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Pope Benedict XVI writes in the *Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China (2007)* that “I realize the normalization of relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) requires time and presupposes the good will of both parties...this situation of misunderstandings and incomprehension weighs heavily, serving the interests of neither the Chinese authorities nor the Catholic Church in China.” This paper analyzes “this situation of misunderstandings and incomprehension” from 1949 to the present and assesses the possibility of the Vatican and the PRC building a relationship based upon mutual respect and deeper understanding in the future.

### **The history of the China-Vatican relations in Imperial China**

**1294** Montecorvino reaches Beijing and is granted permission to live in the capital, make converts, and build a church.

**1552** St. Francis Xavier dies on Shangchuan (Sancian) Island off the coast of Guangdong, and Matteo Ricci is born.

**1582** Beginning of the Permanent Jesuit Mission by Matteo Ricci.

**1704** Pope Clement XI forbids Catholic converts from practicing the traditional rites in honor Confucius and the ancestors.

**1721** The Qing Emperor Kangxi Prohibits missionary activity.

**1842** The Treaty of Nanjing Treaty. Five ports are opened to foreign trade. Beginning of the “protectorate” by the French consular authorities over the Catholic missions in China.

**1864** The Qing Emperor Dao Guang issues an edict nullifying the prohibition against missionary activity

During the period of Imperial China, access to China was difficult for the Catholic Church. The first Catholic missionary, a Franciscan archbishop, John of Montecorvino, arrived in Beijing in 1294 during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). He died in Beijing without a successor, and a few bishops that were appointed to China by the Pope never arrived at their posts.<sup>1</sup> After the fall of the Yuan Dynasty, the Catholic community in Beijing disappeared. In 1552, Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier landed on an island near the coast of Guangdong Province. Nevertheless, he died on that island and never entered mainland China. In 1582, another Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, set out for China. From the first contact with the Chinese, Ricci based his entire scientific and apostolic methodology upon two pillars, to which he remained faithful until his death. First, Chinese neophytes, in embracing Christianity, did not in any way have to renounce loyalty to their country; second, the Christian revelation of the mystery of God in no way destroyed, but in fact enriched and complemented everything beautiful and good, just and holy, in what had been produced and handed down by the ancient Chinese tradition.<sup>2</sup> After the death of Ricci in 1610, the Jesuit mission went on to become an important part of the Imperial civil service.

The Catholic Church made little progress in China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to the Chinese Rites Controversy. The Jesuit missionaries thought that the Chinese ceremonies rendered to Confucius and the ancestors were mere civil rites with no religious

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Lam: The Catholic Church in Present-Day China, (Hong Kong: Holy Spirit Study Center, 1997) p. 3

<sup>2</sup> *Message of Pope John Paul II Fourth Centenary of Matteo Ricci's Arrival in Beijing*, October 24, 2001, in Elmer Wurth, ed., Papal Documents Related to China (Hong Kong: Holy Spirit Study Center, 2006): p. 315

content. The Dominicans, Franciscans, and the Foreign Missionary Society of Paris, however, claimed these rites were religious exercises and therefore contradicted Catholic teaching.<sup>3</sup> In 1715, Pope Clement XI published an encyclical letter, *Ex Illa Die*, that denounced the rites.<sup>4</sup> In 1721, when Emperor Kangxi discovered that Pope Clement XI sent a delegate to promulgate the prohibition of the Chinese rites, he issued an edict prohibiting missionary activities. Emperor Kangxi died in 1722, and his successor Emperor Yongzheng vigorously enforced Kangxi's edict. Emperor Yongzheng cited a decree of the office of rite in January 1724 which stated that "*the Europeans at court are useful of the calendar and in other ways, but those who reside in the provinces are not at all useful. They attract to their religion ignorant people, both men and women; they build churches where men and women meet indiscriminately under the pretext of prayer. This is no profit to the empire... as for those who are dispersed throughout the empire, if they can be useful, let them be sent to court. As for the others, let them be sent to Macao.*"<sup>5</sup> The imperial decree of 1724 was disastrous for Catholics in the short term. Henceforth, missionaries could only enter China secretly. The court periodically repeated these draconian measures against missionaries until the colonial period of the nineteenth century.

In 1842, the British forced China to sign the "Nanjing Treaty" which opened five treaty ports in southeast China. In 1844, the French, the United States and other Western powers

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<sup>3</sup> Lam: p. 6

<sup>4</sup> The Controversy was settled on December 7, 1939 when Pope Pius XII rescinded the prohibition.

<sup>5</sup> Charbonnier: p. 268

concluded similar agreements, which gave foreigners benefits to trade and reside in the five treaty ports. In addition, foreigners in the treaty ports were under the protection of foreign law and not subject to Chinese law.<sup>6</sup> Thus, foreign missionaries within these areas were able to operate freely, and the church finally became a legal entity after over a hundred years. The protection given by foreign powers caused a greater influx of missionaries in China than ever before. The Christians in China, now overshadowed by new mission from the West, found themselves under the protection of foreign interests. Such foreign missionary onrush came as a shock to the Chinese, a people proud of their culture and independence, and it provoked anti-foreign feelings. These anti-foreign feelings had built up because of the foreign troops that had been stationed in Tianjin from 1858 to 1865, and because in 1860 the French seized the imperial villa there for a consulate.<sup>7</sup> This xenophobia burst out in 1900 in the Boxer Rebellion, which largely destroyed the missionary progress made by the church in the nineteenth century.

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by the fall of the Manchu Empire and by an attempt at nationalistic modernization. This gave Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, greater opportunities for serving the country's progress. They were soon, however, overtaken by new revolutionary forces, which adopted popular antiforeigner feeling. The first victims of this trend of nationalism were the Chinese Christians, who appeared as traitors to their country. China's new masters, the communists, condemned them as being the "running dogs" of

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<sup>6</sup> Lam: p. 8

<sup>7</sup> Charbonnier: p: 333

imperialism.<sup>8</sup> But due to geographical isolation, Catholics living in remote villages of the country preserved their faith. Some of the villages were composed of refugees who had, as a group, fled from persecution in other provinces; some had descendants of Catholic peasants exiled by former Chinese emperors.<sup>9</sup> By 1948 the Catholic population numbered more than three million (0.5% of the population), and most of them were peasants living in mountainous plateau in Hebei Province,<sup>10</sup> most of them quite poor.<sup>11</sup> By 1949, the Catholic Church, already beset with difficulties, was about to meet its greatest challenges—an atheistic Communist government.

### **The Period of Removing Foreigners and Controlling Chinese: 1949 to 1957**

**1949** October 1: In Tiananmen Square, Beijing, Mao Zedong proclaims the liberation of the Chinese people and the creation of the People's Republic of China.

**1950-53:** The Korean War

**1951** May: The Communist government accuses Archbishop Riberi, papal nuncio, of sabotaging the movement for independence. He is expelled. Foreign missionaries are condemned as agents of foreign imperialism and are expelled from Mainland China.

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8 Ibid: p: 316

9 Ibid: p: 341

10 Other Catholic populated Provinces are Shanxi, Sichuan, and Guizhou.

11 Ibid: p. 268

**1955** September, in Shanghai: Archbishop Gong Pingmei and some forty priests and 1,000 Catholics are accused of obstructing the patriotic movement for independence and are condemned and sent to prison. Violent campaign against the Legion of Mary.

