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Beijing, Vatican Prepare to Resume Talks

China and the Vatican are preparing to resume a long-stalled dialogue as changes of leadership on both sides have created an opportunity for communication. **"The atmosphere is quite positive for both sides to restart the dialogue now,"** a person close to the Holy See said, highlighting hopes generated by the relatively new leadership in both the Vatican and Beijing.

If formal talks are held they would be the first since 2010, when Beijing's unilateral ordination of bishops damaged what had been an improving relationship. Relations were further strained in 2012 when Thaddeus Ma Daqin, auxiliary bishop in Shanghai, was detained hours after he announced his resignation from the leadership of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the officially sanctioned Church which the Holy See does not recognize.

Previous talks sought to address key issues, such as the unilateral ordination of bishops, and to pave the way for resuming diplomatic ties.

Bishop John Fang Xingyao, chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, said now was the ideal time to resume a relationship with the Vatican. **"My understanding is that China is hoping to establish diplomatic ties with the Vatican, and most people in the Vatican share this view too. This is the best time to do so; we shouldn't miss it,"** Fang said.

The Vatican has insisted that the issue of unilateral ordination should be addressed before formal ties can be established. But Fang said that the best way to resolve the issue was to resume diplomatic ties.

Pope Francis, hailed as a great communicator who does not shy away from thorny issues, raised hopes with his election in 2013 that he could make headway on the relationship. The pontiff has yet to make any public pronouncement on China. But he has reached out to the nation's faithful by sending them messages ahead of special prayers dedicated to Chinese Catholics in May 2014 and last year.



Pope Francis and the President of China, Xi Jinping

In an interview with an Italian newspaper in March, Pope Francis revealed that he exchanged congratulatory messages with President Xi Jinping following each other's appointment last year. This was seen as a sign of warming ties.

However, the authorities in Wenzhou demolished more than 60 churches, raising concerns of a crackdown on religion. The source close to the Vatican said initial feedback on the demolitions indicated they could stem from an isolated policy authorized by the local government. But the incident could complicate the dialogue. Another potential stumbling block is the election of **Joseph Tang Yuenge** as bishop of the Chengdu diocese in May.

"Since the Pope's election, everybody is watching how he is going to engage with China ...whether he is going to take a stronger approach, or if he is going to make a compromise," the source close to the Holy See added.

[South China Morning Post]

Church News

China Denies Church Demolition is Persecution



The Sanjiang Church had been demolished by April 28.



A massive church was razed to the ground this week in Wenzhou, a coastal Chinese city nicknamed the "**Jerusalem of the East**" for its large Christian population.

Local officials responsible for the demolition say the church was an illegal structure that was four times the permitted structure size. But Christian groups are concerned that the demolition signals an official campaign against religious organizations.

The Sanjiang Church took 12 years and 30 million yuan (\$4.7 million) to build, reports Chinese media. Its soaring spires were a symbol of worship in a city that is fifteen percent Christian.

The church's demolition on April 28 was preceded by a month-long standoff between supporters of the church and local authorities, with supporters occupying the church to protest its destruction.

The church was originally a government-approved project under the official "**Three-Self Patriotic Movement**," a state-sanctioned Protestant church.

Last September it was lauded by the local government as a model engineering project. But the official rhetoric has since changed entirely.

Jin Leibo, a spokesperson from the propaganda department of Yongjia County, where Sanjiang Church was located, said that the church was destroyed as it was "*illegal*." "**The building area should be within 1,881 square meters, but they built 7,928 square meters illegally**," Jin said. The church was asked to "self-rectify" by April 22, but workers only managed to tear down 500 square meters by deadline, according to officials. By April 28 evening the church had been flattened by bulldozers.

U.S.-based Christian rights group China Aid says the faithful are worried that the church demolition could be a sign that the government is tightening its grip over the spread of Christianity in China.

The organization claims that churches in different parts of Wenzhou and Hangzhou are currently "**facing persecution**" as a result of a provincial campaign against religious structures that was set into motion after Zhejiang Party Secretary Xia Baolong visited churches across the province and deemed them "**too conspicuous**."

