pope Benedict said in his 2007 *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*: "As you know, the profound unity which binds together the local Churches found in China, and which likewise places them in intimate communion with all the other local Churches throughout the world, has its roots not only in the same faith and in a common Baptism, but above all in the Eucharist and in the episcopate. Likewise, the unity of the episcopate, of which 'the Roman Pontiff, as the Successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation', continues down the centuries through the apostolic succession and is the foundation of the identity of the Church in every age with the Church built by Christ on Peter and on the other Apostles". "Catholic doctrine teaches that the Bishop is the visible source and foundation of unity in the local Church entrusted to his pastoral ministry. But in every local Church, in order that she may be fully Church, there must be present the supreme authority of the Church, that is to say, the episcopal College together with its Head, the Roman Pontiff, and never apart from him. Therefore the ministry of the Successor of Peter belongs to the essence of every local Church 'from within'. Moreover, the communion of all the local Churches in the one Catholic Church, and hence the ordered hierarchical communion of all the Bishops, the successors of the Apostles, with the Successor of Peter, are a guarantee of the unity of the faith and life of all Catholics. It is therefore indispensable, for the unity of the Church in individual nations, that every Bishop should be in communion with the other Bishops, and that all should be in visible and concrete communion with the Pope."<sup>6</sup>

### **The Expression and Practice of Communion between the Church in China and the Universal Church**

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<sup>6</sup> *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*, n.5.



The appointment of local bishops is the expression of the communion between local Churches and the universal Church. The Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium* (The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church) says this about the appointment of a local bishop: “The canonical mission of bishops can come about by legitimate customs that have not been revoked by the supreme and universal authority of the Church, or by laws made or recognised by the same authority, or directly through the successor of Peter himself; and if the latter refuses or denies apostolic communion, such bishops cannot assume any office.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, local Churches have no authority to appoint their own bishops. Only under the permission or appointment of the Roman Pontiff can anyone become the shepherd of a local Church.<sup>8</sup> As a result, it can be seen that the local bishops’ conferences do not have any authority that is independent from that of the Roman Pontiff to decide on and to appoint local bishops. Local bishops’ conferences can only exercise their authority to teach and shepherd local Churches with the permission of the pope.<sup>9</sup> Secular political power does not have any authority to appoint local bishops, for “the apostolic office of bishops was instituted by Christ the Lord and pursues a spiritual and supernatural purpose.” “This sacred ecumenical synod declares that the right of nominating and appointing bishops belongs properly, peculiarly, and per se exclusively to the competent ecclesiastical authority.” “Therefore, for the purpose of duly protecting the freedom of the Church and of promoting more conveniently and efficiently the welfare of the faithful, this holy council desires that in the future no more rights or privileges of election, nomination, presentation, or designation for the office of bishop be granted to civil authorities.”<sup>10</sup>

The above principles are applicable to the way the Holy See deals with the Catholic Church in China. Pope Benedict clearly expresses in his *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons*

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<sup>7</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n.24.

<sup>8</sup> cf. *Christus Dominus*, nn.4, 18.

<sup>9</sup> cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n.21.

<sup>10</sup> *Christus Dominus*, n.20.

*and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China* that “the claim of some entities, desired by the State and extraneous to the structure of the Church, to place themselves above the Bishops and to guide the life of the ecclesial community, does not correspond to Catholic doctrine, according to which the Church is ‘apostolic’, as the Second Vatican Council underlined.” “The Church is apostolic ‘in her origin because she has been built on ‘the foundation of the apostles’ (Ephesians 2:20). She is apostolic in her teaching, which is the same as that of the apostles. She is apostolic by reason of her structure insofar as she is taught, sanctified and guided until Christ returns by the apostles through their successors who are the bishops in communion with the Successor of Peter”; “to implement ‘the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church’ is incompatible with Catholic doctrine.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in realising its communion with the universal Church, the Church in China is not any different from any other local Church. They all need to obey the highest teaching and administrative authority of the Roman Pontiff. But because inside China there are people who are sceptical and worried about the Roman Pontiff having the final decision-making power on the appointment of local bishops in the Catholic Church, the appointment of bishops has become the most sensitive issue in this mutual relationship.