**1957** July 15: The Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) is officially created in Beijing.

Mao had used a selection of Marxist texts to construct a version of Communism that was accessible to Chinese minds, full of imagery, practical and dialectic.<sup>12</sup> Marxist doctrine was fundamentally atheist, but the Chinese's conception of atheism was different from Marxist atheism. Marx followed the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave and conceived of atheism as freeing mankind from the tyranny of God. The Chinese had never seen God that way. Atheism for them was a confirmation of their traditional humanism.<sup>13</sup> Mao Zedong led Chinese Communists to reject religion as an outdated superstition. Chinese Communists therefore asked believers to attend repeated study sessions where their faith was not directly attacked but where it was gradually replaced by faith in the people, in the result of science, in the construction of Socialism, and, finally, in the Party.<sup>14</sup> Mao also adapted the Marxist doctrine of class struggle to a universal principle of contradiction: "The law of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the basic law of materialist."<sup>15</sup> For example, in the eyes of the Communist government, religious institutions, such as Christian Churches in China, and the Chinese

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12 Ibid: p.425

13 Ibid: p. 427

14 Ibid: p. 427

Communist Party had two conflicting beliefs and goals. Their differences were so great that, according to Mao, the inherent contradiction could only be resolved through struggle.<sup>16</sup> The contradictions mentioned in Mao's Theory of Contradictions are never fixed in a monolithic block. Mao emphasized that all contradictions must be clearly divided into principal and secondary contradictions. Mao's Theory of Contradictions justified the violent attacks on religious institutions by the United Front, the Communist Party's organ of propaganda. The task of the United Front in relation to the Christian Churches was to unite the majority to attack the minority in order to cause division among church groups. Eventually, the United Front would be able to bring all Christians under its complete control. Consequently, the Chinese Communist Party's long-term goal was and remains the demise of religion.

During the first years of the Liberation<sup>17</sup>, foreign bishops and missionaries remained in China, and they became the "principal enemies" for the United Front. The government accused many foreign missionaries of being spies and counter-revolutionaries. No matter what "evidence" the government authorities brought against them, their fate was already sealed. They

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15 Mao Zedong: *Selected Works Mao Zedong, On Contradiction*, (Foreign Language Press: Beijing, China, 1961)

16 Mao Zedong: *The Collected Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol. 1, pp. 295-297 Lam: p. 186

17 The Chinese government calls the establishment of the PRC in 1949 "the Liberation".

were first imprisoned and then expelled.<sup>18</sup> In 1951, the expulsion of Archbishop Antonio Riberi, the Holy See's Nuncio to China, marked the official breaking off of relations between the Chinese government and the Holy See, the envoy of the Catholic Church in Rome. The Chinese government considered Riberi as a representative of Western imperial power and declared that he was involved in attempts to overthrow the new Communist government.<sup>19</sup> Riberi was forced to move to Taiwan, which enabled the Nationalist government there to maintain ties with the Holy See. Riberi's expulsion was to create trouble for the Chinese government in later years.

While the government's United Front policy attacked its major contradiction of the government, which was the foreign missionaries, it also continued to consolidate the minor contradiction, which for the time being were the Chinese clerics and laity. The government set up new organizations for those who wished to cooperate with it, and one instrument was the "Three-Self" movement. In May 1950, nineteen Protestant leaders met the prime minister, Zhou Enlai, in Beijing and discussed the content of a *Christian Manifesto*. The signing of the manifesto by forty Christian leaders in July 1950 marked the official beginning of Patriotic "Three-Self" Movement.<sup>20</sup> The text affirmed the commitment of the signatories to supporting the "common program" of the government, to purging the Church of imperialist influences, to supporting the agrarian

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18 Lam: p. 18

19 *A Declaration Stating the Three Major Principles that the Catholic Church has to Implement: Self-administration, Self-support, and Self-propagation*, (June 2000), internal source edited by the United Front and Hubei Religious Affairs Bureau, p. 4

20 Charbonnier: p.431

reform, to cultivating a patriotic spirit, and to promoting triple autonomy, which consisted of self-governance, self-support and self-propagation.<sup>21</sup> Chinese Protestant leaders' total acceptance of the government's demands was partly due to the fact that Protestant opinion was already favorable to independence. However, Chinese Protestants, as well as Catholics, were prone to strong political pressure on the occasion of various government campaigns: the Land Reform in 1950; the law of February 21, 1951 on the suppression of counterrevolutionaries; the campaign of the three antis (*San Fan*) against corruption, waste, and bureaucracy in August 1951; and the campaign of the five antis (*Wu Fan*) against private business in January 1952. Above all, China felt the intervention of the United States in Korea as an immediate threat by imperialism. When the Chinese troops entered the war in October 1950, Chinese Christians were more than ever required to give proof of their patriotism. In 1951, the Communist Party set a preparatory committee of the "Three-Self" Movement to promote the critique of imperialism and to aid a fuller understanding of the three autonomies of self-governance, self-support and self-propagation.<sup>22</sup> These campaigns were the occasions for numberless denunciations between pro and anti "Three-Self" Movement Christians, which poisoned Church life for many years to come.

Where Catholics were concerned, the "Three-Self" Movement was officially launched on December 14, 1950 when the New China New Agency published the Guangyuan Manifesto. The parish priest of Guangyuan, Fr. Wang Liangzuo, and other 500 Catholic in Guangyuan

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid: p. 431

<sup>22</sup> Ibid: p. 431

County, Sichuan Province signed the manifesto. The document declared a declaration a total break with all imperialistic power and the setting up of a church that would be self-administrating, self-supporting, and self-propagating.<sup>23</sup> According to an interview with Fr. Wang in 1987, the original purpose in issuing the Guangyuan Manifesto was political rather than pastoral. His aim was to free the Chinese Catholic Church from the dependence of foreign aids rather than from the Holy See.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the movement grew in Sichuan Province. On January 23, 1951, twenty-six priests signed the Declaration of Nanchong, which was published in the *People's Daily* on February 12; it spoke of “breaking off all relations with imperialist countries, the chief of which is America”, and “breaking the bonds of economic aid with the Vatican.”<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, the government seized the opportunity to set up “reform committees”, which were designed to become the democratic organs of a national church, under the direction of the Bureau for Religious Affairs. The Beijing government took the initiative to impose the new structure on the dioceses, first in Tianjin, then in Shanghai and in other big cities. The first “Three-Self” Catholic organization, “the Tianjin Catholic Preparatory Committee for Promoting the Revolution”, was established in Tianjin on January 11, 1951.<sup>26</sup> According to Dr. Lam, the

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23 Lam: p. 24

24 Wang Liangzuo: "Tianzhujiao Fandi Aiguoyundong Jilue" [Recall the CCC's Anti-Imperialist and Patriotic Movement]. *Catholic Church in China* 20: 19. 1987

25 Charbonnier: p. 432

26 Lam: p. 24

executive secretary of the Holy Spirit Study Center<sup>27</sup>, and Fr. Charbonnier, a priest of the Missions Etrangères de Paris Society, the response of most Catholics was reticent, but a minority of Catholics did join the movement willingly enough. Some priests and lay people saw it as a way of putting into place a Chinese management structure for the Catholic Church; for some it was a protest against the humiliation to which they had been subjected by the sole leadership of foreign missionaries.<sup>28</sup> Up to this time, the “Three-Self” Movement had limited itself to attacking the imperialism of Britain, the United States, and other Western nations without confronting the basics of the Catholic faith.