[CNN]

Zhejiang: More Crosses and Churches Demolished.

Two days before the bulldozers tore down the imposing (Protestant) church of Sanjiang, the Catholic shrine of Longgang, where authorities destroyed many statues that were part of the Way of the Cross, transferred the larger statues to a warehouse. The central pavilion, occupied by statues of Christ, the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph was walled to hide the religious symbols from view. Also in this case the reason given was that the constructions are "illegal".

Since 2013, when Zhejiang was slated to become a hub of economic development by 2020, a campaign was enacted to "**beautify**" the region by removing the illegal structures. The campaign is called the "**Rectify Three, Demolish One**" campaign intended to halt violation of building regulations. But it is a fact that the campaign is targeting mainly Christian sites.

The faithful note that the demolition notices began to circulate after Xia Baolong, party secretary of Zhejiang earlier this year inspected a church in Baiquan and noted it had a cross that towered "**too obviously**", deeming it offensive to the eye. On later seeing a forest of crosses in the skyline in other cities, he gave the order to "*rectify*" the situation. Since then, tearing down crosses, destroying statues and razing churches has become the Party's most conspicuous task.

The government defends itself by saying that all those crosses and demolished buildings violated building codes and that, before their forced destruction, the communities were given time to rectify the error. But the faithful denounce that the notice was impossibly short: the church of Sanjiang, only had 4 days for "*rectification*", in short, to destroy over 500 "illegal" square meters.

The fact that the demolition of churches is part of a wider plan was clearly revealed by the Secretary Xia Baolong who, in an interview with Xinhua on the 17th of February, denounced that "*hostile forces of the West*" had infiltrated the Christian communities. And in July 2013 he warned the Party of Wenzhou against the influence of the underground community.

Almost as if to confirm these "*concerns*", on 6 May the University of International Relations and the Academy of Social Sciences published a "**Blue Book**". It states that all religions pose one of the biggest challenges to national security and that "**hostile western forces are infiltrating the religions of China**".

By now, the effort to suffocate religions, control or eradicate them, and demolish their buildings has become a nationwide campaign. A notice from the authorities ordered the closure of an underground house church. The orders read as follows:

- 1) An immediate stop to all religious practices;
- 2) Removal of all religious objects from the building;
- 3) Dismissal of all participants in the services.

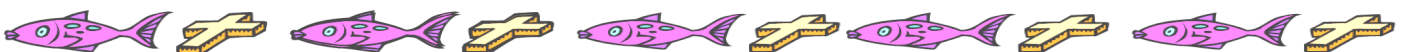
The same applies to several underground Catholic communities.

It seems that the Chinese government fear the prediction of some academics that by 2025 China will be the country with the most Christians in the world, with about 165 million faithful. This "**prophecy**", based on sociological projections was made by **Fenggang Yang**, a professor of sociology at Purdue University.

It is worth noting that in 2003-2004 a campaign was launched in Zhejiang to demolish hundreds of churches. Since then, the community of Zhejiang and Wenzhou have grown even more and now the Christians are about 15% of the population of the city of 9 million inhabitants.

Their strength lies in faith and not in buildings. One of them, Pastor Yang, commenting on the destruction of the church of Sangjiang said: "**When it comes to our faith, the word jiaohui** (church, congregation, fellowship) **is not the same as jiaotang** (church building). It may be possible to deal violently with a building, but not with the Church. Christians shouldn't be so sad. Maybe this is a good time to reflect if we have put too much focus on church buildings. *With this building now destroyed, we should focus our efforts on building the Church*".

[AsiaNews]



Bishop Fan Zhongliang: Better Broken Jade than Intact Tile

The following is a memorial and a eulogy of the figure of *Msgr. Joseph Fan Zhongliang*, Bishop of Shanghai, not recognized by the government, who died on March 16. The author is *Archbishop Savio Hon Taifai*, Secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Archbishop Hon stresses that the deceased bishop, in his love for the Church and the Pope was also a great witness of love for his country and his people and set an example for many of the faithful.

When two days ago I received news of the death of *Msgr. Joseph Fan Zhongliang*, sadness immediately descended on my heart. But then, remembering who he was, I was comforted.

