

中國宗教評論



Religions & Christianity in Today's China

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Contents

Editorial | 2

News Update on Religion and Church in China

June 28 – October 2, 2019 | 3

Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, Katharina Feith,
Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle) and Jan Kwee

“Everything is related”

The 10th European Catholic China Colloquium in Siegburg

focused on *Laudato Si'*, Technoscience and the Church in China | 20

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

Beijing and the Holy See – Seeking the Common Ground

Two Wounded Partners in Dialogue | 22

Jerome J. Heyndrickx CICM

Imprint – Legal Notice | 38

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Today we can present to you the fourth issue in 2019 of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* (中国宗教评论). Besides the regular News Update on religions and Christianity in China it contains two contributions on the 10th European Catholic China Colloquium “*Laudato Si*” and Technoscience – Implications with Focus on the Church in China” which was organized by the China-Zentrum and took place in Siegburg/Germany from 30 August – 1 September 2019.

The first is a short conference report by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, the second the contribution given by Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx CICM (Verbiest Institute, Catholic University of Leuven) on “Beijing and the Holy See – Seeking the Common Ground. Two Wounded Partners in Dialogue.” In his article Fr. Heyndrickx elaborates how the Rome–Beijing relationship developed from confrontation to dialogue and gives his evaluation of the “Beijing–Rome Agreement of September 22, 2018.”

As many of you already have learned, on 29 November 2019 the founding director of the China-Zentrum, Fr. Prof. Dr. Roman Malek SVD, passed away at the age of 68 in the hospital of Grudziądz, Poland. The funeral service was held in the mission house of the S.V.D. missionaries in Górna Grupa, Poland. We owe Fr. Malek with his charismatic nature and admirable creative power very much. Also in the long years of his illness he always remained close to us and our work. A public memorial service for Fr. Malek will be held in accordance with German Catholic tradition six weeks after his death, i.e., on Friday, 10 January 2020 at 14:30 in the crypt chapel of the S.V.D. Missionary Seminary, Arnold-Janssen-Str. 30, 53757 Sankt Augustin, Germany. You are most welcome to attend. If you plan to, please let us know by Monday, 10 January 2020 (info@china-zentrum.de). We will publish an obituary at a later point of time. R.i.P.

Religions & Christianity in Today's China is freely available on the website of the China-Zentrum, www.china-zentrum.de. Additionally, readers who subscribe to *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* will regularly receive e-mail updates providing web links to the contents of each newly published issue. – The China-Zentrum is a non-profit organization. For the publication of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* we are dependent on the generosity of our friends and readers. In order to help us cover inevitable costs, we would be very grateful if you could consider sending a voluntary contribution.

Sankt Augustin, December 2019

The Editors

News Update on Religion and Church in China June 28 – October 2, 2019

Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, Katharina Feith, Isabel Friemann
(China InfoStelle) and Jan Kwee
Translated by David Streit SVD

The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2019, No. 3, pp. 3-21) covered the period March 26 – June 28, 2019.

Politics, Human Rights

June 30, 2019:

China’s Communist Party reports over 90 million members

By the end of 2018, China’s Communist Party had 90.59 million members. In 2018, it recruited 2.06 million new members, 72,000 more than in the previous year. Of these, 44.9% had at least a junior college (大专) degree, 80% were 35 years or younger. According to *Xinhua*, these figures were published on June 30 in a report by the Organization Department of the party’s Central Committee. On the party’s membership structure, the report states that more than a third of party members were born in the 1980s and 1990s, and nearly half have at least a junior college degree. 27.2% of the party members are women, 7.3% belong to ethnic minorities. 35.3% are farmers and workers, 15.5% professional and technical personnel, 10.8% business and management personnel (*Xinhua* June 30).

July 8, 2019:

Letter from UN ambassadors from 22 states calls on China to end arbitrary detention in Xinjiang – Letter from Saudi Arabia and 36 other states supports China’s Xinjiang policy

In a July 8 letter to the President of the UN Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN ambassadors from 18 European countries, as well as from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan expressed concern about the “arbitrary detention in large-scale places of detention, as well as widespread surveillance and restrictions,” particularly targeting Uighurs and other Muslim and minority groups in Xinjiang. They called on China to end the practice and allow meaningful access to Xinjiang for international observers.

The letter was published on July 10. The semi-official *Global Times* rejected it sharply on July 11. A kind of counter-letter from 37 states to the UN supported China's policy. According to *Reuters*, who saw the letter on July 12, the 37 states wrote: "Faced with the grave challenge of terrorism and extremism, China has undertaken a series of counter-terrorism and deradicalization measures in Xinjiang, including setting up vocational education and training centers." They further said that security had returned to Xinjiang and the fundamental human rights of people of all ethnic groups had been safeguarded. The letter was signed by Saudi Arabia, Russia, many African countries, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba, Belarus, Myanmar, the Philippines, Syria, Pakistan, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. According to an analysis by *CNN*, almost half of the signatory states have a majority Muslim population; it said that this reflects China's great influence on these states (*CNN* July 17; globaltimes.cn July 11; nytimes.com July 10; *Reuters* July 12; letter of the 22 ambassadors at www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/190708_joint_statement_xinjiang.pdf).

July 21 and August 16, 2019:

China publishes two White Papers on Xinjiang: one on "Historical Matters" and the other on "Vocational Training Centers"

Chapter I of the White Paper on "Historical Matters Concerning Xinjiang" is dedicated to the topic "Xinjiang Has Long Been an Inseparable Part of Chinese Territory." Chapter VII points out that the Uighurs historically adhered to various religions (including Buddhism) and that Islam was "not a voluntary choice made by the common people, but a result of religious wars and imposition by the ruling class, though this fact does not undermine our respect for the Muslims' right to their beliefs."

The White Paper "Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang" claims, among other things, that "The only criterion for education at the centers is whether the trainee has been convicted of unlawful or criminal acts involving terrorism and religious extremism. It has nothing to do with their region, ethnicity or religion."

Already in March of this year China published the White Paper "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang" (see: *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, p. 4). The text of the new White Papers can be found at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201907/22/WS5d34f718a310d830564002eb_1.html and at http://english.scio.gov.cn/2019-08/16/content_75106484.htm.

August 14, 2019:

Civil rights attorney Gao Zhisheng has been missing for more than two years, his wife says on *Radio Free Asia*

According to his wife Geng He, who now resides in the United States, Gao Zhisheng has been reported missing from his home in Shaanxi since August 13, 2017. She said that she still has no idea where he is. Gao Zhisheng had been advocating for the rights of people in politically sensitive cases, for example in defending Falun Gong practitioners and in suing the authorities for their carrying out of enforced family planning. The authorities closed down his law firm in 2005. In December 2006, he was given a suspended sentence of three years in prison for incitement of subversion of state power and was placed on probation for five years. While he was on probation, he was taken into custody several times. He reported in 2007 that he had been tortured during a period of detention. He disappeared in January of 2009, re-appeared for a month in March of 2010 and then disappeared from view once again. In December of 2011, the state media reported that he had been jailed for three years for violation of his probation terms. On August 14, 2014, he was released from jail, according to reports in very poor health

and living under house arrest afterwards, until his renewed disappearance in 2017. Gao Zhisheng is a Christian (rfa.org Aug. 14; see: *RCTC* 2014, No. 4, p. 12).

Religious Studies

July 10 and September 24, 2019:

Lecture series on the major project “Religious Risks in the Conduct of ‘One Belt One Road’” by the National Social Science Foundation in Beijing

In lecture No. 15 of the series, Lü Jianfu (Shaanxi Normal University) addressed questions on the origin of Buddhism and its spread to China on July 10. According to Lü, there are two points of view regarding the acceptance of Buddhism by the Chinese: one view is that there was a natural affinity between Buddhism and Chinese thought; the other view is that Mahayana Buddhism was able to spread in China as a result of an “emptiness,” since the country at the time of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States (770–221 BC) was lacking any “mainstream culture and religion.”

Lecture No. 16 on September 24 dealt with the subject of Pakistan. Among other things, the speaker Wang Nan, board member of the Chinese Association for Asian and African Studies, answered questions about Islamic extremism and the spread of Christianity in Pakistan.

Both lectures took place at the Institute for World Religions (IWR) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The lecture series began in 2015 (iwr.cass.cn July 12; Sept. 25).

From July 13, 2019:

Animated film about the mythological figure Ne Zha turns out to be a blockbuster in China

The film is a free adaptation of the myth of Ne Zha, a demon with superhuman powers who is born as the child of human parents. As Maik Rudolph wrote in *China Radio International*, the myth can be found in Chinese and Indian narratives, as well as in Daoism and Buddhism. The figure of Ne Zha appears in many classics of Chinese literature, including the *Journey to the West* and *The Investiture of the Gods*. The portrayal of Ne Zha has always fluctuated but the figure is extremely popular, Rudolph explained, and since the late 1970s, there have been various cartoon adaptations of the material. – Ne Zha is also revered as a guardian deity in Chinese folk religion.

Director Jiaozi's film has turned out to be China's most popular animated film of all time. By the end of August, it had grossed 4.68 billion yuan (around € 596.1 million). In the US and Canada, where the film has been running since late August, it has met with considerably less success. The *Global Times* attributed this to cultural differences and wrote that the film Ne Zha, “the core value of which [is] ‘I am the only master of my destiny,’ may have difficulty touching the hearts of those who believe in God” (german.cri.cn Aug. 15; beta.blickpunktfilm.de Sept. 3; globaltimes.cn Oct. 11).

Religious Policy

July 10, 2019:

Authorities in Xingtai City, Hebei Province, announce to the public a new telephone hotline for the reporting of illegal religious activities

Xingtai City's United Front together with the city's Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau announced the opening of the new hotline. The hotline was also referred to in a new legal norm, entitled "Measures of Xingtai City for Rewarding the Reporting of Illegal Religious Activities (For Trial Implementation)" 邢台市举报非法宗教活动奖励办法(试行). According to these "Measures," the following illegal activities should be reported: distribution of unauthorized religious publications, unauthorized operation or construction of religious sites, organization of religious activities or acceptance of religious donations by non-religious organizations or sites. In addition, "unauthorized, arbitrary [i.e. not state-approved] organization of religious training or Hajj activities, and arbitrary organization of religious education courses for minors by whatever organization or individual" should be reported to the authorities. Anonymity of callers is assured, with the reward being offered ranging from 100 to 500 Yuan or more.

In March of this year, the City of Guangzhou announced a similar legislation but one that offered much higher rewards. There are also similar hotlines available in China for denunciations on many other topics (UCAN July 18; the text of the announcement can be found at: www.xingtai.gov.cn/zwggk/zwdt/gsgg/201907/t20190709_537068.html, of the "Measures" at: www.ainanhe.com/thread-1071-1-1.html; for the legislation in Guangzhou see RCTC 2019, No. 2, p. 6).

According to Yang Fenggang's *Atlas of Religion in China*, measured in terms of the number of registered religious sites, the Catholic Church and Islam are the two most widely held religions in the area administered by Xingtai City.