In March of 1951, the acting Vicar General of the Nanjing diocese, Li Weiguang, together with some clerics and laypersons, published a declaration that supported the “Three-Self” principle of the Chinese Catholic Church. The Catholic Church in China also had to oppose the Vatican’s interference in China’s internal affairs, i.e. its anticommunist policies, and to deliberately break off all political and economic ties with it.<sup>29</sup> The leader of the Universal church, the Roman Pontiff and his representative in China, Archbishop Riberi, suddenly became the

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27 The Holy Spirit Study Centre (HSSC) is an organ of the Diocese of Hong Kong. It was established in 1980 by the late Cardinal John Baptist Wu as an expression of pastoral concern for China and the Church in China. It is a research institute whose primary practical task has been to gather, store and analyze pertinent data about China that will serve to broaden understanding of the Mainland’s rapidly changing situation, and to effect appropriate Christian responses

28 Charbonnier: p. 432

29 Lam: p.24

target of the “Three-Self” Movement.<sup>30</sup> What had originally started out as something pertaining to the church’s political stance against imperialism now directly involved the faith itself. Several Church leaders throughout the country voiced their strong opposition in the “Declaration of Faith” authored by Father Dong Shizhi of Chongqing in 1951. The “Declaration of Faith” declared “the government-supported Three-Self Movement was wrong”, and that “today they want us to attack the Pope’s representative, Archbishop Riberi. Tomorrow it will demand that we attack Jesus’ representative on earth: the Pope.”<sup>31</sup> The government propaganda continued its work and isolated and destroyed the centers of Catholic resistance. Since many priests and laity did not join the “Three-Self” Movement, the government inaugurated a National Assembly of Chinese Catholics on July 15, 1957. The assembly approved the creation of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), but the majority of priests and laity still did not join. However, those who had taken part in the Movement became the chief leaders of the Patriotic Association.

In response to the “Three-Self” Movement, Pope Pius XII published two apostolic letters, *Cupimus Imprimis* in 1952 and *Ad Sinarum Gentem* in 1954, to strengthen the faith of the Catholics in China and discourage any local church from proclaiming autonomy and independence from the Holy See.<sup>32</sup> The Pope declared that the “Three-Self” Movement aimed at

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30 Lam: p.24

31 Thaddeus Hang, *The Catholic Church Before the Chinese Dawn*. (Taiwan: Guangqi Press, 1963) p. 56

32 Ibid: p. 21

creating a national Church that, by denying its universality, would no longer be Catholic.<sup>33</sup>

However, the government officials used these papal documents to accuse the Vatican of rousing up of the faithful against their own country.<sup>34</sup> Due to the government's censorship, most of the Catholic clerics and laity did not have the opportunity to read the papal letters at that time. Besides papal documents, foreign missionaries were the only communicating tools between the Holy See and the Catholic Church in China. With the expulsion of foreign missionaries, the strong censorship by the government, and the lack of diplomatic relations between the government and the Holy See, the Chinese Catholics were isolated from the Pope and the rest of the world.

After removing foreign missionaries by 1952, the government "promoted" Chinese bishops and clerics who refused to cooperate with the government to the status of "primary enemies". The government's first attack on a Chinese Catholic was on Gong Pinmei, Bishop of Shanghai. In defiance of the "Three-Self" Movement, Bishop Gong, who led the diocese of three large cities in China, invigorated the Legion of Mary. The Legion of Mary chapter in Shanghai was founded in 1948 and urged the young members to hold fast to their Faith. In October 1951, the government declared the Legion of Mary an illegal society that was engaged in espionage of the service of the United States under the cloak of religion. It demanded that all legionaries throughout China either register in the Public Security Bureau and acknowledge that the Legion

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33 Charbonnier: p. 434

34 There is an interesting comparison to the Pope Benedict's letter in 2007, which was sent to the Chinese government before being issued to the faithful despite the lack of any official ties. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128548164>

was counter-revolutionary, or risk imprisonment.<sup>35</sup> Bishop Gong told his followers not to comply with the government, and they must, under any circumstance, uphold their faith. Because of their trust in Bishop Gong, the members of the Legion of Mary obeyed. With the exception of very few, ninety-nine percent of the legionaries refused to sign the registration. In September 1955, the government arrested Bishop Gong and 1,000 other Chinese Catholics and sentenced them to from 10 to 20 years of hard labor.<sup>36</sup> Bishop Gong was released in 1987 when he was 86. On his visit to Rome in 1988, Bishop Gong found out that Pope John Paul II had elevated him to Cardinal, *in pectore*, in 1979, while he was in prison.

#### The Period of Difficult Circumstances: **1957 to 1978**

Timeline:

**1957** March 7: Propaganda Fide Grants Supervisory Powers to Diocesan Priests when the Bishop is absent

**1957** July 15: The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) is officially created in Beijing.

**1958** January: Mao Zedong launches the second Five-Year Plan: the Great Leap Forward

**1958** April at Wuhan the first consecration of Catholic bishops without the approval of the Holy See. Pope Pius XII issues his third encyclical letter to the Catholics of China *Apostolorum Principis*, condemning the Catholic Patriotic Association and the illegal appointment of Catholic bishops in China.

**1958** October 9: Pope Pius XII dies and Pope John XXIII Succeeds

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35 Cardinal Kung Foundation, biography

36 *Shanghai Criminal Studies Journal*, September 25, 2009 <http://www.xxjs.ecupl.edu.cn/showdetail.asp?id=729>

**1962** January 6: The second general meeting of the Patriotic Association takes place in Beijing.

**1962-65** The Second Vatican Council is held in Rome.

**1966** The Cultural Proletarian Revolution. The Red Guards devastate what is left of the Catholic Church. All the Catholic churches in China are closed. Priests and religious sisters are sent to prison or to labor camps for reeducation.

**1976** September 9: Death of Mao Zedong. Hua Guofeng succeeds in 1977. Revolutionary activism ceases with the elimination of the Gang of Four.

The expulsion of all foreign missionaries had created a vacuum in the leadership of many dioceses, since the majority of the bishops at that time were non-Chinese. Most of the foreign bishops thought that their expulsion from China was going to be of short duration and that they would soon return. Therefore they only appointed diocesan administrators and were unwilling to recommend them to become bishops with diocesan authority.<sup>37</sup> These Chinese diocesan administrators on the one hand were responsible for the preservation and development of the diocese; on the other hand, they did not have sufficient authority and legal status to carry out their duties. Wishing to maintain normal Church life in China, on March 7, 1957, Pope Pius XII promulgated to the Church in China through the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith that “all priests and each individual priest in communion with the Holy See possess all the powers necessary to effectively exercise their pastoral duties while being unable to communicate with their local ordinary.”<sup>38</sup> This extension of faculties enabled diocesan priests to carry on the work of the diocese despite the absence of a legitimate bishop. It also tried to prevent the

<sup>37</sup> Lam: p. 39 As reported by Bishop Hou Jinde of Xingtai Diocese in Hebei to a visiting Catholic from Hong Kong in September 1988

Chinese church from choosing, on its own authority, candidates to replace those bishops who were imprisoned or exiled. In reality, however, this extension of faculties had no practical effect. In the 50s, Chinese priests faced two difficult choices: cooperating with the government's "Three-Self" policy or going to jail.<sup>39</sup> The priests who needed this extension of faculties to carry out their pastoral duties were all imprisoned by 1958. This extension of faculties had its real effect after 1978 and became the legal basis for the future underground churches.

From 1957 until 1966, the Catholic Church in China, under the pressure of the government, had two parallel developments: the government-sanctioned open church and the unregistered underground church. Both camps initially intended to preserve the existence of the church and maintain hierarchical structures, although the structures differed somewhat from one another. Nevertheless, difficult and unforeseeable circumstances widened the initial stances of those priests and bishops. The clerics who chose to cooperate with the government became the leaders of the government-sanctioned open church.<sup>40</sup> The open church was under strong political pressure to support the government's socialist campaigns and was subjected to the government's constant scrutiny. Although the leaders in the open church yielded to the government's demands, they nonetheless faced ruthless persecution during the Cultural Revolution. Those who refused to cooperate with the government were imprisoned until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978.