As the Chinese proverb says: "**Better [to be] broken jade than intact tile**". It was with this attitude that Msgr. Fan lived his life, which spanned a long and dramatic period, always under pressure, in varying degrees, from the political situation.

Bishop Fan was *a good pastor* in every sense, who sacrificed everything for his sheep. He was a symbol for many Chinese Catholics, *a symbol of faith* in the Lord, despite having been subjected to so many difficulties, including imprisonment. He was a symbol of *fidelity to his vocation*, although tried for a long time by disease. He was a symbol of *allegiance to the Pope*, even if it cost him dearly.

When I was teaching in Shanghai in the 1990s, at the regional seminary of Sheshan, I was struck by the way in which the faithful and also many young priests spoke of him with great love and respect. Once he sent me a message of thanks because I had offered my time and my academic abilities to teach in China.

Within the context of his situation and the political regime, Bishop Fan's external freedom was always restricted, but *not his interior freedom*: a good Jesuit through and through, he always embraced God's will. This was also why he had to suffer, but his witness made Catholics even more determined and more in love with their country. Love for God and love for the Pope does not preclude love for one's country.

His character was formed at the school of Card. Gong Pinmei. We can read a tradition common to both Card. Gong and Msgr. Fan. As Confucius says, they will not budge even a millimeter in their benevolence and solidarity.

Bishop Joseph
FAN ZhongLiang,
SJ.

Bishop of
Shanghai



Another characteristic element of Msgr. Fan was *his magnanimity*. Though belonging to the unofficial church, he never had harsh words or sectarian judgments of official Catholics. *In his clarity and truth he also knew how to be gentle and merciful*. This explains why over the years he was able to reconcile with Msgr. Jin Luxian, even if the paths that they had taken in the past were very different.

Bishop Fan died on March 16, Msgr. Jin died last year. But the Lord has not left the Church in Shanghai without a guide. On the surface there may seem to be a vacuum, but in reality, the presence of *Msgr. Thaddeus Ma Daqin* ensures continuity. Shanghai Catholics feel the same respect and appreciation of Msgr. Ma. And it is a wonderful thing that he is the successor to both Msgr. Jin and Msgr. Fans. Through him the Church of Shanghai can really live a new era of reconciliation.

I believe that the government would do well to allow to Msgr. Ma celebrate the funeral of Msgr. Fan Zhongliang. It would be a respectful gesture towards religious freedom and towards an elderly person, such as Msgr. Fans. In addition, Msgr. Ma Daqin's presence would guarantee not only a fitting funeral, but also an experience of fraternity and harmony among Christians, from which the entire city could only benefit.

[AsiaNews]



Religious Issues

China on Course to Become World's Most Christian Nation

The number of Christians in Communist China is growing so steadily that by 2030 it could have more churchgoers than America.

Officially, the People's Republic of China is an atheist country but that is changing fast as many of its 1.3 billion citizens seek meaning and spiritual comfort that neither communism nor capitalism seem to have supplied.

Christian congregations in particular have skyrocketed since churches began reopening when Chairman Mao's death in 1976 signalled the end of the Cultural Revolution. Less than four decades later, some believe China is now poised to become not just the world's number one economy but also its most numerous Christian nation.

"By my calculations China is destined to become the largest Christian country in the world very soon," said *Fenggang Yang*, a professor of sociology at Purdue University and author of *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. **"It is going to be less than a generation. Not many people are prepared for this dramatic change."**

China's Protestant community, which had just one million members in 1949, in 2010 there were more than 58 million Protestants in China. Prof Yang, a leading expert on religion in China, believes that number *will swell to around 160 million by 2025*. That would likely put China ahead even of the United States, which had around 159 million Protestants in 2010 but whose congregations are in decline.

By 2030, China's total Christian population, including Catholics, would exceed 247 million, placing it above Mexico, Brazil and the United States as the largest Christian congregation in the world, he predicted. **"Mao thought he could eliminate religion. He thought he had accomplished this,"** Prof Yang said. **"It's ironic – they didn't. They actually failed completely."**

A recent study found that online searches for the words "*Christian Congregation*" and "*Jesus*" far outnumbered those for "*The Communist Party*" and "*Xi Jinping*", China's president.