July 22, 2019:

Government ban on Falun Gong now twenty years old

Various international media recalled the ban on the meditation movement Falun Gong issued twenty years ago. On April 25, 1999, over 10,000 Falun Gong followers silently demonstrated for thirteen hours in front of Zhongnanhai, the seat of the party and the central government, to gain recognition for their movement. On July 19, 1999, the Central Committee of China's Communist Party formally announced that party members were forbidden from practicing Falun Gong – reportedly there were many party members among the supporters of Falun Gong. Then, just three days later, on July 22, 1999, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security banned the Falun Gong movement outright (see *China heute* 1999, Nos. 3 & 4, pp. 66-72, 83-85 [in German]). There then began a crackdown on the movement as well as continued persecution of its supporters by the authorities. Nevertheless, according to a 2017 poll by Freedom House cited by UCAN, 7 to 20 million people in China are still said to be practitioners of Falun Gong (UCAN July 19).

August 2019:

New high school textbooks emphasize “Chinese values” – Reported removal from textbooks of references to religious concepts in Western literature

The Chinese Ministry of Education has for the first time published uniform textbooks for the subjects of politics, history and Chinese language nationwide, *China Daily* reported on August 28. The new textbooks emphasize more strongly the traditional values and the revolutionary history of China, according to *China Daily*. The paper also reported that the editor-in-chief of the new history textbook told its reporter that the new textbooks teach students a strong sense of national sovereignty and emphasize that Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan and the islands in the South China Sea are inseparable parts of China. Citing media reports, *UCAN* said on August 8, that beginning with the new school year, the books will be used in the first grade of the senior middle school in Beijing, Tianjin, Liaoning, Shanghai, Shandong and Hainan. By 2022, all senior middle school students in China are to use them.

In a textbook used by the 6th grade, religious references such as the words “God” and “Bible” have been deleted from Chinese translations of foreign classics of world literature – *UCAN* said on August 8 quoting other media reports. For example, in the volume which was edited by the People’s Education Press, in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale “The Little Match Girl,” the sentence “When a star falls, a soul goes up to God” has been changed to “When a star falls, a human goes.” According to the same source, Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe* and the short story “Vanka” by Anton Chekhov have been similarly censored (*bitterwinter.org* May 26; *China Daily* Aug. 28; *UCAN* Aug. 8).

August 27, 2019:

“Measures for the Administration of Religious Organizations (Draft for Solicitation of Comments)” published

The new Regulations on Religious Affairs, in force since February 1, 2018, assign to the religious organizations 宗教团体 (currently this refers to the official umbrella association of the five recognized religions) a key role in the state management of religious affairs. This key role is laid out more in detail in the draft new legislation. Here are just two references to the content of the document which has not yet been officially adopted:

1. Religious organizations in the sense of the new legal norm are “voluntarily [*sic!*] formed [自愿组成] by religious citizens,” they are “a bridge and bond” that unites and connects party and state with the religious circles and citizens (§ 2). So far, the indication that the organization is voluntary is to be found only in the statutes of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. It is not found in the statutes of the official associations of the other four religions.

2. The political principles to which religious organizations must adhere include the “principle of independence, autonomy and self-government” (§ 5). So far, this principle has only been included in the statutes of the umbrella organizations of Catholics (Patriotic Association and Bishops’ Conference), Protestants and Muslims. Now, with the new legal norm, this principle will be further generalized. Both points are certainly noteworthy in view of the ongoing Sino-Vatican negotiations.

The deadline for submitting opinions on the draft legislation was September 27, 2019. The text of the 宗教团体管理办法 (征求意见稿) can be found at www.moj.gov.cn/news/content/2019-08/28/zlk_3230430.html, and an unofficial translation can be found at www.chinalawtranslate.com/religious-group-draft.

October 1, 2019:

The People's Republic of China celebrates its 70th anniversary – China's religions to take part in the celebrations

Party and state spared no efforts in the 70th anniversary celebrations to mark the founding of the state. Through their umbrella organizations, the five state recognized religions were also called upon to join in the celebrations. For more details, see the article in *China heute* 2019, No. 3, p. 140 (in German).

Buddhism

July 1, 2019:

Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) releases notice on the installation of abbots and the inauguration of statues and stupas

The document says that waste, lavishness and blind competition are destroying the image of Buddhism in Chinese society. It then explains the religious significance of ceremonies: the purpose of inauguration is to give statues of the Buddha or of bodhisattvas as well as stupas (pagodas) their sacred character and to introduce believers to the spiritual world of compassion and wisdom they embody. Inaugurations should not serve as a stage for the local economy, and Buddhist religious personnel should not perform religious inaugurations of non-Buddhist sites or for items such as watches or cars. The installation of abbots and the inauguration of statues or stupas should be simple and should not include red carpets, drums and pipes or convoys of luxury cars. No Buddhists or CBA religious personnel from other provinces should be invited to such ceremonies, and apart from representatives of the United Front and religious authorities, no party or government cadres should be invited. The document "Notice on the Standardization of the Buddhist Activities of Installation of Abbots and Inauguration of Statues and Stupas" (关于规范升座、开光等佛事活动的通知) can be found at www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=506&id=40433, a German translation will appear in *China heute* 2019, No. 4.

July and August 2019:

Reports of re-education of monks and nuns expelled from Yachen Gar monastery and of demolition of sections of the monastery complex

According to reports by the US-based radio broadcaster *Radio Free Asia* (RFA), since May of 2019, some 3,500 monks and nuns have been expelled by the authorities from the Yachen Gar monastic center in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Kardze (Ganzi) in Sichuan Province – especially those who originally come from other provinces (see *RCTC* 2019, No. 3, p. 8). The exact number of monks and nuns expelled is unclear. On July 1, RFA reported that many of the deportees would be required to undergo political re-education after their forced return to their towns of origin. According to the organization Free Tibet, in a detention center in Jomda (Jiangda) County in the Tibet Autonomous Region, about 70 nuns from Yachen Gar were required to undergo a two- to three-month patriotic re-education where they had to wear lay clothes, to praise the People's Republic of China and to denounce the Dalai Lama. Following their re-education, they would no longer be allowed to join any other monastery, the organization said.

Free Tibet reported that an instruction was issued on August 10, 2019, according to which 3,500 dwellings in Yachen Gar (mostly small huts built by the nuns and monks themselves) were to be demolished; the demolitions were scheduled to begin two days later. On September 30, Free Tibet published satellite imagery to show that nearly half of Yachen Gar's area had been cleared of buildings. According to one source at *RFA*, the number of monks and nuns in the complex is to be limited to 4,700.

Yachen Gar is a monastery and study complex associated with the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, where some 10,000 nuns and monks are said to have lived until a few years ago, including many Han Chinese. In past years there have been repeated expulsions of monks and nuns from the complex (freetibet.org July 8; Aug. 24; Sept. 30; rfa.org July 1, 27).

September 9, 2019:

International Network of Engaged Buddhists publishes statement on Hong Kong

In the statement, the Buddhists express concern about the suffering of Hong Kong's people who are facing violence on a daily basis [in connection with the ongoing protests]. They also express their concern about the structural causes of such violence. They express their determination to engage compassionately, holistically and in a non-violent fashion in Hong Kong and to try to end violence on both sides through their network of contacts. "We look forward to the Buddhist monasteries and groups in Hong Kong to provide humanitarian assistance beyond political positions," the statement said. The Buddhists also want to contribute to longer-term solutions to the problems in Hong Kong and express their willingness to work with other partners.

According to its own data, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists with members from 25 countries, founded in 1989 by the Thai sociologist and activist Sulak Sivaraksa, was given the goal of networking with committed Buddhists worldwide to encourage them to address global issues (buddhistdoor.net Sept. 9).

Islam

September 21, 2019:

New York Times (NYT) on a secret 2018 political guideline on "Islam work" and the abolition of government standards for *halal* foods

An article by *New York Times* writer Steven Lee Myers deals with increasing restrictions on certain aspects of Islamic life in the People's Republic, especially in Ningxia, Inner Mongolia and Henan (the specific situation in Xinjiang is not discussed). In the article, Myers refers to an internal document – Document (2018) No. 24 issued by the Office of the Party's Central Committee and the Office of the State Council on April 19, 2018 titled "Views on Reinforcing and Improving Islam Work in the New Situation" (关于加强和改进新形势下伊斯兰教工作的意见) – parts of which, as he says, have been seen by the *NYT*. According to Myers, this document warns of the "Arabization" of Islamic sites, fashions and rituals in China and especially of the influence of Saudi Arabia. It forbids the use of the Islamic financial system, thus Myers. It prohibits mosques and other private Islamic organizations from organizing kindergarten or after-school programs, and forbids Arabic language schools from teaching religion or sending students abroad, Myers further says. Already in June of 2018, *Bitter Winter* and *Radio Free Asia* had reported on this document, the existence of which is also confirmed by references to it in reports on websites of some local authorities.

Myers also writes that the authorities of several provinces no longer issue *halal* certificates to food producers and restaurants. In fact, as early as December 2018, the *Global Times* reported that the Gansu and Shaanxi provinces had abolished their governmental *halal* identification standards, which had only been introduced a few years ago according to the *Global Times*, mainly with a view to export sales; it said that more provinces would soon be following suit in ending government *halal* certification. These standards have been “based on the rules of Islam and foreign identification methods,” while future *halal* identification will “have no set standards but will follow and respect local ethnic customs,” a Gansu official told the newspaper (globaltimes.cn December 17, 20, 2018; *NYT* Sept. 21; rfa.org June 22, 2018; zh.bitterwinter.org June 5, 2018; zjsmzw.gov.cn May 15, 2018).

Certain scholars had warned in Chinese media for a long time about so-called “pan-*halal* tendencies.” The Marxist researcher Xi Wuyi had called for a separation of state and religion in this area (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 2, pp. 10-11; 2018, No. 1, p. 9; No. 2, pp. 11-12).

Orthodox Church

August 3, 2019:

In Hong Kong, the Sunday Octoechos has been published in Chinese

The publication of this major liturgical book, which can be used for public worship and private prayer, was aimed at making liturgical texts available for Chinese-speaking faithful. This edition of the Octoechos, which is based on the Chinese text translated by the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission in the 19th century, has been substantially edited to meet today’s standards of Chinese liturgical language. It contains eight volumes of the Octoechos, with 36 pages in each volume, with parallel English and Chinese texts, liturgical commentaries and a short appendix of Chinese vocal chanting (mospat.ru Aug. 3).