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38 Document no. 1023/57 of Propaganda Fidei. The original text is in Latin, in Lam: p.22

39 Lam: p. 37

40 The open church was also closed down during the Cultural Revolution.

After their release, those clerics who had kept their faith in the prison became leaders of the underground church that was loyal only to the Pope, not the government. The discussion of the underground church will be in the *Period of Restoration: 1978 to Present* below, and this section will be mainly about the development of the open church.

In May of 1956, the Communist government implemented a policy<sup>41</sup> that encouraged non-Party people to express their opinions about the Party freely. Wishing to express their frank criticisms of the Party, four bishops who had not yet been arrested decided to visit Zhou Enlai and other government officials in July 1956.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, after 1958, Zhou's moderate viewpoint that admitted the necessity for Catholics to remain united to Rome in spiritual matters was replaced by a more "leftist" one.<sup>43</sup> The Party asked Church leaders to break off relations with foreign countries. Yielding to government demands, several bishops along with more than thirty priests and lay Catholics proposed to create a national Catholic organization. They held the first meeting on July 15, 1957 and called their association, at government insistence, the Chinese Catholics' Patriotic Association (CCPA).<sup>44</sup> The CCPA's resolution in their first meeting stated that

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41The policy is called: *letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend*

42 In 1949, communication between China and the Vatican was still possible and the Holy See appointed at least eighteen Chinese bishops in mainland China to pastor the Church. Lam: p. 27 and p. 33

43 Charbonnier: p. 433

44 Lam:p.34

“with our country’s independence and dignity foremost in mind, we shall maintain purely religious relationships with the Vatican. We shall obey the Pope in matters pertaining solely to faith and church law. Moreover, we absolutely sever all political and economic ties with the Vatican and resolutely oppose its use of religious pretexts and other underhand activities to disrupt our just cause of opposing imperialism and promoting patriotism.”<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to know how much this statement reflected the true desires of the clergy and laity present at the meeting. Nevertheless, those clergy and laity believed that establishing the Patriotic Association was the only way for the Catholic Church to survive under the political climate at that time.

After the Patriotic Association’s first meeting, the government demanded an election of new bishops to fill the vacancies in those dioceses that did not have bishops.<sup>46</sup> Some clerics in these dioceses considered this a real apostolic need.<sup>47</sup> On December 16, 1957, the Chengdu diocese in Sichuan, without prior approval of Rome, chose Fr. Li Xiting to be bishop. They did not report this fact to the Holy See and did not consecrate Fr. Li but adopted a wait and see attitude.<sup>48</sup> Following this example, many dioceses also chose their own bishops. At the beginning

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45 Ibid: p.35

46 Ibid: p. 35 Foreign bishops were exiled or imprisoned and non-cooperating Chinese bishops were arrested.

47 Lam: p. 35

48 Ibid: p. 35 Bishop Wang Wencheng of Chengdu later illicitly consecrated Fr. Li Xiting on July 6, 1958

of 1958, the Hankou and Wucang dioceses in Hubei province chose Fr. Dong Guangqing and Fr. Yuan Wenhua respectively to be bishops. The government pressured Bishop Li Daonan of Puxi diocese to travel to Hankou and to consecrate the two candidates. However, both dioceses still wanted to act according to church law. So they sent a telegram to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith announcing the results of their election and hoping to obtain the Pope's approval. Since the two dioceses in question already had bishops who were in prison, Rome replied on March 25 with a refusal.<sup>49</sup> However, on April 14, 1958, Bishop Li Daonan of Puxi diocese solemnly consecrated the two candidates in the Cathedral of Hankou. After these consecrations, the government forbade church authorities to have future recourse to the Holy See. Dioceses throughout the country became divided. The bishops and priests who supported independent consecrations had to declare openly that they had broken off all relations with the Holy See during the consecration ceremony; those who refused to break church law were immediately imprisoned.<sup>50</sup> Between 1958 and 1963, fifty-one bishops were consecrated, and they, for the most part, followed government instructions.

Pope Pius XII issued an apostolic letter *Ad Apostolorum Principis* in June 1958 that reiterated the Pope's exclusive authority to make Episcopal appointments. He also restated that "the power of the Church is in no sense limited to so-called 'strictly religious matter'; but the whole matter of the natural law, its institution, interpretation and application, in so far as the

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49 Charbonnier: p. 441

50 Ibid: p. 37

moral aspect is concerned, are within its power.”<sup>51</sup> Pope Pius XII harshly condemned the elections of “bishops” in China and stated that “[the consecrations] are [...] gravely illicit, that is, criminal and sacrilegious.”<sup>52</sup> Pope Pius XII and his predecessor Pope Pius XI did not know that their letters never reached most of the Chinese church authorities or laity loyal to the Pope. Some church leaders only knew the existence of these letters from the United Front and Religious Affairs Bureau, which were state-run organizations aiming at subduing religion under the government’s control using the method of Mao’s Theory of Contradiction.<sup>53</sup> Facing the government’s censorship, the Chinese Catholic leaders were cut off from the Pope’s teachings.

On the one hand, the Pope was upset about the scandals Chinese church leaders from the Patriotic Association had made; on the other hand, some of the Chinese bishops and priests who participated in illicit consecrations thought that the Holy See did not understand their peculiar situations. Bishop Li Daonan who had taken part in the first illicit consecration in Wuhan expressed his feelings to an overseas Chinese priest who had returned home on a home visit. He said he never had any intention of breaking with the Holy See but matters developed beyond what anyone could have envisioned.<sup>54</sup> For more than thirty years, Bishop Li had suffered

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51 Wurth: p. 84

52 Ibid: p. 86

53 Lam: p. 40

54 Ibid: p. 38

torments of conscience for his part in those consecrations.<sup>55</sup> Bishop Zhao Zhensheng of Xianxian Diocese in Hebei also took part in the one of the first illicit consecrations. He was a prominent Jesuit but, contrary to everyone's expectations, he continued to consecrate four other bishops without the permission of the Holy See.<sup>56</sup> Bishop Zhao told his student thirty years later that he considered the times of the illicit consecrations to be extraordinary, and that even the Pope himself, under the same circumstances, would have agreed with his decision.<sup>57</sup> Many of the testimonies gathered by Dr. Lam suggest that the majority of priests who took part in these illicit consecrations acted out of good intentions, hoping, through their compromise, to preserve the church's existence.

Pope Pius XII died in 1958 and the new Pope John XXIII (his pontificate was from October 1958 to June 1963) began to establish dialogue with communist countries in the East. Pope John XXIII changed his precursor's harsh language on the issues in China, and he said in his letter to China and the Chinese Church that "in Our paternal affection for all, We trust and hope that the actual reality is not so bad and disquieting [...] it is for this reason that We abstain from using more grave words and rather continue to pray and to invite others to do the same."<sup>58</sup>

Sometimes, Pope John XXIII used the word "schism" in describing the Church in China when he

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55 Ibid: p. 38 An article in China Catholic Online ([www.ccccn.org](http://www.ccccn.org)) says that the government pressured Bishop Li to consecration first two Bishops in Wuhan by detaining him for a week.