Despite the fact that the Holy See insists on appointing bishops for the sake of protecting the unity and the community of the Church, when a bishop is appointed, the pope is exercising his highest spiritual authority and this authority in no way involves interfering in the internal political affairs or violating the sovereignty of the country. Still, the pope understands that the Chinese government is concerned about the influence the Catholic bishops may have on society.

Consequently, the Holy See is willing to dialogue on the issue on the appointment of bishops in the Church in China and to reach a mutually acceptable consensus under the premises that the principles of the Catholic faith and of ecclesial communion are not

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<sup>11</sup> *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*, n.7.

violated, for dialogue does not run counter to the hierarchical communion of the Church.<sup>12</sup>

On the appointment of Catholic bishops, canon 377 of the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church says:

§1. The Supreme Pontiff freely appoints bishops or confirms those legitimately elected.

§2. At least every three years, bishops of an ecclesiastical province or, where circumstances suggest it, of a conference of bishops, are in common counsel and in secret to compose a list of presbyters, even including members of institutes of consecrated life, who are more suitable for the episcopate.

They are to send it to the Apostolic See, without prejudice to the right of each bishop individually to make known to the Apostolic See the names of presbyters whom he considers worthy of and suited to the episcopal function.

§3. Unless it is legitimately established otherwise, whenever a diocesan or coadjutor bishop must be appointed, as regards what is called the ternus to be proposed to the Apostolic See, the pontifical legate is to seek individually and to communicate to the Apostolic See together with his own opinion the suggestions of the metropolitan and suffragans of the province to which the diocese to be provided for belongs or with which it is joined in some grouping, and the suggestions of the president of the conference of bishops.

The pontifical legate, moreover, is to hear some members of the college of consultors and cathedral chapter and, if he judges it expedient, is also to seek individually and in secret the opinion of others from both the secular and non-secular clergy and from laity outstanding in wisdom.

§4. Unless other provision has been legitimately made, a diocesan bishop who judges that an auxiliary should be given to his diocese is to propose to the Apostolic See a list of at least three presbyters more suitable for this office.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. n.9.

§5. In the future, no rights and privileges of election, nomination, presentation, or designation of bishops are granted to civil authorities.

It is clear from the canon on the appointment of bishops in the Code of Canon Law that the appointment of local bishops by the pope is purely a Church affair. The Church reserves this privilege and authority to itself, and does not give any privilege or special permission of election, appointment, presentation or designation to the political authority of the country.

There are mainly two ways the pope appoints local bishops. First, the pope himself freely appoints. Second, the pope approves as bishop the person elected in accordance with legal provisions. Here, the legal provisions of course refer to those accepted as legitimate by the Catholic Church.<sup>13</sup> If there is no legal provision on which the candidates for the episcopacy ought to be based, then the pope will use his own judgement to appoint bishops, without being restricted by any civil or religious power. When the pope freely appoints bishops, he will seek the opinion of people within the Church and choose the most suitable person from a list of candidates. People to be consulted include: bishops of the other dioceses of the same province, the national bishops' conference, the current or previous bishop of the diocese and the pontifical legate. The pontifical legate makes a personal visit to seek the opinion of a local Church. After the investigation, a list of candidates is reported to the pope based on the results of the investigation. The list of names includes the candidates he considers to be suitable and the candidates which the metropolitan of the province, the bishops belonging to the same province or the suffragan entities of the province, consider suitable. Canon Law also requires that the pontifical legate listen to the opinions of members of the college of consultors and cathedral chapter, and if he considers it beneficial, secretly seek the opinion of other clerics serving in the diocese and that of lay people with outstanding wisdom.

The above are the main principles generally followed in the election and appointment of bishops in the Catholic Church. In

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<sup>13</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n.24.

concrete practice, they may be adjusted according to what is feasible in the local situation. In appointing bishops all over the world, the Catholic Church chooses ways that do not violate the principles of faith and communion according to the specific circumstances. For instance, the so-called Vietnam model is what the Apostolic See tailored to suit the situation of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. On the election of bishops by the Apostolic See and the Chinese government, the Apostolic See should not be criticised over the way it decides on the appointment of bishops in the Church in China, so long as the above principles are not violated. Regarding the appointment of bishops in the Church in China, the Apostolic See has the right to set up special provisions to target the specific circumstances faced by the Church in China. This does not violate the principles of faith nor destroy the communion and unity of the Church.