Protestantism

Middle of July, 2019:

Access to Bible App WeDevote blocked

WeDevote 微读圣经, which is the most popular Bible application (app) in China with 10 million installations, was closed down in mid-July. Government censors blocked Chinese access to WeDevote’s website and scrubbed the app from most domestic app stores. WeDevote had entered the market in June of 2013 after a development phase of three years and quickly became the market leader. With its slick design, respect for copyrights, and curated Bible reading plans and devotionals, WeDevote stands far above other Bible apps for smartphones and tablets available in China. The small production team working with Levi Fan had to shut down the company in Beijing and cease distribution in response to pressure from the government in 2015. Foreseeing that this might happen, a branch company in Hong Kong had already been created, to which all rights to the app had been transferred. WeDevote could continue to be installed and updated in mainland China until the summer of this year. Now that is no longer possible. However, the program can still be used offline and shared privately via links. Levi Fan, the app’s creator, now lives in the USA (June Cheng in: *World Magazine*, edition of Oct. 12 [world.wng.org Sept. 26]).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

July 17–30, 2019:

Delegation of Young Volunteers from the United Methodist Church visits China

At the invitation of the Chinese Christian Council, a United States delegation from the United Methodist Church visited churches and church-related institutions such as the YMCA and Amity Foundation in Shanghai, Nanjing and Beijing. The group of young volunteers, twelve in number, all between the ages of 18 and 35, saw their journey as leadership training for their future assumption of responsibilities in their church. The trip was organized and chaired by Rev. David Newhouse and his wife Christy. Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, President of the United Methodist Church's Department of Ecumenical Relations, also accompanied the group, in order to cement the institutional relationships between the denomination and its Chinese partners. At the Christian Council headquarters in Shanghai, the Methodist delegation was received by Pastor Lin Manhong, who is responsible for theological education. In Beijing, the group attended a service in the large Haidian Church in the university district (ccctspm.org July 19; *UM News* Aug. 16).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

October 2019:

International Bible Conference Canceled

The National Theological Seminar of the China Christian Council, which has its headquarters in Nanjing, had originally planned a conference to mark the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Union Version of the Bible, a Chinese translation of the English Revised Version. The conference was suddenly canceled in October without any official reason being given. A complete Chinese translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek texts is still in the works.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

From June 28 / July 2 until September 1, 2019:

Longgang Parish in Wenzhou Diocese launches 24-hour Eucharistic Adoration – and distributes free “hot weather tea”



Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Longgang parish church. Photo: xinde.org.

The worshipers of the Longgang Parish, a congregation of 10,000 Catholics, have always had a great veneration for the sacrament of the altar, and in the small Blessed Sacrament chapel there are almost always people praying – according to a report in the Catholic newspaper *Xinde (Faith)*. The parish leader, Mr. Zhou Xiong, took initiative to begin the practice of perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. He drummed up enthusiasm for the idea in 13 different areas of the parish, lists were drawn up to determine who would take which shift, and group leaders were chosen. On June 28, 2019, the parish began holding the ancient practice of Perpetual Adoration. The hours from midnight to four o'clock a.m. are normally taken by married couples, so that

nobody has to be on the road alone at night. Those spending time before the Blessed Sacrament report having had profound experiences through their close communion with Christ in adoration and the positive effects their adoration has had on their family life. One Catholic woman, who had brought her son to adoration several times, told *Xinde* that he had overcome his gaming addiction and had become a good student.

For several years now and so also this year, volunteers of the parish in the subtropical Longgang distribute free “hot weather tea” to passers-by during the hot season. Because the Catholic church is located in the Street in Front of the Station, people are constantly passing by, including many manual laborers, such as transport workers, porters and rickshaw drivers, who are happy to accept the offer. In this year’s action, which lasted from July 2 to September 1, 76 parish volunteers took part in the service. Every day, five people heated water with traditional Chinese medicinal ingredients beginning in the early morning. Ten to 18 fifty-liter pots of tea were served daily. The costs were covered by the Yawei Charity of the parish and by donations. The volunteers see the action as an opportunity to live their faith in everyday life and to make their faith visible to the people of the neighborhood – the report says (*Xinde* 2019, No. 28 [July 30]; No. 30 [Aug. 20]).

July 16–25, 2019:

Visit of a delegation with 5 Chinese bishops to Belgium and Germany

The delegation included Bishops Fang Xinyao (Linyi Diocese, Shandong Province), Shen Bin (Haimen Diocese, Jiangsu Province), Xu Honggen (Suzhou Diocese, Jiangsu Province), Du Jiang (Bameng Diocese, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region) and Chen Gong’ao (Nanchong Diocese, Sichuan Province). Bishop Fang is also chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), Bishop Shen is Vice-Chairman of the CCPA and of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference. Invited by Cardinal De Kesel, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, and Auxiliary Bishop Steinhäuser of the Archdiocese of Cologne, the visit was organized by the Verbiest Institute in Leuven in cooperation with the China-Zentrum e.V. in Sankt Augustin, Germany.

The bishops began their visit in Belgium. On July 16 they concelebrated Mass in the Cathedral of Antwerp Diocese. Among other places in Belgium, they visited St. Egidio Center, the Theological Faculty of the Catholic University of Leuven, the Verbiest Institute and the Chinese College at Leuven. There were also many discussions. For example, the five bishops met with Cardinal De Kesel and Msgr. Herman Cosijns, Secretary General of the Belgian Bishops’ Conference, and conducted detailed discussions on the function of the respective Bishops’ Conferences in China and in Belgium.

On July 20, the delegation continued on to Germany. They concelebrated at the Sunday High Mass in Cologne cathedral with Auxiliary Bishop Steinhäuser. In addition to further discussions with Auxiliary Bishop Steinhäuser and other representatives of the Archdiocese of Cologne, the Chinese bishops conducted numerous other discussions during visits to the Benedictine Abbey of Maria Laach, the China-Zentrum and the Monumenta Serica Institute in Sankt Augustin, as well as to the Catholic aid organizations Misereor, Missio and the Pontifical Children’s Mission in Aachen. During their discussions, they also addressed concrete topics such as future cooperation in the face of new legal developments in China (*Verbiest Update* No. 48, July; own information).

July 21–27, 2019:

“Special training” course for priests from Mindong at the Central Institute for Socialism in Beijing

According to a report on the website of the official Catholic governing bodies, thirty-three priests from various parishes of the Diocese of Mindong in Fujian Province have participated in a “special training course for Catholic Church work of Fujian (Ningde).” *AsiaNews* added the information that many priests in the Diocese of Mindong, mostly from the underground, had refused to sign the declaration of support for the principle of independence of the Church called for by the authorities. However, “a few dozen” had signed, and the political training was apparently intended for them. The course was organized by the Central Institute for Socialism and the United Front Department of Fujian. At the beginning of the training course, representatives of these two bodies urged the participants to hold fast to the core socialist values, to the love of land and Church, to Sinicization and to the adaptation to socialism. The participants were also urged to work actively for the “independent, autonomous and democratic administration of the Church.” At the end of the course, Bishop Zhan Silu spoke to the participants (*AsiaNews* Aug. 14; chinacatholic.cn July 30).

In December of 2018, answering a request by the Pope, the ordinary bishop of Mindong, Guo Xijin (whom the government did not recognize), gave up his position and accepted the role of Auxiliary Bishop subordinate to Bishop Zhan Silu, who had been illegitimately ordained but was later recognized by the Pope. Despite that, however, Bishop Guo Xijin was still refused recognition by the government. In May, he finally withdrew his request for official recognition (see: *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 11-12, 16; No. 3, p. 13).

August 2019:

Authorities prohibit many dioceses from holding summer camps for young people

Traditionally, many dioceses and parishes carry out summer camps with religious instruction for Catholic children and adolescents every year during the summer holidays. As *UCAN* writes, the authorities are increasingly banning these summer camps in recent years, and in some places the Church has been forced to give them up altogether. Some of the dioceses and parishes manage to hold the courses in remote places without any publicity. For example, *UCAN* reports that originally two summer courses were planned in a northern Chinese diocese; the first was allowed to take place because Church staff had invited the faithful privately, by word of mouth. When the diocese publicly advertised a call for participation in the second course, it was banned. In another northern Chinese diocese, the summer program was quietly transferred from a large city parish to a smaller parish in the country. One Church source told *UCAN* that some dioceses had decided not to declare the courses as lessons, but to say that “the parishes organize summer activities for children whose working parents cannot supervise them adequately during the holidays.” The source explained that the government does not allow the Church to hold activities for children which involve any form of education, even if the Church applies for it under state regulations (*UCAN* Aug. 6). See also the entry From September 2019.

End of August 2019:

Ongoing education for Church correspondents organized by the Church in various places in China



At the course for correspondents in Zhejiang, a professional explains the correct use of the camera. Photo: xinde.org.

to write about the history of the parishes and to interview older believers in order to preserve their testimony of faith.

From August 19-23, the Catholic Church in Zhejiang Province held a training course for 50 priests, Sisters and other correspondents from the four dioceses of the province. Spirituality as well as writing and photographic techniques were on the program, and various communications experts not belonging to the Church were also invited to contribute.

The 5th training and exchange meeting of the Diocese of Jinan (Shandong) took place on August 22 in Huzhuang attended by 23 correspondents. After an introductory talk by the bishop, two Catholics spoke on the topics of journalistic photography and writing.

The exact details of a correspondent's job were not described in the *Xinde* report. Usually, those who write for diocesan papers or ecclesiastical WeChat official accounts are volunteers. *Xinde* also gets most of its information from volunteer writers (*Xinde* 2019, No. 33 [Sept. 10], xinde.org Aug. 27, 29).

In order to promote the “Evangelization through writings” (文字福传) and to adapt Church reporting to the needs of the times, training courses for Church “correspondents” (通讯员) were held in several places, according to a report by *Xinde*.

On August 28, the Diocese of Tangshan (Hebei) organized its sixth exchange on this topic, which was attended by nearly 40 correspondents from 13 parishes. Speakers included the Bishop as well as the Vicar General Fr. Ren Dahai, who invited participants

From September 2019:

Minors now also prohibited from entering churches in the Province of Liaoning

According to a report by *UCAN*, in recent years the authorities have been gradually reducing attendance at church by minors all across the country. The ban, however, has not been imposed everywhere, although in Henan, Jiangxi and now also in Liaoning Province it is being strictly enforced. (During the same period there have also been reports from Liaoning of the closure by the authorities of underground churches and meeting places.)

One person from the Diocese of Liaoning told *UCAN* that in his parish, which is part of the official church, minors are forbidden to set foot in the parish church as of the beginning of September this year, with the result that there are no longer young altar boys at Sunday Mass. Previously, local officials of the United Front pretty much “closed one eye,” but now since the arrival of the inspection team (督察组), the orders of the Central Committee would be strictly followed, the source said.

In general, those interviewed by *UCAN* expressed great concern about the effects of such measures on the transmission of the faith to the children of the next generation and on priestly vocations. One Catholic identified only as Paul also said it feels as if the government were “cooking frogs in warm water,” that is, restrictions are introduced gradually, so that once a person becomes accustomed to one

such restrictive measure, the next one comes along, and little by little the living space of the Church becomes narrower and narrower (china.ucanews.com Sept. 24; *UCAN* Sept. 10, 26).