56 Ibid: p: 39

57 Ibid: p. 39 The Pope actually acknowledged the peculiar circumstance when the underground Bishop Fan Xueyan consecrated bishops without the prior permission from the Pope in the 80s.

saw the possibility of the development of a schismatic church in China apart from the Supreme Pastor, the successor of Peter. In 1959, a group of China experts had held a meeting in Hong Kong at which Cardinal Agagianian, head of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, was present. Two conclusions were reached: (1) the consecrations taking place in China were illicit but valid; (2) the Chinese church was not a schismatic church.<sup>59</sup> According to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, Bishops who have been ordained without the Pontifical mandate are considered illegitimate but valid as long as it is certain that they have received ordination from validly ordained Bishops and that the Catholic rite of episcopal ordination has been respected. In addition, valid and legitimate consecration of Bishops is essential to preserve the apostolic succession. For many Catholics in China, the failure to procure pontifical mandates for the consecration of bishops breaks or at least threatens the apostolic succession. During the first session of the Second Vatican Council on November 21, 1962, a group of bishops who had lived in China came to the same conclusion that the priests in China possessed valid sacraments, and the Catholic Church in China was not a schismatic church. They presented their conclusion to the Pope, and the Pope promised on November 26, 1962, that he would not use the term “schism” again when speaking of the Church in China.<sup>60</sup> Since the pontificate of Pope John XXIII, the

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58 Wurth: p. 134

59 Lam: P. 40

60 Wurth: p. 138 Although the heading “Pope John Promises Never to Use the Word ‘Schism’ Again” appears in many documents and sources, there is no written text available in which the Pope actually says: “I won’t use the word again.”

Holy See abandoned harsh words and embraced a sense of consideration for the difficulties in the Catholic Church in China.

As the Holy See was moving from condemning to understanding the Church in China, the political climate in China during this time grew tense. In January 1958, Mao Zedong had launched a second Five-Year Plan, known as the Great Leap Forward. The goal of this campaign was to rapidly transform the country from an [agrarian](#) economy into a modern communist society. However, compounded in some areas by drought and in others by floods, the Great Leap Forward led to the death of 30 million Chinese peasants between 1959 and 1962.<sup>61</sup> In January 1962 a second general meeting of the Patriotic Association took place when the whole country wholeheartedly and aggressively devoted itself in realizing its communist ideal. The Patriotic Association functioned as the mouthpiece for the government, and the government withdrew the freedom of worship as it closed down numerous churches. *The Guangming Daily*<sup>62</sup> published the resolution of the Patriotic Association that stated that it would “wholeheartedly accept the leadership of the Communist Party, walk the socialist road, resolutely support the three sided red flag of the Party’s general line, the Great Leap Forward, and the people’s communes, and actively and totally serve the cause of socialism.”<sup>63</sup> The Patriotic Association’s silence on the

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61 China’s Great Famine, 40 Years Later, [British Medical Journal](#);319:1619-1621 (18 December, 1999)

62 Since 1958, the newspaper began to be operated under the direct leadership of the Propaganda Department and the United Front Work Department of the [Communist Party of China](#) (CPC) Central Committee. Run by the CPC Central Committee, it is now a daily paper targeting intellectuals.

63 Ibid: p. 42

great sufferings in China suggests that the meeting was purely a means to respond to political exigencies, having no pastoral or religious meaning whatsoever.<sup>64</sup> The second general meeting of the Patriotic Association in 1962 made it clear that the Chinese Communist Party was following a policy that aimed at subjugating the Catholic Church in China to a socialist order. At the time when the Universal Church was experiencing unprecedented renewal by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Church in China was entering into the night.

When the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, the Chinese Communist Party disintegrated overnight, and Revolutionary Committees completely took over Party functions at provincial, urban, and local levels.<sup>65</sup> In the Chinese governmental system, Party and government functions intermingled. Those agencies, such as the United Front and Religious Affairs Bureau, with primary responsibility for religious matters, were on the Party's side. When the Cultural Revolution was at its peak in the late 1960s, the leaders working in the United Front and Religious Affairs Bureau who were responsible for winning over minority groups to accept Party policies were persecuted under the accusation of being "counter revolutionary revisionists, capitalist roaders, traitors, and spies."<sup>66</sup> If high Party officials were treated in this way, how could religious people and other national minorities, who were under their protection, expect to escape the storm? Bishops and priests, who had relied on the government, underwent self-criticisms at

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64 Lam: p. 43

65 Ibid: p. 46

66 Ibid: p. 46

public sessions. The society saw them as remnants of a feudalistic superstitious systems and the tail of Western imperialism.<sup>67</sup> Faced with a sense of despair, some bishops and priests considered marriage or even suicide. The government pressured bishops and priests to get married and many of them took Sisters as their wives.<sup>68</sup> Some did this to show their obedience to the government while others wanted to give, at least in name, a means of support for those women who had no other means of survival. Among those clergy who had followed the government line, some kept their faith and priestly vows and accepted their sufferings as a means of expiation.<sup>69</sup> After the Cultural Revolution, they were the backbones for rebuilding the Catholic Church. The unprecedented sufferings from the Cultural Revolution made some clergy in the open Church lose all hope, but some became more firm and intrepid in professing their faith. The outside world was without the news of Christians in China for about ten years; the Church there was effectively buried, but with the hope of resurrection.

#### The Period of Restoration: **1978** until the present

Timeline:

**1978** December: Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress. Deng Xiangping launches a policy of economic reform and modernization.

**1979** Religious Activities Began to Reopen in Important Cities and Towns

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67 Ibid: p. 47

68 Ibid: p.48

69 Ibid: p. 49

**1980** May-June: Third General Assembly of the Catholic Patriotic Association. Creation of the Administrative Commission of Religious Affairs and of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of China.

**1989** June 4: Student demonstrations Tiananmen Square, Beijing, are dispersed with considerable loss of life.

**1992** September 15-20: The Fifth National Assembly of Catholic Representatives held in Beijing decides to apply in China the reforms of the Catholic liturgy put in place elsewhere by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

**2000** October 1: Pope John Paul II canonizes 120 Blessed Martyrs of China

The Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP occurred in the same year—1978—that Pope John Paul II began his pontificate. Chairman Deng Xiaoping declared an open reform policy and the Four Modernizations program. The Four Modernizations program ordered the priority in Chinese economic development in agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology.<sup>70</sup> These reforms stressed economic self-reliance and aimed at making China a great economic power by the early 21st century.<sup>71</sup> The Four Modernizations program's slogan "seek the truth from facts" represented a shift in emphasis from employing idealism and utopianism to employing pragmatism in designing socioeconomic policy.<sup>72</sup> As the

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70 Jean-Pierre, Charbonnier: *Christians in China* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007) p. 501

71 Evans, Richard: *Deng Xiaoping and the making of modern China* London: Penguin Books, 1997

72 Peter M. Lichtenstein: <http://www.bookrags.com/tandf/four-modernizations-tf/>

breeze of freedom was blowing through the country, Chinese intellectuals took the lead and advocated a “Fifth Modernization”: an “emancipation of minds.”<sup>73</sup> But Deng thought the society was not ready for exercising democracy in a responsible way and was determined that order and discipline should accompany economic reform. Therefore, on March 5, 1978, the government added the Four Basic Principles points into the Constitution: a Socialist system, rule by the Party, dictatorship of the proletariat, and the Marxist-Leninist thought of Mao Zedong, in order to prevent the opening up the of the country too fast.<sup>74</sup>

Deng’s concern might come from his understanding of Chinese intellectual history. Throughout Chinese history, the vast majority of Chinese had experienced only passive submission to the bureaucratic machine, so that a relaxation of controls tended to produce anarchy and even more corruption. After the Cultural Revolution, there was no effective legal system in China to provide the framework for civil society, and there were no intermediate bodies with a tradition of responsible action. Previously, the moral imperatives of Confucianism maintained a certain social cohesion. Perry Link, a leading authority on Chinese intellectual trends and coeditor of the *Tiananmen Papers*, sums up the search for a meaningful ideology by the Chinese people in the twentieth century: “the collapse of Confucianism as China’s guiding ideology, followed by a briefly promising but ultimately disastrous attempt to replace it with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought left Chinese groping for a new alternative even as they

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73 Charbonnier: p. 501

74 Ibid: p. 501

were trying to rid themselves of remnants of failed ones.”<sup>75</sup> Just as the country was seeking to regain her economic and moral strength, the government-sanctioned Catholic Church in China both benefited from the general policy of openness and suffered periodically from the way the government put the brakes on its promise of religious freedom.