Currently, there is still no bishops' conference accepted by the Apostolic See in the Church in China. If the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China, after fulfilling the basic requirements of the Church, is in the future accepted by the Apostolic See as legitimate, it, or the bishops in the provinces under it, would have the right and responsibility to recommend episcopal candidates they consider as suitable to the pope. This is totally in accordance with the tradition of faith of the Church and does not destroy the communion and unity of the Catholic Church. If the agreement reached between the Apostolic See and Beijing included contents regarding the episcopal candidates for China recommended by a pontifically approved bishops' conference of China, we should not consider that the Church has sacrificed its own communion with and the administrative right of the pope in the Church in China. Certainly, a bishops' conference in China, once legally constituted and recognised, and the bishops in the provinces under it would only have the power of recommendation, while the power of final decision would still be reserved to the Apostolic See. The Apostolic See has the right to choose from the recommended list the candidates it considers as most suitable and the right to reject the candidates recommended by a bishops' conference of China and the bishops in the provinces under it. In such cases, the process of consultation would commence again.

## On the Bishops' Conference in China

A local bishops' conference has the right to recommend episcopal candidates to the Apostolic See. Yet, for reasons obvious to all, some bishops of the Catholic Church in mainland China "under the pressure of particular circumstances, have consented to receive episcopal ordination without a pontifical mandate, but have subsequently asked to be received into communion with the Successor of Peter and with their other brothers in the episcopate". "The Pope, considering the sincerity of their sentiments and the complexity of the situation, and taking into account the opinion of neighbouring Bishops, by virtue of his proper responsibility as universal Pastor of the Church, has granted them the full and legitimate exercise of episcopal jurisdiction. This initiative of the Pope resulted from knowledge of the particular circumstances of their ordination and from his profound pastoral concern to favour the reestablishment of full communion." "There are certain Bishops—a very small number of them—who have been ordained without the Pontifical mandate and who have not asked for, or have not yet obtained, the necessary legitimation. According to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, they are to be considered illegitimate, but validly ordained, as long as it is certain that they have received ordination from validly ordained Bishops and that the Catholic rite of episcopal ordination has been respected."<sup>14</sup>

In mainland China, there are also some bishops of the clandestine Churches not yet recognised by the Chinese government. Some may still be living in situations deprived of freedom and are unable to exercise their ministry as bishops. Therefore, there is currently no legitimate bishops' conference recognised by the Apostolic See in mainland China, for "the 'clandestine' Bishops, those not recognised by the Government but in communion with the Pope, are not part of it; it includes Bishops

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<sup>14</sup> *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*, n.8.

who are still illegitimate, and it is governed by statutes that contain elements incompatible with Catholic doctrine.”<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, a future bishops’ conference in China would have to include all the legitimate bishops of the open Church as well as the clandestine bishops, to form an integral bishops’ conference in China. Currently in mainland China, there are still bishops not yet recognised by the pope who ought to fulfil the statutes of the Catholic Church for legitimate bishops so that they can subsequently be recognised by the pope as legitimate. The Apostolic See earnestly desires: “What great spiritual enrichment would ensue for the Church in China if, the necessary conditions having been established, these Pastors too were to enter into communion with the Successor of Peter and with the entire Catholic episcopate!”<sup>16</sup>

To strive for and protect the legitimate authority of the bishops of the clandestine Churches in China, Rome should also conduct a dialogue in order that these bishops be recognised by the Chinese government as legitimate. Some people are worried that the illegitimate bishops being treated with excessive leniency in Sino-Vatican negotiations puts the principles of faith and communion of the Church in second place. Such worries are unnecessary. In its unceasing insistence on dialogue with the Chinese government, the Apostolic See aims not to sacrifice the principles of faith and communion of the Church, but to help the Chinese government understand the real meaning of the principles of faith and communion of the Church through dialogue and negotiation, so that the Chinese government will no longer be sceptical and remove its various unnecessary administrative measures imposed upon the Church in China. In this way, the integrity of faith and communion of the Church would be protected. If the Holy See has any intention of forsaking the principles of faith and communion of the Church, there would actually be no need for it to dialogue and negotiate with the Chinese government. The unceasing dialogue actually

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

represents the unwavering stance of the Holy See towards this question.