August 26, 2019:

Authorities demand the demolition of the “Gate of Heaven” at Dong’ergou Shrine, Taiyuan Diocese

According to a *UCAN* report, the government has issued orders to Bishop Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan (Shanxi) to demolish the free-standing three-story gate at the Marian pilgrimage site at Dong’ergou within 5 days. The gate stands at the end of the Stations of the Cross behind which is the plateau of the Mount of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows with its open-air altar and church. In October of last year, the statues on the gate and some other statues at the site had already been removed. The bishop was still attempting to negotiate with the authorities about being allowed to keep the gate, the report said. Bishop Meng is said to have called on all diocesan priests this year to come to Dong’ergou for the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary on the 15th of September. Although the authorities blocked roads, over 10,000 worshipers took part in this year’s pilgrimage, more than usual, *UCAN* said. Reportedly, the “Gate of Heaven” was initially built with the permission of the local authorities (originally as a single story structure), but last year the Central Inspection Team decided that the gate was too close to the expressway and too prominently visible (*AsiaNews* Sept. 16; china.ucanews.com following a report of rfa.org Sept. 18; *UCAN* Sept. 20)

Sino-Vatican Relations

August 16, 2019:

UCAN: Self-appointed underground Chinese bishop in Shanghai plans to ordain bishops without Vatican permission

According to *UCAN*, a priest, Fr. Zhang Tongli, was supposedly ordained a bishop in 1999 by the then coadjutor bishop of Henan, Zhang Changfeng, under special permits granted by Pope John Paul II to the Chinese underground Church. However, Pope Benedict XVI revoked this privilege in a letter to the Chinese Church in 2007. The Vatican does not recognize Fr. Zhang as bishop and forbade him to head a diocese, *UCAN* said. Zhang Tongli now told *UCAN* that several priests had told him that he had the right as a bishop to consecrate other bishops because the latest Sino-Vatican Agreement had betrayed the faith. He could no longer refuse [to consecrate], Zhang said.

According to *UCAN*, in the Chinese underground Church there are five or six bishops consecrated “privately” (that is, without the consent of the Pope), including Paul Dong Guanhua of the Diocese of Zhengding (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 1, p. 13; No. 2, p. 13). The Curia must also find a solution for these bishops, *UCAN* said (china.ucanews.com Aug. 16; *UCAN* Aug. 16).

August 26, 2019:

First episcopal ordination following the provisional Sino-Vatican Agreement in the Diocese of Jining (Inner Mongolia)

Fr. Antonius Yao Shun, born in 1965, has been ordained a bishop by Bishop Meng Qinglu of Hohhot. Bishops Du Jiang of Bameng, Li Jing of Ningxia and Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan were co-consecrators.

During the ceremony, the Letter of Approval of the Chinese Bishops' Conference was read, stating: "According to the tradition of Episcopal ordination of the Holy Church and the regulations of the Chinese Bishops' Conference, the bishop of the diocese was elected. After examination, the election has been found valid and is hereby officially approved. The Pope has already consented to this candidate." (根据圣教会选举主教的传统和中国天主教主教团的规定, 当选了教区主教. 经审核, 选举有效, 现予以正式批准. 此人选已经教宗同意.) The last sentence concerning the consent (not appointment) of the Pope was not included in the original formula of the official document of approval of the Chinese Bishops' Conference, and was obviously reintroduced as a result of the Sino-Vatican Agreement.

Bishop Yao studied at the National Seminary in Beijing, where he later taught, and was ordained a priest in 1991. From 1994 to 1998, he earned a Master's Degree in Liturgy at St. John's University in the United States. In 2010 he was appointed vicar general of the Diocese of Jining; according to *UCAN*, he was already at that time appointed bishop by the Pope. On April 9, 2019, he was elected bishop following the official Chinese procedure. *UCAN* reports that the Diocese of Jining (Ulanqab, Wumeng) has 70,000 Catholics. *Xinde*, however, gives the number as about 100,000, i.e., about half of all the Catholics in Inner Mongolia. Since the death of Bishop Liu Shigong in 2017, the See has been vacant (*AsiaNews* Aug. 26; *china.ucanews* Aug. 26; *xinde.org* Aug. 26; *UCAN* Aug. 26; see: *RCTC* 2019, No. 3, p. 14).

August 28, 2019:

Fr. Stephan Xu Hongwei ordained coadjutor bishop of Hanzhong Diocese (Shaanxi)

Bishop Ma Yinglin of Kunming, chairman of the Chinese Bishops' Conference, was the principal consecrator. The ordination mass was concelebrated by the 85-year-old Bishop Yu Runshen of Hanzhong, as well as by Bishops Yang Xiaoting of Yan'an, Dang Mingyan of Xi'an, Wu Qinjing of Zhouzhi, Han Yingjin of Sanyuan, Tong Changping of Weinan and by Coadjutor Bishop Wang Xiaoxun of Ankang (all from Shaanxi Province). The Letter of Approval read out at the consecration, which took place under strict security, contained the same new formula regarding the Pope's consent as the letter read at the episcopal ordination in Jining two days earlier.

Bishop Xu Hongwei was born in 1975. He studied at the Seminary in Xi'an and was ordained a priest in 2002. From 2004–2008 he completed a degree in Pastoral Theology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome, after which he served for two years in the Diocese of Vancouver. On April 11, 2019, he was elected bishop according to the official Chinese procedure. However, he is said to have been appointed bishop by the Pope already before the provisional Sino-Vatican Agreement. The Diocese of Hanzhong has close to 20,000 Catholics, 27 priests, eight Sisters, one seminarian and 21 churches (*AsiaNews* Aug. 28; *UCAN* Aug. 28).

End of August 2019:

Comments on the first two episcopal consecrations following the Provisional Agreement between China and the Vatican

Official media of both the Vatican and the People's Republic of China have rated the episcopal ordinations in Jining and Hanzhong positively. *Vatican News* cited comments by the head of the Press Office of the Holy See, Matteo Bruni, who confirmed for each of the two newly ordained bishops that he "received the Papal Mandate" and that his ordination "took place in the framework of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China signed in Beijing on 22nd September 2018." After almost a year, "the deal is bearing fruit," *Vatican News* commented. On Bishop Yao,

Vatican News further reported: “In a unanimous decision he was named bishop of the diocese of Jining last April by the representatives of the diocese in a meeting led by Bishop Meng Qinglu. Among the representatives, the predominant component was made up of priests flanked by some lay and religious representatives. After careful evaluation, Yao Shun received the apostolic mandate and nomination by the Pope.” Thus, at least as far as the diocesan electoral meeting is concerned, the official Chinese system for electing bishops has found some kind of confirmation by the Vatican spokesman (he did not mention the role of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference).

The English-language *Global Times*, which is directed principally at a foreign readership, seems to have been the only Chinese state media to report on the ordinations. In addition to citing some positive opinions of foreign experts, the *Global Times* quoted, among others, Bishop Meng Qinglu as saying that the mandate of Pope Francis was mentioned during the ceremony. Bishop Shen Bin, vice chairman of both the Patriotic Association and the Bishops’ Conference, told the *Global Times* that Bishop Yao’s ordination was a good start for China to elect and consecrate more bishops, providing as it did a successful example of such a process.

In a sense, the process was not new in itself (for in the last decades, many bishops had been officially elected and consecrated after papal appointment), but on both sides this time the procedure demanded by the other side (election or papal appointment/consent) was officially mentioned. According to *UCAN*, 20 other bishop candidates have been approved by the Pope [some of them many years ago], but have not yet been consecrated because approval from the Chinese side is still pending (*Global Times* Aug. 27, 28; *UCAN* Aug. 26; Sept. 11; *Vatican News* Aug. 28).

September 22, 2019:

Anniversary of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops – Underground Bishop Wei Jingyi: “no reservations, no doubts”

On the occasion of the anniversary of the signing of the agreement, *Vatican Insider* published an interview with Bishop Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar (Heilongjiang Province), who is not recognized by the government and who has previously spoken positively about the dialogue between Rome and Beijing. The danger of a split between the Chinese Church and the universal Church has been reduced by the agreement, according to Bishop Wei. He said that he has no reservations, no doubts about the agreement. Some find it difficult to adapt to the new situation due to bitter past experience, Wei explained. The bishop said that the underground Church had arisen to preserve the integrity of the faith. But now the pope is appointing the new bishops, they are all in full communion with the pope; that changes everything and makes it possible to follow the motto “love the country and the Church,” Bishop Wei claimed, adding that even the principle of independence can now also be reinterpreted.

Anthony Lam of the Holy Spirit Study Centre told the *South China Morning Post* that Bishop Wei’s comments reflected his personal faith. In Lam’s view, they show “his readiness to put himself in the hands of God including giving up his position [as bishop]” (*South China Morning Post* Sept. 24; *Vatican Insider* Sept. 22).

Hong Kong

July to October 2019:

The protests continue, with violent clashes between demonstrators and police

For these events and the reactions of religious communities in Hong Kong, see the Informationen, Dokumentation and Themen sections of *China heute* 2019, No. 3, pp. 141-142, 163-164, 165-169 (article by Anthony Lam) (in German).

July 5, 2019:

UCAN: Translation of the subtitles of the musical about Saint Joseph Freinademetz SVD have been completed in several languages

The musical “St. Joseph Freinademetz – The First Saint to Ever Serve in Hong Kong,” has been recognized by several international film awards such as the Gabriel Award and the Denali Award. The musical which tells the story of the China missionary Saint Joseph Freinademetz SVD, is originally sung in Cantonese. The Divine Word Missionary, who is also known for his statement, “Love is the only language that everyone understands,” mastered many languages and dialects. Therefore, it was also important for the production team to translate the subtitles into as many languages as possible. In addition, the title song of the musical was recorded in 20 different languages.

The video of the musical with German subtitles was uploaded on September 25 on the official Youtube channel of the musical. It is also freely available there with subtitles in other languages: www.youtube.com/channel/UCSAAaIa6lRWIq77UEyGMm82w (UCAN July 5).

Macau

June 29, 2019:

Macau: New seminary built

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has officially established the “Redemptoris Mater” College in Macau for the formation of priests for the evangelization in Asia, entrusting it to the Neocatechumenal Way. The College was established by decree signed by Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of “Propaganda Fide,” on June 29, after the audience with Pope Francis. The “Redemptoris Mater College for Asia” was scheduled to begin classes in September with a first group of students from different nations of the world. According to the statutes, the college is directly under the authority of Propaganda Fide, but according to *Fides* will maintain contact with the local bishop. The college will have the status of a seminary. In an interview with *Fides*, Cardinal Filoni stressed that the College was a response to the invitation of Pope John Paul II, who at the beginning of the new millennium called Asia an important continent for evangelization. Macau has historically represented the door for the mission of the Church in the East, Filoni said (*AsiaNews* July 29; *Fides* July 29).

October 2, 2019:

Macau Diocese angry as government projected images of the Chinese flag and national emblem onto the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral



Glowing red, the emblem of the People's Republic of China appears on the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral in Macau. Photo: UCAN.