Gradually many priests arrested in the fifties were released from prison and those clergy who suffered persecution during the Cultural Revolution rehabilitated. As for the open Catholic Church, patriotic bishops were reinstated by the government in 1978. The appointment of bishops without any reference to Rome also began again. Most of the bishops and priests returned to the churches where they originally served. Most priests could not accept the government’s arrangement for them to live with priests who had married or had given evidence against others before government officials. The most unacceptable were priests who had publicly denied the primacy of the Pope.<sup>76</sup> During the latter half of the eighties many open churches restored the Prayer for the Pope in the canon of the Mass, and the topic of “Papal Primacy” was restored to the curriculum in seminaries.<sup>77</sup> On the whole, the open church’s attitude towards papal primacy was gradually improving. Nevertheless, the government’s insistence on controlling the

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75 Perry, Link: *Evening Chats in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, Washington, D.C., Regnery Publishing, 2003

76 Lam: p. 59

77 Ibid: p. 66

Catholic Church in China for the interest of stability has remained an obstacle for granting true religious freedom.

Since 1978, the government has made clear for the patriotic clergy that religion has to be subordinated to the Socialist ordering of society and their duty is to ensure that believers were docile to the directives of the Party.<sup>78</sup> Some of them adopted a minimum of exterior submission while remaining faithful at heart. Others considered any compromise as a snare and went to join the underground Church. Priests who joined the underground Church objected to the government's principle of the complete independence of the Catholic Church in China. The Patriotic Association was unable to stem such losses on its own and convened a meeting of the Assembly of Representatives of the Catholic of China on May 31, 1980. The meeting attempted to give the Patriotic Association a more ecclesiastical appearance so it established the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference (CCBC), which was something totally new for the Church in China. This Bishops' Conference was responsible in theory for doctrinal questions and international relations, but it had no real power.<sup>79</sup> The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), which was established by the [People's Republic of China's](#) Religious Affairs Bureau, exercised state supervision over Mainland China's Catholics.<sup>80</sup> One of the most important tenets

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78 Charbonnier: p. 503

79 Ibid: p. 504

80 *The Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association celebrates 50 years at a less than ideal moment*: <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=9915>

in the constitution of the CCPA is its autonomy from the Pope. A bishop from Hebei expressed his criticisms of the Patriotic Association in 1988 stating that the mere fact of joining was equivalent to supporting the Three-Self policy of self-governance, self-support and self-propagation. He stated that once a priest or a bishop joined, he must attend innumerable meetings. At these meetings he must raise his hand or even sign his name declaring his position for some resolutions and statements. It did not matter what a priest or a bishop might think in his heart or how many regrets he may have later, all this brought them to openly break ties with the Pope.<sup>81</sup> For example, during the ceremony of illicit Episcopal consecrations in the eighties, the one who was being consecrated had to kneel before the consecration bishop and swear an oath to break ties with the Pope and follow the Party's leadership.<sup>82</sup> In return, the bishops represented the "independent" Catholic Church of China and were allowed to evangelize in public.

For the clergy and the lay faithful who joined the underground Church in order to escape government control, their situation was anything but ideal. The underground Church refers to the churches that are not registered under the government, since the government requires all places of worship to be registered. Propaganda Fide, a department of the Holy See that organizes all the missionary activity of the Church, extended the powers of each diocesan priest in the 1950s. During that time most bishops were either expelled or put in prison, so the Holy See granted priests the privilege of administering the sacraments beyond diocesan boundaries.<sup>83</sup> This gave the

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81 Lam: p. 148

82 Ibid: p. 148

83 Lam: p. 124

underground Church ministers the legal foundation to work without being subject to any other clergyman. Bishop Fan Xueyan of the Baoding diocese in Hebei Province was the most important person for the development of the underground Catholic community. After release from prison in 1979, Bishop Fan decided to ordain three priests as bishops because most of the bishops in communion with the Pope had already died. The Holy See was inclined to recognize those bishops at that time, and in the *Christian Life Weekly* of Taipei for January 16, 1994, the Pope agreed with Bishop Fan's decision.<sup>84</sup> One of the reasons the Holy See refused to approve the episcopal candidates from the open Church was that the Holy See had no documentary evidence on hand to judge their suitability.<sup>85</sup> But Bishop Fan had obtained acknowledgement from the Holy See and spiritual support from the Pope. He continued to ordain more bishops until he was jailed for a third time in 1983. After his release in 1987, the government put him under strict surveillance in Baoding. Outsiders estimate that from 1980 to 1993 over 80 bishops were secretly ordained.<sup>86</sup> By March 2010, not counting those who have already died or have

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84 The Reply that the Pope sent to Bishop Fan is: "Dear Brother Peter Joseph, your action was in complete accord with my will. I grant you the Holy See's Benediction and special faculties that enable you to decide the proper course of action in all matters after which you can inform me."

85 Lam: p. 36

86 Ibid: p. 127

become Open Church bishops, the number of bishops not recognized by the government was 49.

<sup>87</sup> Bishop Fan died of ill treatment on April 13, 1992, but his influence on the development of the underground Church has remained.

The rise of the underground church was the result of its dissatisfaction with the organization of the open Church. In August 1988 Bishop Ma Ji of Pingliang, Gansu Province and an open Church member attributed the growth of the Underground Movement to the blunders of the Patriotic Association. He blamed the actions of a small number of patriotic bishops: some had gotten married; they had rejected the authority of the successor of St. Peter; they had destroyed the so-called the bridge function of the Patriotic Association between the government and the Church.<sup>88</sup> Bishop Ma questioned what kind of bridge function these leaders can perform whose “right hands hold the chalice while embracing their wives with the left.”<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, Fr. Charbonnier stated in his book *Histoire de Chrétiens* published in 1992 that the real issue was elsewhere. According to him, it was not so much the way the association was operating that was the problem, but that it was interfering in matters concerning faith, such as the doctrine of the

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87 Sandro Magister: <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/7024?eng=y>

88 Charbonnier: p. 523

89 Lam: 160

Roman Catholic Church in regard to the Pope and Church hierarchy.<sup>90</sup> The very existence of the Patriotic Association was not authorized by the Pope and was a challenge to his authority.