Some people are concerned that the dialogue between the Holy See and the Chinese government may sacrifice the legitimate rights of the clandestine Churches. Some are worried that the clandestine bishops in prison may be forgotten by the negotiators representing Rome. I believe that this worry could represent a mistrust of the love of the Holy See towards the Church in China. This way of thinking may indeed be an offence against the Holy See and its delegated representatives in the negotiations; it should not come from the hearts of us Catholics. The sacrifice made by the clandestine Churches in their perseverance in the faith of the Church is universally acknowledged. The universal Church also demonstrates its concern for the struggle for survival of the clandestine Churches by trying to lend a helping hand to it in all sorts of ways. The dialogue between the Holy See and Beijing in fact aims to change the clandestine Churches' abnormal condition for survival, so that they may soon practice their religious faith under the protection of the law.

The previous Pope Benedict begins his *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China* by stating that his heart is deeply concerned about his brothers and sisters in the Church in China, and that he prays for the Catholic Church in China every day.<sup>17</sup> The current Pope Francis also "prays for China" every day in front of a statue of Our Lady of Sheshan that he keeps in his private chapel.<sup>18</sup> We should not doubt the deep concern of the pope towards our brothers and sisters in the clandestine Church in China.

The dialogue and negotiation between the Apostolic See and the Chinese government is a long-term process. Coming to know each other, mutual understanding, mutual acceptance and mutual recognition take time. We do not expect that the problems accumulated over several decades between China and the Vatican can be solved in one go. We have to allow time and patience on

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<sup>17</sup> *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*, n.1.

<sup>18</sup> *Vatican Radio*, 26/02/2016.



both sides. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. As long as both sides have begun to establish a relationship of mutual trust, there is no reason that we should make a pessimistic forecast or give a premature death sentence to the negotiations. We dare to positively hope for fruitful results in the dialogue with each other because of our pursuit and perseverance in faith. We believe that goodness and not evil is the world's ultimate ruling power. The Catholic Church perceives the people and the rulers of China as friends who also seek goodness, justice and other similar universal values. "Friendship is nourished by contacts, by a sharing in the joy and sadness of different situations, by solidarity and mutual assistance."<sup>19</sup> Let us keep the smooth continuation of negotiations between the Apostolic See and Beijing in our prayer. A Sino-Vatican agreement will certainly be a win-win outcome and not a zero-sum game.

## **Conclusion**

Needless to say, some people still have certain "serious difficulties, misunderstandings and hostility" about the communion mechanism of the Catholic Church.

Thus, the Catholic Church continuously stresses that "in the course of a respectful and open dialogue between the Holy See and the Chinese Bishops on the one hand, and the governmental authorities on the other, the difficulties mentioned may be overcome," hoping "that an accord can be reached with the Government so as to resolve certain questions regarding the choice of candidates for the episcopate, the publication of the appointment of Bishops, and the recognition—concerning civil effects where necessary—of the new Bishops on the part of the civil authorities."<sup>20</sup> Since the resumption of dialogue between the Apostolic See and the Chinese government got underway in recent years, many people have positive expectations for the development of Sino-Vatican relations, and hope that Sino-Vatican dialogue can

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<sup>19</sup> *Letter to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*, n.4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, nn.3, 9, 12.

change the survival conditions of the Church in China. Moreover, we are aware that our many brothers and sisters in the clandestine Church are also supportive of the dialogue between the Apostolic See and Beijing. They “[do] not see a potential agreement between the legitimate authority of the People’s Republic of China and the Holy See as a political compromise or even as a form of giving in.” They believe that the normalisation of Sino-Vatican relations “is the direction we are headed in,” it “could bring ‘good things for the Chinese people and not just for Catholics,’” “it brings [them] joy,” for “it would make the everyday life of Catholics in China much easier,” “the people of God in China will be given more space and freedom to practice the faith,” thus “we follow the Pope and trust any decision he takes with regard to relations with China.”<sup>21</sup> We hope these good wishes for the Church in China will soon be realised.

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<sup>21</sup> *Vatican Insider*, 28/01/2016.