In a statement, chancellor of the Diocese of Macau, Rev. Cyril Jerome Law, Jr., criticized the “mapping show” on the facade of the ruins of the church of St. Paul to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The display was sponsored by the Tourist Office of the Macao Government Tourism Office on three consecutive days beginning September 29. During the show symbols of the People's Republic of China, such as the national flag and the state emblem, were projected onto the ruins. The facade of St. Paul is not only a trademark of the city, but also has a rich historical and religious significance. “Although the facade was no longer church property, it remained a symbol of the Catholic faith in Macau,” the statement said. Many Christians of different nationalities expressed their irritation at the propaganda display. Future mapping shows would do well to be related to the religious context of the monument, thus Fr. Law's statement (*AsiaNews* Oct. 3; *UCAN* Oct. 4)

This “News Update” was first published in *China heute* 2019, No. 3, pp. 154-161 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the “News Update” refer to the year 2019.

Note: Since the beginning of October 2019, unfortunately, the website china.ucanews.com can no longer be accessed.

“Everything is related”

The 10th European Catholic China Colloquium in Siegburg focused on *Laudato Si'*, Technoscience and the Church in China

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

Translated by Jacqueline Mulberge SSps

“Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely,” wrote Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, referring to the technological possibilities of the present. China is one of the world’s leading nations in the development and especially the application of artificial intelligence and other new technologies. What are the consequences of technological progress for humanity, how do we arrive at an ethic of dealing with it, what is China’s role? What do the new technologies mean for society and churches in China? This question was addressed at the 10th European Catholic China Colloquium, which took place in Siegburg, Germany, from 30th August to 1st September 2019.

For Pope Francis, “everything is related” – emphasized Professor Massimo Borghesi of the University of Perugia in his lecture. In *Laudato Si'*, this “relational model” stands in



Group photo of the participants of the conference with the Cologne Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Dominikus Schwaderlapp (center). Photo: Václav Mucha SVD.

contrast to the technocratic model that alienates humankind from its environment. In this regard, during the conference a clear connection to traditional Chinese philosophy became visible: there, human persons are always seen in their relationships with others and are defined by relationship; human beings and the world are seen as a single continuous process. At the end of his lecture, the sinologist Dr. Heinrich Geiger called for a “parcel” of Western and non-Western traditions to be put together in a respectful manner in order to promote a global awareness of our common home.

After this theological-philosophical introduction, Mao Yishu of the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Berlin described in concrete terms how artificial intelligence has already penetrated all areas of life in China – from artificial newsreaders to its application in jurisprudence, healthcare, education and security. Since 2018, government documents on AI ethics have been published. But according to Mao Yishu, there is still a pluralism of opinions among Chinese experts and the priorities of values also differ from those of the West.

Professor Fu King-wa, a media researcher from the University of Hong Kong, analysed “China’s ‘360-degree’ information control.” He distinguished three levels: “Control 1.0” consists of state surveillance and censorship of the Internet and social media. In “Control 2.0,” the Chinese State actively influences public opinion and user behaviour, for example by manipulating topic rankings or purchased comments in social media. “Control 3.0” is expanding from online behaviour to everyday life. One example is the Social Credit System which will enter fully into force by 2020. It will evaluate people’s behaviour in all areas of life and condition it through punitive measures such as travel restrictions.

A further lecture pointed out that the age of mobile communication also offers new opportunities for evangelization in China: It presented a Catholic app from China and explained its features and functionalities.

In a second thematic block the conference dealt with the situation of the Catholic Church in China. Like the other religions of China, it is affected by ever stronger control by the state authorities. Fr. Bernardo Cervellera PIME, of the Roman news agency *AsiaNews*, reported on this subject. The Chinese state demands that the religions become “sinicized.” Dr. Li Jingxi, vice-rector of the Shaanxi Catholic Seminary, Prof. Dr. Batairwa Kubuya Paulin SX of the Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei and Daniel Yeung of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in Hong Kong discussed the topic of sinicization/inculturation of the Church in China. Prof. Wang Meixiu of the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx CICM of the Verbiest Institute of the Catholic University of Leuven spoke about the future of the Church after the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops concluded one year ago.

Around one hundred participants from 15 countries and regions, including Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, attended the colloquium in Siegburg. The event took place at the Katholisch-Soziales Institut on the Michaelsberg. It was organized by the Catholic China-Zentrum in Sankt Augustin.

A German version of this text was published at www.china-zentrum.de/artikel/details/alles-ist-miteinander-verbunden.

Beijing and the Holy See – Seeking the Common Ground Two Wounded Partners in Dialogue

Jeroom J. Heyndrickx CICM

Part 1: Why do we call them *wounded*? & How did the Rome–Beijing relation develop from confrontation to dialogue?

The Unequal Treaties (1842–1860) were for China the most humiliating events in its history. They caused wounds in the hearts of all Chinese which till now are not healed. The history of the Catholic Church in China was also full of drama. The drama of the Rites Controversy (18th Century) was partly caused by internal strife inside the Church, but most painful and leaving unhealed wounds among Catholic leaders and faithful were the dramas of the Boxer Uprising (1900) and the events of the 1950's which culminated in the Cultural Revolution (1965–1975). This dramatic history has over the years caused sharp confrontations and an unfriendly relationship between Rome and Beijing. Given this dramatic background we consider it a breakthrough that these two wounded partners – Beijing and the Holy See – are now in dialogue *seeking the common ground*¹ instead of continuing the confrontation of the past.

The following text is the contribution of Fr. Jeroom J. Heyndrickx CICM (Verbiest Institute, Catholic University of Leuven) to the 10th European Catholic China Colloquium “*Laudato Si*” and Technoscience – Implications with Focus on the Church in China,” Siegburg/Germany, 30 August – 1 September 2019. The German translation of this text was published in *China heute* 2019, No. 3, pp. 175-185.

- 1 Cfr. Philip Wickery, *Seeking the Common Ground*, Maryknoll – New York: Orbis Books 1988, p. 293, “Notes. Introduction,” No. 5: “The slogan *qiu tong cun yi* was first articulated by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai at the Bandung Conference of non-aligned nations in 1955. ‘The Chinese delegation,’ Zhou told the delegates, ‘has come to seek the common ground, not establish differences. Is there a basis among us for seeking the common ground? There is. It is that the majority of nations and peoples of Africa and Asia have in the modern age suffered from and even now are suffering from the bitterness and sufferings brought on by colonialism. From the common ground of eradicating the bitterness and suffering of colonialism, we can come to mutual understanding and respect, mutual sympathy and support, not mutual suspicion and fear or mutual exclusion and opposition.’ He went on to relate this same principle to the religious question, in part because he was addressing a number of leaders from Muslim countries: ‘The principle of freedom of religious belief is commonly acknowledged by modern nations. We Communists are atheists, but we respect people of religious belief. We hope that religious believers would also respect those who do not believe. China is a country in which there is freedom of religious belief. We not only have seven million Communist Party of China members, but tens of millions of Muslims and Buddhists, and millions of Protestants and Catholics. This Chinese delegation includes a faithful Muslim Imam. Since this

Fundamental changes have taken place in both China and in the Catholic Church during the past 150 years. The Vatican II Council has changed the Church. The Open Policy has changed China. As a result the Rome–Beijing dialogue has become possible. Both Rome and Beijing now declare themselves to be open to dialogue with all ideologies. This was not the case in the past. Changing the Catholic Church from a medieval Church into a Church open to dialogue with all ideologies was the fruit of a 150 year long, gradual and painful struggle and growth to a level of maturity needed for any entity to transform and open itself to the world. The same is true for the changes that happened in China. Some observers insist that the Chinese government never changed nor will ever change. That's why we explain at length how changes did happen in China almost parallel with the changes that happened in the Church.²

The French Revolution shocked the Church. Popes fought the new ideologies of that time. Since Vatican II the Church dialogues with these ideologies.

The French Revolution ended medieval times for society and for the Church. The Catholic Church was deeply wounded by it. Since then an avalanche of new ideologies spread in Europe. The popes were at a loss as to how to deal with these ideologies. They were defensive and wanted to defend the traditional teaching of the Church. Pope Pius IX published *Syllabus Errorum* (*Syllabus of Errors*, 1864) in which he condemned 82 errors of that time including rationalism, naturalism, socialism, communism, indifferentism, Freemasonry, separation of Church and state, freedom of the press, religious freedom and other aspects of liberalism. For more than a thousand years popes had been convinced that in order to protect the church and to freely spread the gospel the pope needed to have his own country. But on October 11, 1870 a large majority of the citizens of Rome voted in favor of annexing the Papal States to Italy. That was seen as a historic disaster. The pope convened Vatican Council I (December 8, 1869) in order to confront the crisis. The Council adopted the dogma of the infallibility of the pope (*Pastor Aeternus*, July 18, 1870) to confirm the authority of the pope against the errors of the Reformation, the growing pretense of science and the Enlightenment. Later, Pope Pius X turned against social modernism, philosophical and theological modernism. In the decree *Lamentabili* and the encyclical *Pascendi* (both in 1907) he condemned 65 positions related to the nature of the church, to revelation, biblical exegesis, sacraments, divinity of Christ.

But gradually the popes, under the guidance of the Spirit, also caught up with the signs of the times. Step by step the church changed and opened up to the world. Leo XIII (1878–1903) wrote the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (*On Capital and Labor*) drawing the attention of the Church to the problems of injustices in society. Until that time the Catholic Church

situation does no harm to domestic unity in China, why should not religious believers and non-believers join together in the great family of nations from Africa and Asia? The era of religious disputes should be in the past, because we would not be among those who would benefit from such infighting.' See, 'Premier Zhou Enlai's Supplementary Remarks' *Xiejìn* (May, 1955), p. 14.'

2 The following historical data are taken from Mark Heirman, *Mij is alle macht gegeven*, Antwerpen – Baarn: Houtekiet – Gooi en Sticht 2000, pp. 166-204.

was in fact generally considered as being limited to Europe. Benedict XV made it into a world Church. In his mission-encyclical *Maximum illud* (1919) he pleaded for the creation of a local clergy and bishops in other continents. That was the emergence of local Churches. As a result of this encyclical Pius XI ordained the first local bishops for China (1926), for Japan (1927), Vietnam and Ceylon (1933), Korea (1937), Uganda and Madagascar (1939). At Christmas 1944, Pope Pius XII speaking over the radio, recognized for the first time democracy as an acceptable form of government and took a positive attitude towards the newly established United Nations (while before he had been critical of the existing “League of Nations”). In 1946 he established the local hierarchy in local Churches of Asia and other continents. In a few years’ time he appointed more than 50 cardinals so that for the first time in history there were fewer Italian cardinals than foreigners. 25 years later – in 1978 – a non-Italian pope (John Paul II) was elected pope. In this extraordinary evolution we see the Church catching up with the times.