Clandestine Catholics began to make the reasons for their opposition to the open Church publicly known. The most famous statement was called the *Thirteen Articles* which was signed by Bishop Fan Xueyan of Baoding on August 14, 1988. The Bishop explained that it was wrong to accept any cooperation whatsoever with the Patriotic Association and that Catholics who attended Mass in an Open Church were committing a grave sin.<sup>91</sup> The Underground Church felt it must assert itself publicly for two reasons. Firstly, more and more Catholics consciously or unconsciously were playing the game of government propaganda and taking advantage of the conditions on which religious freedom was being offered to them.<sup>92</sup> As the religious policy started to loosen up after 1978, many official bishops secretly contacted Rome to obtain its approval. In a recent article, dated March 2010, published in "*La Civiltà Cattolica*", it was reported that 49 of 79 patriotic bishops have returned to communion with the pope.<sup>93</sup> Beijing closed its eyes to this, but Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong suggested that "the Holy Father's generosity in legitimizing the bishops of the open Church has not born the fruits it was supposed

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90 Charbonnier: p. 524

91 Lam: p. 138

92 Charbonnier: p. 527

93 Ibid: p. 535

to produce.”<sup>94</sup> The intention for Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI to recognize illicit bishops was to promote reconciliation and unity through reestablishing a visible and hierarchical communion in the open Church in China. Nevertheless, according to Cardinal Zen some of the bishops in the open Church lacked the conversion of the heart and a spiritual communion with the Pope and, therefore, they failed to bring about unity of the Catholic Church in China. Cardinal Zen also stated that “[underground Chinese] Catholics are scandalized that official bishops who have been recognized by the Pope are still on the side of the government.”<sup>95</sup> Secondly, those who were collaborating with the regime were making a favorable impression on foreign visitors who brought their moral and financial support only to the open Church while the underground Church was finding it difficult to make ends meet in the late eighties.<sup>96</sup> But the spiritual anguish of the clandestines was perhaps more acute than their material poverty, since they were beginning to feel that the Universal Church would perhaps abandon them by recognizing or even favoring the open Church, although they were the very ones who had borne the full brunt of Communist persecution. Pope Benedict was aware that the legitimation of some of the open Church bishops gave rise to a grave problem of conscience for the underground Catholic community. In his letter to the Catholics in China in 2007, Pope Benedict urged the bishops in open Church, “once he

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94 [http://catholicworldreport.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=199:the-churchs-fight-for-survival-in-china&catid=53:cwr2010&Itemid=70](http://catholicworldreport.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=199:the-churchs-fight-for-survival-in-china&catid=53:cwr2010&Itemid=70)

95 Ibid

96 Ibid: p. 527

legitimation has occurred” to “bring into the public domain at the earliest opportunity [...] unequivocal and increasing signs of full communion with the Successor of Peter.”<sup>97</sup>

Before 1989, underground bishops and priests in China were working independently of each other since the Holy See enabled diocesan priests to carry on the work of the diocese when the bishop was absent. In November of 1989 they felt a need to set up their own organization, and from that point on clandestine Catholics had formed indestructible small groups that held together by unbreakable loyalty to the Pope. On November 21, 1989, some thirty bishops, priests, and lay people of the Underground Church organized their own Bishops’ Conference in Shaanxi that was different from the one that the official church established in Beijing in 1980. A paper from the Underground Bishops’ conference entitled *A Proposal of the Chinese Bishops Conference* surfaced in the fall of 1993 in Taiwan.<sup>98</sup> The proposal revealed unwillingness on the part of the bishops to follow blindly unreasonable government policies and made it clear that they had no confidence in the present communist government. (This may be true of bishops in the open Church, but they were careful not to express their doubts openly). In addition, it appealed repeatedly to the Holy See to denounce publicly the government sponsored Patriotic Association as well as the government approved Bishops’ Conference.<sup>99</sup> Pope Benedict in his

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97 Pope Benedict XVI: *Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China*, 27 May, 2007: 8:11

98 Lam: p. 179

99 Ibid: p. 179

letter of 2007 described the Patriotic Association as an entity “desired by the State and extraneous to the structure of the Church, to place themselves above the Bishops and to guide the life of the ecclesial community, does not correspond to Catholic doctrine according to which the Church is ‘apostolic’.”<sup>100</sup> Pope Benedict did not denounce the civil authority of the Chinese government but he gave clear warning that the greater rights of God must be respected.

The aim of the underground bishops’ conference was to affirm the underground Church’s right to exist in complete and open fidelity to the Holy See, but the government thought their actions as a threat to the regime. In the months that followed the Shaanxi Conference, the government arrested every one of those who had taken part in it. The Holy See has issued no comment either recognizing or disowning the underground Bishops’ Conference. In 1992, an official from the Holy See told Bishop Qian Zhiqun of Hualian Diocese in Taiwan that “because the Holy See wants to avoid giving the Chinese Communist a pretext to persecute the loyal church, it has not given formal approval to the November 21, 1989 establishment of the Chinese Bishops Conference in Mainland China. However the Holy See was pleased with results, but since this was an activity of the loyal church acting on its own, the Holy See does not put any Chinese bishop under obligation to join it.”<sup>101</sup> The Holy See continues to search for ways to resolve its relations with China, weighing of all opinions from the underground and the open Catholic communities and the Chinese government for the benefit of the entire Church and of all the Chinese people.

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100 Benedict’s Letter: 7:5

101 Taiwan, *Shandao Weekly*, September 20, 1992, in Lam: p. 169

## The Communist Party's Policy towards Religion

The religious policy of the Communist Party in China has been set out in Document 19 of the Central Committee, dated March 31, 1982. It begins with a statement that “with the advent of Socialism, the exploitation that produced religious belief has basically been removed; however, during the period of Socialist construction which can be a very long one, the people still have to endure many sufferings and therefore still seek refuge in outdated ideas and customs.”<sup>102</sup> Father Sergio Ticozzi from the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions argues that the government's fundamental standing on religion has remained constant since the establishment of the PRC in 1949. According to him, the Communist government used two tactics to handle religion. They used force as an administrative stratagem to persecute and destroy religion and allowed religion to wither away slowly as society evolved into socialism.<sup>103</sup> The Chinese government determined two prerequisites for the establishment of China-Vatican relations.

1. The Vatican should break the ties with Taiwan and recognize Beijing as the only legitimate government of China
2. The Vatican should not use religion to interfere in the internal affairs in China

The Chinese government views the Episcopal ordination as a part of Chinese internal politics. The disputes between the government and the Holy See derive from the interlocking of politics and religion.

The Communist Party is the head of the Chinese government and holds leadership of all matters in

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102 Charbonnier: p. 504

103 Ibid, p. 188

China. The Central Committee of the Communist Party's *Document No. 3* (1989) states that "the Party and the government must strengthen our own leadership over the Catholic Church."<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the Chinese government views the appointing bishops as the same as appointing governmental officials. In the modern era, the Chinese society, like previous Chinese imperial dynasties, does not have a clear distinction between spiritual authority and temporal authority as exists in the West.<sup>105</sup> The Chinese government thus insists that government officials, a social pillar of the Chinese society dating back to Qin dynasty (221-206 BC), cannot be disturbed by the Pope. All bishops appointed by the government are priests who do not oppose the Party within the Church but nothing has indicated up to now that the bishops have any effective power as Church leaders. The Patriotic Association keeps them subjected to the directives of the government.<sup>106</sup> The bishops have no freedom to speak openly about his beliefs that are contrary to the directives of the state. According to Cardinal Zen, Liu Bainian, the current vice chairman of the Patriotic Association also known as the "Chinese Pope", is one of the most significant factors in the government's efforts to control China's Catholics. Cardinal Zen explained in an interview with Dr. Anthony Clark, a professor of Asian history at Whitworth University, "At dinners with Mr. Liu and the bishops, Liu is the only one who talks. But when he goes away everyone can speak." The conflicts between the ecclesial communities and state agencies appear to be one of the major obstacles in the China-Vatican relations.