In 1963 Pope John XXIII wrote the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* which no longer condemned modern human rights and freedoms but formally recognized them and even hailed them as the foundation for world peace. Time was ripe to convene the Vatican II Council which became the historical turning point for the church. Its document *Gaudium et Spes* (*Joy and Hope*) confirmed that the Church opened itself for dialogue with the world. The word “dialogue” appeared for the first time in an official Church document when Pope Paul VI wrote *Ecclesiam Suam* precisely to promote dialogue. To prove his point the pope went to speak before the United Nations General Assembly (1965). He took initiatives towards ecumenical dialogue (1966 and 1967) and convened the first Synod of Bishops (1967). The Catholic Church had changed fundamentally in its attitude to the world and to all different ideologies. It also set up structures – the Synod of Bishops – to promote dialogue inside the Church.

The Unequal Treaties are to China what the French Revolution was to the Church

The Opium War and the Unequal Treaties (1842–1860) humiliated, shocked and wounded China deeply. It made China painfully aware of how corrupt and powerless the country was, exploited by Western colonialists. In the same way the French Revolution had shocked the Church in Europe to its foundations. During the following century the popes were at a total loss searching for ways for the Church to survive. The same happened to China. During the 100 years following upon the Unequal Treaties, Chinese philosophers and politicians searched for ways to save China’s existence as a people and to strengthen the state. Should they rely on their own culture or should they learn from the West (*xixue* 西学)? They faced the painful choice of how to combine their hatred for the imperialists from the West with their felt need to learn from these same imperialists; a painful choice that bothered China for generations. Feng Guifen 冯桂芬 and Li Hongzhang 李鸿章 searched for ways towards “self-strengthening” of China, relying still on Chinese traditional values yet stressing the need for Western (“barbarian”) Studies (西学). Liang Qichao 梁启超] went much further. He wondered whether Confucius’ Wang Dao 王道 was still worth at all to be kept in the New China. He called for the creation of a “new Chinese

citizen,” a fundamental change in China’s identity, a change to the core of what it meant to be Chinese, so as to save China’s existence as a people and state.³ He even suggested that this would require a complete destruction of China’s traditional value system. He invented the term “destructivism” (*pohuaizhuyi* 破坏主義). Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, Lu Xun 鲁迅 and others followed in the same line. These ideas found finally their dramatic echo during the 1960’s when Mao Zedong 毛泽东 – who was an enthusiastic reader of Liang Qichao’s writings – launched the Cultural Revolution speaking of “destruction before construction” (*xian po hou li* 先破后立). Mao did only the first and failed in the second.

The Wuchang Uprising and the establishing of the Republic in 1911 did not bring liberation either as it was followed by the confusing period of the War Lords, the Long March (1934–1935) and the bloody war against the Japanese (1931–1945). The establishing of the People’s Republic (1949) was a moment of glory. The Chinese people found in Mao Zedong a leader who symbolized the pride of the whole nation after their victories over the enemies of the past. But that’s where the contribution of Mao Zedong ended. Just as Pope Pius IX and his successors did not know how to deal with the new situation after the French Revolution, so also Mao was at a loss trying to build up his nation from destruction. During the following 25 years he launched one destructive movement after another leading the country into famine and disaster. Chinese people trusted that Mao would finally solve the problems of the nation and improve their livelihood. But that did not happen. China went through a destructive Cultural Revolution (1966–1973). These were the most confusing 150 years of China’s history.

The “Policy of Opening-Up” was for China what Vatican II was for the Catholic Church.

Dialogue with Rome became possible as of then.

When Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 took over the leadership of China after Mao’s death, he was a well-known figure even though he had not been a great writer or philosopher. He was for China what Pope John XXIII was for the Church, who became pope after the long dramatic recovery in the Church. He had the clear insight into what the Church needed at that time. From that insight he made his historical decision to convene the Vatican II Council taking the whole Church by surprise. In the same way quite unexpectedly and to the surprise of everybody in China and to the whole world, Deng Xiaoping cancelled two decades of Mao policy at the 3rd plenum of the 11th Chinese Communist Party Congress in 1978 when he declared: “From this day forward we renounce class struggle as the central focus, and instead take up economic development as our central focus.” Chinese farmers understood him right away when he made his famous “white cat, black cat” (*bai mao hei mao* 白猫黑猫) statement.

True liberation happened after Deng Xiaoping promulgated this Policy of Opening-Up (*kaifang zhengce* 开放政策). China joined the World Trade Organization and again surprised the world by paying a high price. It abandoned its basic Marxist policies in econo-

3 Data in this chapter are taken from: Orville Schell – John Delury, *Wealth and Power. China’s Long March to the 21st Century*, New York: Random House 2013.

my and politics which had been its priorities for decades. A remarkable change indeed! The Policy of Opening-Up changed China economically and changed its relations of confrontation with many countries into a relation of cooperation and exchange. Since then China started to adjust to the international scene and the world has watched in amazement its fast growth economically, socially, politically. This success was enhanced when it organized the Olympic Games in 2008 and when that same year Chinese astronauts completed another successful space flight. China now rightfully claims high recognition even in the fields of science and technology. After a long, dramatic struggle and growth the “New China” was born: a different China from that of the Boxer Rebellion and of 1949, a truly liberated China. This “New China” declares itself to be ready to dialogue with all ideologies in the world. China has made drastic changes and big progress in the fields of economics and politics but it failed till now to apply the same in the field of religion. In other words the liberation introduced by Deng Xiaoping is historic but not yet complete.

China and the Catholic Church (identified by Chinese officials as “the Vatican”) are the same in that both have fundamentally changed and adjusted themselves a lot to our time. They took important steps on the way of dialogue, but they both still have to prove much when it comes to realizing the dialogue which they promised. The signs of our time however show that historical dialogue between the two is now possible. In fact it is happening.

Rome and Beijing already took remarkable initiatives towards dialogue But both experienced that in their own camp not everybody agrees to dialogue.

When we analyze the events that have happened since the 1980’s, we discover that the popes have been pioneers in promoting dialogue, especially with China; and in a limited but clear way, China responded with positive signals to the gestures of Rome. But other events revealed that an important group of conservatives in the Chinese Communist Party blocked any attempt by China to further apply its Policy of Opening-Up also in the field of religion and human rights. And Rome on the other hand discovered that not everybody in the Church was ready to walk the way of dialogue.

In 1970, two years even before President Richard Nixon visited China, Pope Paul VI pleaded in a speech at FAO (UN Food and Agricultural Organization) to admit China as a member of FAO. It is remarkable to note that this happened at a time when in China Church persecution was going on during the Cultural Revolution. Pope John Paul II, although born in Poland and known as anti-communist, also demonstrated a remarkable will to dialogue with China. We quote only one example: on the occasion of the commemoration of the Fourth Centenary of Matteo Ricci’s Mission in China (October 25, 1982) when speaking about China today he made it clear that he wanted to do everything possible to make dialogue succeed. He said: “We can have faith that the obstacles can be removed and that an appropriate way and adequate structures will be found to resume dialogue and keep it constantly open.”⁴

4 E. Wurth MM, *Papal Documents Related to China 1937–2005*, Hong Kong: Holy Spirit Study Centre 2006, pp. 303-311, here p. 310.

China echoed these gestures by giving signs of appreciation for religion in China. As of 1985 Chinese bishops were allowed to respond positively to invitations from abroad to visit Churches in Asia, Europe and the USA. Communication between the Chinese Church and other local Churches was allowed.

In 1985 Zhao Fushan 赵复三, then vice-director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, gave his historic speech at the Chinese People's Political Consultation Congress explaining that *it is wrong to say that religion is the opium of the people*. The message implied that religion therefore did not have to be destroyed any more, as was the policy until then. This was yet another 180 degree U-turn from China's position during the Cultural Revolution. In 1988 Cardinal Jaime Sin was officially received by Zhao Ziyang 赵紫阳 in Beijing and in their conversation the possibility to normalize the Beijing–Vatican relations was explicitly mentioned.

On December 16, 2001 Pan Yue 潘岳 published an article in the *Shen Zhen Special Zone Daily* on “Marxist view on religion must move along with the times” (Yu shi fu jin 与时俱进). It was commonly understood as being backed by higher authorities. Pan criticized the traditional philosophy of religion of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as the persecution of religion during the Cultural Revolution. He admitted the positive role of religion in society in the field of morality and recommended reforms so as to found a new Religion-State relationship.

But these positive signals were met by negative, often violent aggressive moves of the conservative group in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) revealing the Party's internal division. On June 4, 1989 the student demonstration for democracy which had started earlier under Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦 and was quietly supported by Zhao Ziyang, was violently crushed. That event shocked the world and silenced also for many years the hope of discussing any further rapprochement between China and Rome. Internal division inside China appeared also in the “White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in China” which was released by the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (PR China) on October 16, 1997. The paper spoke an aggressive language against religion, mainly against the missionaries. It repeated the slogan language of the Cultural Revolution and was seen as another sign that the conservatives were very influential in the CCP. The document was published shortly before Jiang Zemin 江泽民 left for his USA visit and was seen as an attempt by the conservatives to sabotage his visit. It was a setback for the president and confirmed the internal struggle.

In 2000, in the presence of 4.000 Chinese Catholics, Pope John-Paul II canonized 120 Chinese martyrs – 87 Chinese and 33 foreign missionaries – in St Peter's square in Rome on October 1, the National Day of the PR China. China reacted in an unusually fierce way. In the style of the Cultural Revolution Catholic martyrs were vilified with names such as: *criminals, traitors, thieves, opium traffickers, rapists; ... all deserved to die because of their unforgivable crimes ...*

The popes remained undisturbed by all this and even intensified the line of dialogue.

The guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church becomes obvious by the fact that the popes – Paul VI, the so anti-communist Pope John Paul II and also Pope Benedict XVI – were able to face all these crises and yet, by their low-key response, avoid all confrontation that would close the doors to dialogue with China. To enter into confrontation was not an option for Rome.

In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI made two open calls for dialogue with China which dramatically intensified the line of dialogue. On January 19–20, 2007 Pope Benedict XVI called a meeting of the highest church officials of the Curia together with Chinese bishops of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan to discuss relations with the Church in China. This happened shortly after three illegal episcopal ordinations in China (in Kunming, Anhui, Xuzhou) had stunned the Universal Church in April, May and November 2006. Before the Rome meeting took place the media, especially in Hong Kong, predicted that the Vatican would probably react against the illegal ordinations and perhaps decide on punishments. But the opposite happened. The press release after the meeting stated:

what emerged was the will to continue along the path of respectful and constructive dialogue with the governing authorities, in order to overcome the misunderstandings of the past. The hope was also expressed that a normalization of relations on all levels could be achieved so as to facilitate a peaceful and fruitful life of faith in the Church and to work together for the good of the Chinese people and for peace in the world.

That same year, in his historic Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Church in China (June 30, 2007), Pope Benedict XVI used charitable words when addressing the Chinese faithful as well as civil authorities. He made it clear that there is only one Church in China but pointed with regret to the drama of the internal division while showing understanding for both communities. The pope confirmed that he fully trusts the bishops and the decisions they take in conscience in order to face the often so controversial requests from civil authorities. In No. 7 of the letter the Pope says:

... the Holy See, after restating the principles, leaves the decision to the individual bishop who, having consulted his presbyterate, is better able to know the local situation, to weigh the concrete possibilities of choice and to evaluate the possible consequences within the diocesan community.

A historic dialogue took place in 2008–2009.

The pope's letter yielded its fruit. In 2008–2009 delegations went from Rome to Beijing and from Beijing to Rome to discuss the very thorny issue: the appointment of bishops. Both sides reached agreements in principle on the appointment of ten candidates to be ordained in different dioceses with approval of both Rome and Beijing. Never, since 1949, had Rome and Beijing engaged in such a constructive dialogue. This was an important step towards the emergence of a truly Chinese Catholic Church in China. The media even

reported that a written agreement on bishops appointments in the future had been drafted that would be signed by both sides. But it was never signed. The reason why it was not signed was never made known. China reacted with disappointment.

In December 2010 the government called together the 8th National Assembly (Ba da hui 八大会) of the Committee of delegates of the Catholic Church. Several bishops refused to participate but were then forced to by the government. It upset Catholics in China and also the Vatican. At the same time the appointment of a candidate bishop for Chengde Diocese was pending. Many in the Church in China were convinced that there was no obstacle for the proposed candidate to be appointed by the pope. But they were disappointed when Rome refused to appoint the candidate. This refusal was seen by many as a sign that also in Rome not everybody was on the same line of thought. Chinese authorities went ahead with the appointment and forced bishops to do the illegal ordination. It was the dramatic end of a historic dialogue and the beginning of other illegitimate ordinations by Beijing and even excommunications by Rome. That produced the situation which we knew before Pope Francis signed the agreement in September 2018.

This analysis of events signals to us that dialogue is going to be difficult. For a long time, for generations perhaps, dialogue will remain a difficult, challenging aspect of preaching the Good News in China. The Church will have to live with this reality. Nevertheless, persevering in this dialogue is the condition for the emergence of a truly Catholic Chinese Particular Church. Even the events of Chengde and the 8th National Assembly did not prevent Pope Francis later from following the line drawn by Pope Benedict XVI: seek unity, through reconciliation and dialogue, also with the state.

The letter of Pope Benedict XVI continues to inspire us to dialogue.

Evangelization always happens within a particular context: a country with its own culture, history, philosophy, economic and political system. The communist People's Republic of China is the milieu in which the Church of China wishes to rebuild itself and to preach the gospel. This implies that the Church in China has to dialogue with the Chinese State and with the situation as we described it. Pope Benedict XVI clearly indicates the obstacles but he refers to the Lord Jesus who encouraged dialogue with the State saying "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mat 22:21). The pope also states that our faith does not prevent us from dialoguing with the State.⁵ Chinese Catholics must learn to practice their faith within the existing system of China but requesting and insisting that the Catholic identity of our faith be fully respected; if not, there would be no freedom of religious belief for Catholics in China.

Pope Francis, the ideal guide of the church to persevere in dialogue.

Finally, it was Pope Francis who, by signing the first ever agreement between the PR China and the Holy See got the dialogue formally started. Truly a breakthrough in the dialogue.

⁵ Cfr. "Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China," No. 7.

Part 2:**The Beijing–Rome Agreement of September 22, 2018**

The pope is recognized as pope! That's a historical step forward.

But this is not reflected in the bad news that comes from China.

A new interpretation of “independence”? OK. But it's a two-edged sword.

After 60 years of free discussions Pope Francis invites us to follow him in dialogue with China.

Ever since in 1958 the PR China appointed and ordained two bishops without appointment by Pope Pius XII, the Catholic Church in China has been divided on whether to dialogue with the Chinese government or to enter into confrontation. During sixty years experts expressed their very different viewpoints on the issue that divided the Church more and more internally. It was in fact the cause of the split between the “official” and “non-official” (underground) communities. But on September 22, 2018, after four years of painful negotiations with civil authorities, the Holy See signed an agreement with the Chinese government on the appointment of bishops and on making the remaining seven illegal bishops also legal, i.e. recognized by Rome. Internal division has harmed the Church in China so much that Pope Francis decided that dialogue should from now on be the way of the Church to deal with the government. The head of the Catholic Church spoke and decided on some issues on which he alone has the final say. Catholic faithful, after years of internal disagreements and in the spirit of unity with their shepherd are since then challenged to follow the pope's line of dialogue.

Very different reactions against the agreement appeared in the media, even among Catholics in Hong Kong and Taiwan: some fiercely criticizing, others expressing doubts, a large majority (also in China) supporting it fully. It is said – and we believe – that also inside the Chinese Communist Party some members support but others disapprove the agreement signed by their government. But that does not appear in the media. Both Beijing and Rome, for reasons of their own, opted not to publish details of the agreement.

Based upon the limited information we dispose of we here make an attempt to formulate our understanding of the agreement. For Catholic faithful living in Taiwan and Hong Kong for example it is particularly challenging and difficult to follow the pope in his decision. Pope Francis in his letter which accompanied the agreement shows that he fully understands that. Their arguments call for attention and respect. Still, the pope signed the agreement. He did so after sixty years of open discussion and after four years of intense negotiations. What matters for Catholic faithful now is to unite and define how we will manage to follow the pope on the long, long pilgrimage of dialogue with the PR China that still lies ahead. There is no shorter way. We did not obtain what we hoped for. How shall we support the pope as he continues to reach the final goal? Let us first try to understand better the agreement.

The agreement is historic and good for the Church.

There are three reasons for this. First because for the first time in its history the PR China by signing an agreement with the Holy See (not with the Vatican) recognizes the pope as head of the Catholic Church. In the past Beijing recognized only the head of Vatican State. Second: for the first time in sixty years all Catholic bishops in China are in unity with the Pope. All have now been appointed by the Pope. That is crucial for the unity of the Church. It clarifies a sixty year old worry of the Church. Thirdly: the agreement now offers the pope the opportunity to appoint a bishop in about 25 dioceses where there has been no bishop for many years. For the Church these three points represent a reason for celebration.

The agreement is not the big breakthrough which everybody expected. It is very limited and this caused mistaken interpretations.

The agreement is very limited in time and in content. In time: both Beijing and Rome took no chance and wisely decided to re-evaluate the agreement after two or three years. If needed some aspect can then be adjusted. But it is mainly limited in content. It only discusses the appointment of bishops and the legalization of the seven remaining illegal bishops. It does not even touch upon diplomatic relations. The fact that the Holy See was able to motivate China to sign this agreement with the Holy See without even touching upon diplomatic relations must be seen as an achievement by the Roman negotiating team and disappointing for China. But then Rome must have been disappointed also as it was unable to clarify the most crucial obstacle for improving the situation inside the Church, namely: the problem of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA). Both Rome and the PR China had hoped for more. Both have given in. That's how negotiations go: both win a bit, both lose a bit. But the Pope did not give in any essential aspect of faith.

The cause of the misunderstanding in Church circles inside and outside China is the fact that for sixty years Catholics have lived with the annoying anomaly that in China the CCPA wants to develop an “independent” (*duli ziban* 独立自主) Catholic Church which goes against the essence of the Catholic Church itself and is therefore totally unacceptable. No other country requests this but China wants it that way. When some Catholics heard of an agreement to be signed between Beijing and the Holy See, they spontaneously and quite understandably expected this agreement to be “finally the agreement” that would clear up this anomaly. But that did not happen and as a result many Catholics in Hong Kong were disappointed. The official “Chinese Bishops Conference” also could not yet be made legal and they too were disappointed.

The agreement teaches the Catholic faithful a lesson.

In fact this teaches all Catholics in China and abroad a lesson: sixty years of arguing and discussing among ourselves and in the media could not clarify the problem of the CCPA. Pope Francis and his team could not clarify that either in four years of negotiations. For this to happen both partners of the dialogue must agree. We do not have that decision in our hands. We must continue to dialogue and explain to our partners in dialogue that an “independent” (独立自主) Catholic Chinese Church remains unacceptable to us. We

must learn to consider this kind of dialogue as an integral part of evangelization in China for the years to come ... Dialogue itself is positive. It gives up nothing. It is creative and in the given circumstance, the strongest most efficient way towards achieving our final goal namely: obtaining the right of legal citizenship for authentic Catholic Faith in China. A most lofty cause, worth working for in patience and perseverance!

The merit of the pope reaching this agreement goes to all the Chinese Catholics.

Too long we have focused our attention only on the internal division of the Catholic Church in China: the “underground” community is in confrontation with the government while the “official community” tries to accommodate so as to allow the Church to survive. But that internal division is only caused by disagreement on political matters not on faith. As far as faith is concerned both the “underground” and the “official” communities are united. They pray the same “Credo.” In every Mass they openly confess their unity with the Universal Church and with the Pope. Everybody in China, also the government, knows that all the Catholic faithful, priests and bishops are united in faith with Rome. Each of the two communities in its own way and within its own limitations makes clear its unity with Rome. Sixty years of history, even the Cultural Revolution has not been able to break that unity. Rome knows it, the government knows it. Without that testimony of sixty years the Chinese government would never have agreed to sign this agreement with the pope. The fact that the pope could sign an agreement at this time is due to the fact that all Chinese Catholics made their unity with Rome clear.

The Church universal has largely ignored that aspect. Instead of focusing on the internal division – which of course remains an issue of grave concern – we should have celebrated the fact that the Church in China in spite of the hardships which it has faced has remained united in faith with Rome. Pope Francis in his letter to the Catholic faithful of China shows that he is much aware of that. He admired their “fidelity, constancy in adverse situations.” He told them that he is very much “aware of their doubts and sense of abandonment” in difficult times. By saying this the pope shows that he does not distinguish between the “underground” and the “official” communities because both have their own problems.

The shepherd who goes in front of the whole Universal Church has spoken. We now follow him in dialogue and celebrate the unity in faith of the Church in China. We prepare for a “Long March.”

Bad news from China makes us worry.

In Henan Province – and in more and more other regions – children below the age of 18 are not allowed to go to church. In some towns school authorities even went to the church on Sunday to note the names of the children who attend Mass. Does that not infringe on the rights of the parents to educate their children? Since two-three years there are more stories of crosses that are removed from church buildings that are suddenly declared illegal and then are destroyed. We wonder what is really meant by “sinicizing” all religions in

China? Will this policy indeed – as is promised – respect each religion’s own liturgy and theology? And if so, why then should “unofficial” bishops who wish to join the Bishops Conference, be obliged to agree on establishing an “independent Church” which is against the theology and faith of the Catholic Church? This must still be clarified. We worry.

A new interpretation of “independent Church” causes confusion.

And now it seems that “independent Church” does not really mean “independent” any more. For sixty years the CCPA has insisted on establishing an “independent” (*duli zizhu ziban* 独立自主自办) Catholic Church in China. For decades it caused controversy and division in the Church.