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104 Lam: p. 296

105 Charbonnier: p. 266

106 Charbonnier: p. 504

[Pope Pius XII](#) in his encyclical [Ad Apostolorum Principis](#) of 29 July, 1958, deplored the attitude and activities of the Patriotic Association that “under an appearance of patriotism, which in reality is just a fraud, this association aims primarily at making Catholics gradually embrace the tenets of atheistic materialism [...] and at setting aside and neglecting the rights of the Church and effecting its complete subjection to civil authorities.”<sup>107</sup> He also declared that bishops who participated in consecrating new bishops selected by the Association to be [excommunicated](#).<sup>108</sup> Pope Benedict XVI in his letter of 27 May, 2007 to the Catholics in China described Patriotic Association as “persons who are not ‘ordained’, and sometimes not even baptized, control and take decisions concerning important ecclesial questions, including the appointment of Bishops, in name of various State agencies. Consequently, [...] the Bishops and priests risk becoming *de facto* persons without office and without power.”<sup>109</sup> According to Benedict in the same letter, “those aspects of the life of the ecclesial community that fall within the civil sphere...recognition from the civil authorities is acceptable if it does not entail the denial of unrenounceable principles of faith and of ecclesiastical communion.”<sup>110</sup> Benedict maintains that the “requisite and courageous safeguarding of the deposit of faith and of

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107 Wurth: p. 80

108 Ibid: p. 88

109 Benedict’s letter: 7:5

110 Benedict’s letter: 10:4

sacramental and hierarchical communion is not of itself opposed to dialogue with the authorities concerning those aspects of the life of the ecclesial community that fall within the civil sphere.”

<sup>111</sup> At the same time, some aspects of these State entities cannot be reconciled with Catholic doctrine, in particular their claim to place themselves above the Bishops and to guide the life of the ecclesial community, as well as their declared purpose of implementing “the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church.”<sup>112</sup>

Therefore, Benedict neither excludes the possibility of accepting or seeking government recognition nor encourages doing so. Benedict leaves the answer of whether recognition from the civil authorities somehow compromises communion with the universal church to the local bishop who has to consult his presbyterate and is better able to know the local situation.<sup>113</sup> The tension of the Episcopal ordination in China seems primarily dependent on factors external to the Church, but it has seriously conditioned the Church’s authority and unity.

#### Future Full of Hope

Throughout his letter to the Catholics in China, Pope Benedict XVI, like his precursor Pope John Paul II, shows his respect for the civil authority in China and encourages the lay faithful “not to hesitate to participate in the Eucharist celebrated by Bishops and by priests who

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111 Benedict’s letter: 7:8

112 Article 3 of the “Statutes of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association” [CCPA], 2004

113 Benedict’s letter: 7.8

are in full communion with the Successor of Peter and are recognized by the civil authority.”<sup>114</sup> In addition, Benedict says that “the purification of memory, the pardoning of wrong-doers, the forgetting of injustices suffered and the loving restoration to serenity of troubled hearts, all to be accomplished in the name of Jesus crucified and risen, can require moving beyond personal positions or viewpoints, born of painful or difficult experiences. There are urgent steps that must be taken if the bonds of communion between the faithful and the Pastors of the Church in China are to grow and be made visible.”<sup>115</sup> The Pope seems to make a distinction between “a spiritual reconciliation” and “a structural merger” and a spiritual reconciliation must take place now even before a structural merger becomes visible.<sup>116</sup> He recognizes that the reconciliation is like a journey that “cannot be accomplished overnight” since they require the overcoming of personal positions or views.<sup>117</sup> The Pope has not asked the underground church to surface and join the open church. However, he emphasizes that the steps to be taken on the way of reconciliation are necessary and urgent, and cannot therefore be postponed.

The government’s new open policy toward foreign governments and international exchanges had permitted more traveling time abroad for study, trade relations, and tourism.

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114 Benedict’s Letter: 10.5

115 Benedict’s Letter: 6.4

116 Compendium of the Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Chinese Catholics (2009)

117 Benedict’s Letter: 6.6

Within that context, religious exchanges have also taken place. Some Chinese Church leaders have been allowed to travel outside China. They were carefully vetted and never alone; the team had to be sufficiently representative of the Chinese government and to follow the line of government propaganda.<sup>118</sup> An international conference at Montreal in October 1981 began a series of such exchanges. The Canadian meeting was the result of prudent contacts made by Chinese delegates at the Third World Conference of Religion and Peace, held in the United States at Princeton in November 1979. Four of the protestant delegates at Montreal had been present at Princeton and had agreed on the general lines of the Montreal Conference. The speakers from the Montreal Conference were theologians, deep into contextualization and liberation theology. They denounced all social exploitation (except in China). Some of the Catholic speakers were hostile to Roman centralization and expressed unreserved acceptance for the position of the delegates from the People's Republic and fully supported an independent Church of China.<sup>119</sup> Other exchange includes inviting foreigners to speak. Among well-known Catholics who have visited China are Cardinal Konig from Austria, Cardinal Etchegaray from France, Cardinal Sin of Manila, and Mother Teresa from Calcutta.<sup>120</sup> On the Chinese side, patriotic Bishop Jin Luxian of Shanghai is the most traveled. He went to Europe, America, Hong Kong, and the Philippines; he also built a new major seminary at Sheshan, outside Shanghai,

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118 Charbonnier: p. 530

119 Ibid: p. 531

120 Ibid: p. 534

which has welcomed teachers from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Europe and the United States to give lectures. This foreign exchange has helped the government to create a favorable attitude toward its religious policy abroad, even though the tight control of the Christian churches and seminaries inside China has remained.

Although at the highest official level relations between Rome and Beijing remain blocked, the grassroots expressions of Christian fraternity have been becoming more frequent, especially from Catholics in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Chinese diaspora. In addition, underground and open communities both agree that there is only one Catholic Church in China despite the fact that some churches are registered with the government and some are not. In the hearts of the seminarians from both underground and open churches, they share the same Catholic faith. Cardinal Zen of Hong Kong taught at the Shanghai seminary, an open church seminary from 1989 to 1996. He concluded that “they are Catholics, just like the Catholics anywhere else in the world.”<sup>121</sup> Despite the structural separation between the underground and open churches and the government’s tight control over the open church, the number of Catholics in China has grown fast. The Vatican in 2007 estimates there are between 8 million and 12 million Catholics in China, a hundred times more than they were in 1949 and that number continues to grow.<sup>122</sup>

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121 Dr. A. Clark’s interview with Cardinal Zen in August 2010 [http://catholicworldreport.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=199:the-churchs-fight-for-survival-in-china&catid=53:cwr2010&Itemid=70](http://catholicworldreport.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=199:the-churchs-fight-for-survival-in-china&catid=53:cwr2010&Itemid=70)

122 <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0703773.htm>

## Conclusion

In 2008 strange reports surfaced of people claiming to see black smoke coming out from under the statue on top of the Sheshan shrine. Black smoke symbolizes confusion and evil ideas; Sheshan shrine is mentioned in Pope Benedict's letter to the Chinese Catholics in 2007.<sup>123</sup> The message was clear: the Church in China suffers from confusion. The acute struggle between the devil and the Church is still raging. The Catholic Church today is still watched by a suspicious government, just as it was during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties. But as the reach of world media expands, China can less easily persecute Catholics without global attention. It is wrong to identify the Patriotic Association in China with the Roman Catholic Church but the assertion that only the underground Church is loyal and the open Church has betrayed the faith may hinder the reconciliation and the unity of the entire Catholic Church in China.

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<sup>123</sup> Benedict's letter 19

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