In private contacts in Rome and in Beijing (I have of course no official function to negotiate) I suggested that changing just one character “*du* 独” (independent) into “*zi* 自” (autonomous) might perhaps be a solution that could satisfy both sides. Establishing an “independent” (独立自主自办) Chinese Catholic Church would then become establishing an “autonomous” (*zili ziban* 自立自办) Chinese Catholic Church which would be in line with Catholic theology. Indeed Vatican II stressed the importance of each local Church within the Universal Church. Each local Church has its own cultural, social, religious and historical background. This way the French, Italian, USA and of course also Chinese local Churches contribute from their own background to the richness of the Universal Church which is a community of many local Churches each with its own face, each with its own autonomy, not independent from and still united with, the Universal Church. It is normal that this autonomy of local Churches may occasionally cause a kind of tension with the center, which is Rome. That is in fact a healthy situation. Only if the relation tilts too much either to the center or to the periphery (to one or several local Churches) only then would there be a problem. The pope is the bishop of the local Church of Rome and the brother-bishop of all other bishops in each local Church. But he is also the successor of Peter who received directly from Christ the special mission to be the head of the Universal Church. As such he is not like a “king” or a “president” far above the other bishops. He is “the head” and in that capacity he has the authority to guide and preside over the council of all the bishops of the Church. The partners in my conversation in Rome and also in Beijing even forwarded the idea to higher authorities and I know from the feedback received that it has been given attention on both sides. But apparently that too seemed to offer no solution. So we follow the decision which Pope Francis agreed with authorities in Beijing.

But suddenly we now learn about a new interpretation of the term “independence” which is now said to refer only to the political realm, not necessarily meaning “independent from the Holy See”. In other words the term “independent” does not really mean what it says. If we had known that earlier it could have avoided a lot of misunderstandings in the past sixty years

**A new phase in the dialogue: words are given a double meaning.
A question of semantics.**

This opens a new chapter in the dialogue between Rome and Beijing. For sixty years the underground bishops refused to join the CCPA because of their demand for an independent Catholic Church in China. After Pope's Francis' Agreement the priority issue is now that the underground bishops also join the "Bishops Conference" so that it can become legal (= recognized by Rome). The underground bishops obviously refuse if they have to give in to the CCPA's demand for setting up an "independent Chinese Catholic Church" because that is against our faith. But now Chinese civil authorities say that the word "independent" refers only to the political realm. Joining CCPA is no more a must. Bishops are free to join or not but new laws in China request bishops and priests to sign a paper by which they promise to obey to the government and also the CCPA which seeks to establish an "independent Chinese Church." This is really not different from becoming a CCPA member but it is against Church teaching and also against their conscience. Yet if they refuse to sign a harsh punishment follows. How do Rome and the bishops in China handle this new situation? Has the big historical disagreement caused by the option for "independence" now become a question of semantics? Underground bishops and priests are confronted with a very delicate decision in conscience. What is the answer of the Holy See to Beijing on this matter and what will be its advice to the bishops?

"Pastoral Guidelines of the Holy See concerning the Civil Registration of Clergy in China"⁶

Rome sticks to its way of dialogue but stands with the bishops who cannot sign.

The Holy See is aware that, even after the new "official interpretation of independence" problems remain for some of the underground bishops if they have to sign and promise obedience to the CCPA which, just as before, even after the signing of the Agreement continues to repeat its slogan of establishing an "independent church" (*duli ziban jiaohui* 独立自办教会).

Rome reminds the Chinese bishops that "freedom of religious belief" is assured by the Constitution of the PR China. That motivates Rome to stick to its option for dialogue with the government and hopes that in time it will be possible to agree with civil authorities on a way to respect Catholic teaching as well as the conscience of the bishops involved. At the same time the Holy See demands from the government to show respect for the conscience of the bishops and priests and avoid to intimidate them. Stating this Rome signifies that it knows very well that intimidation of bishops is happening already in many places in China. While sending this message to the government the Holy See makes it clear to the bishops and priests that, in case some of them feel that even with the new interpretation of "independence," they cannot in conscience agree to sign the document, the Holy See shows understanding and remains close to them. It quietly hints that bishops may consider to be flexible to sign even though this implies an ambiguous attitude, saying: "Sign,

⁶ Vatican, June 28, 2019.

but make it clear (to a witness and to your bishop) that in conscience you disagree.” But bishops are assured that if any bishop considers it to be against his conscience to sign, Rome understands and backs him.

We are witnessing what Audrey Donnithorne wrote in 1967: Words are given a double meaning.

This situation reminds me of what Audrey G. Donnithorne (Dong Yude 董育德)⁷ wrote as early as 1967 about the significance of words in China. She wrote in her book *China's Economic System* and quoted it again in her recently published memoirs *China. In Life's Foreground* referring especially to the distinction and confusion between official and underground Chinese Catholics:

*The Chinese have a sophisticated attitude to outward expression of opinion ... words are regarded as symbolic counters, to be moved across the chessboard of life in order to produce the desired effect. This leads to reservations and subtleties of expression and actions which need to be interpreted within the framework of the Chinese environment and which a stranger might not understand. There commonly lacks a sense of obligation for words and beliefs, or words and actions, to correspond. While this phenomenon is certainly present in other cultures, it is not normally so strong as in China. It has the result that outward compliance is easily obtained but that an individual's or group's "public face" must not be taken as an indication of its "private face". Thus, conformity though easily won is apt to remain superficial ... sabotage need be none the less effective for being done in silence. Indeed, the more contrary to central government orders that local cadres are acting, the more loudly they may give verbal support to those orders.*⁸

We see the “guidelines” as the right answer to the situation but they are “a two-edged sword”.

The guidelines show that the Holy See remains faithful to its agreement and the line of dialogue. Rome looks further to the future. Avoiding confrontation but sticking to dialogue is the only way to make progress on that road in the awareness that this road is long. For spreading the gospel in the PR China, taking into account the past centuries of controversy and confrontation, walking that long road is worthwhile. Rome advises the bishops to avoid confrontation even while they are confronted with pressure. While insisting on following the road of dialogue Rome does not abandon the bishops who feel they cannot

7 Audrey G. Donnithorne was born in Sichuan province China of British missionary parents and is an economist and writer who has held academic posts of University College London and the Australian National University, working mainly on the economy of China. In her long life she has been a sharp-eyed observer of a changing Asia and Western world; of China in the era of the war lords, the Guomindang and the war against Japan. She has also been an active Catholic laywoman helping the Catholics in China.

8 Cfr. Audrey G. Donnithorne, *China. In Life's Foreground*, North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly 2019, p. 413; and cfr. Audrey G. Donnithorne, *China's Economic System*, Allen & Unwin 1967, pp. 508-509.

agree, in conscience, to walk the ambiguous road of saying one thing yet meaning something else.

We believe that Rome understands well that the option to adjust to this double meaning and sign the document is in fact a two edged sword (*liang dao zhi dao* 兩刃之刀). On one side it allows the bishops (and Rome) to go around the endless discussion of the CCPA policy of establishing an “independent church” That in itself is an achievement and that’s the reason for Rome to live with it. But on the other hand, if the option would be accepted as a general line of policy to be followed in the future, it would introduce a double-standard way of living: saying one thing and meaning another. That would jeopardize even the gospel values and the main principles of Canon Law. Accepting this is to be excluded.

Is accepting this option then to be seen as a step in line with sinicisation? At least we observe that Rome and Beijing have already applied the same option in the 1980’s. Bishop Dong Guangqing 董光清 (Wuhan) – the first official bishop ordained without nomination of the pope (1958) – applied to Rome to be legitimized in the mid-eighties and was then followed by other bishops who, secretly, followed him. The director of the National Religious Affairs Bureau, Ren Wuzhi 任务之, warned all the bishops during a meeting that *this was not allowed. Those who had done so were requested to admit their mistake (ren cuo 认错)*. But more illegal bishops just continued, during the 1980’s and 1990’s to follow the example of Bishop Dong Guangqing. None of them was ever punished by the government. Rome from its side studied each case individually and legitimized them one by one even though it was known that these bishops, while not being member of the CCPA, publicly avowed to cooperate with them. They had to. Several of them even occasionally repeated the slogan of establishing an “independent Church” (独立自办教会). Was that adaptation to the reality inside China (sinicisation)?

In any case the adaptation to the two-edged sword situation needs to be qualified, relativized, to make sure that living with a double standard does not become a common practice in the church and undercuts its very gospel message. The phrasing of the document on the “guidelines” makes clear that Rome is well aware of this.

Conclusion

From the point of view of Europe:

Faith invites us to join Pope Francis on his pilgrimage.

Dialogue must be continued and increased.

So as to complete the unfinished Agreement.

Dialogue itself is entirely in line with the gospel message. Confrontation is non-productive and harmful to both sides. We need to “seek the common ground” in mutual respect also for religious belief as Zhou Enlai suggested. Instead of losing ourselves in scolding our own church brothers and sisters or criticizing our partners in dialogue we should engage in creative planning for the future in order to clarify the existing doubts seeking agreement on what can at this point be agreed upon.

As Catholic faithful we understand that to walk the road of dialogue must be a pilgrimage in faith practiced within the Christian communities. Chinese faithful make their “exodus in faith” leaving their own closed community – be that “official” or “unofficial” – and, in biblical terms, visit the “promised land” (i.e. the other community) even if it were only to bring some flowers to the other church. Catholic faithful outside of China stop their practice of exclusively one-sided visits by either one-sidedly visiting the “official community” or one-sidedly visiting the underground. All bishops are now recognized by the Pope, who are we that we would not recognize them? That kind of internal movement in faith would in fact be of the highest quality activities of Church community building, a first step towards setting up truly Chinese – and indeed autonomous – but united Catholic local Church. This pilgrimage in faith represents the most crucial aspect of dialogue. It happens inside the communities, inside the hearts of the faithful. It is crucial because without *this pilgrimage towards unity* all other aspects of dialogue will fail.

Outside the circle of the Catholic faith, joint academic research is a wide open field for dialogue. In the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) Verbiest Institute KU Leuven initiated such academic exchange inviting scholars from China and other countries to exchange views on “Religion and the Rule of Law.” But there is much more; for example the field of ethics – Family Ethics, Environment Ethics, Business Ethics, etc. – which offers ample opportunities to exchange research on issues of common concern of all societies and countries worldwide and which can create a lot of mutual respect, trust and friendship.

As more dialogue is developed on the higher diplomatic level and parallel with it on the lower academic and pastoral levels, progress will be made in finding the common ground which we all seek. Hope will grow that what is now an ambiguous option and a two-edged sword which helps to cross a 60-year old controversy may also mature in a more clear mutual agreement in line with the commonly accepted principle of religious freedom and in true respect for the conscience of the partners on both sides. And, who knows, perhaps one day there will be an agreement on an autonomous local Chinese Church. If so, then there would be no need for any ambiguous interpretation or double meaning of terms. We are dealing with an *unfinished agreement*.

Completing the *unfinished Agreement* will be the challenge of the two partners in dialogue – Beijing and Rome – for the coming years. The day when they find the common ground the Rome–Beijing Agreement will culminate in an encounter which will assure clear citizenship for Catholic faith in China. Today that encounter may seem to be far away in a vague future. As Christians carrying our gospel we cannot afford to exclude this from our vision and hope. That motivates us to follow Pope Francis and his negotiating team.

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