Yet China's Protestants also worry about how the religious landscape might shape its political future, and its possible impact on the Communist Party's grip on power. As a result, a close watch is still kept on churchgoers, and preachers are routinely monitored to ensure their sermons do not diverge from what the Party considers acceptable.

Such fears may not be entirely unwarranted. Christians' growing power was on show earlier in June when thousands flocked to defend a church in Wenzhou, a city known as the "*Jerusalem of the East*", after government threats to demolish it. Faced with the congregation's very public show of resistance, officials appear to have backed away from their plans, negotiating a compromise with church leaders.

"They do not trust the church, but they have to tolerate or accept it because the growth is there," said one of the church leaders **"The number of Christians is growing they cannot fight it. They do not want the 70 million Christians to be their enemy."**

The underground church leader said many government officials viewed religion as "*a sickness*" that needed curing, and Prof Yang agreed there was a potential threat. The Communist Party was **"still not sure if Christianity would become an opposition political force"** and feared it could be used by **"Western forces to overthrow the Communist political system"**, he said.

Churches were likely to face an increasingly "*intense*" struggle over the next decade as the Communist Party sought to stifle Christianity's rise, he predicted. **"There are people in the government who are trying to control the church. I think they are making the last attempt to do that."**

[The Telegraph]



Religious Freedom still Stifled

In his Letter to the Church in China in 2007, *Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI*, designated May 24, the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, the annual World Day of Prayer for the Church in China. This May, the diocese of Shanghai diocese organized a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan as usual and thousands of people came from all over the country to pray for the Church in China.

When Bishop *Joseph Fan Zhongliang* died in late March, people from both the unofficial and official Church communities paid their respects. They also prayed for auxiliary Bishop *Thaddeus Ma Daqin*, who has been under house arrest since shortly after July 2012 ordination.

Although China's constitution stipulates that citizens should enjoy religious freedom, the authorities still monitor and try to exert influence over the life of Church. Bishop Ma has been kept from his pastoral duties, while Bishop Fan was denied a funeral service at the cathedral of Shanghai because he did not have government approval. Where is religious freedom and respect?

Recently, in *Wenzhou* and *Zhejiang*, Protestant and Catholic church buildings were forcibly demolished. Incidents like government interference in the management of seminaries, the appropriation of Church properties and the cancellation of Church activities challenge the confidence and faith life of the Chinese faithful, while many priests are still imprisoned or remain missing. The election of bishops has increased the pressure on the clergy who vote for them.

Although the Church in China is facing various difficulties, there are many energetic faithful who work hard in bearing witness to Christ. Bishop Ma, in his blog, urged people to model themselves on our modest Mother of God and to walk with the Lord: **"Mary, who followed Jesus to the foot of his cross and accompanied him when he died and rose from death, is our model of hope."**

Our Lady Help of Christians, please pray for the Church in China so that the faithful can enjoy true religious freedom.

[Sunday Examiner]

Keep Out of China's Affairs

In response to an announcement from Pope Francis that he had written to the president of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, and received a reply from him, the vice president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, *Father Liu Yanlong*, responded by saying that **the Vatican should keep its head out of China's sovereign affairs.**

It quoted Father Liu as saying, **"China will always safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity and it never allows foreign forces to interfere with religion.** The Vatican should respect China in terms of the personnel of a diocese."

Pope Francis is the first pope to publicly admit that he has had direct communication with a high official of the government in Beijing. The pope told the Italian newspaper, *Corriere Della Sera*, that he had written to Xi when he was announced as the new president of China and that he had also received a reply, adding that this is an indication that the Vatican does have relations with the People's Republic.

"We are close to China," Pope Francis, who was elected in March 2013, said in the interview. *"There are relations. They are a great people that I love."*

"China's Catholic Church has always had contact with the Vatican, but not in the name of its Church groups, as they are run independently," *Wang Meixiu*, a research fellow with the Institute of World Religion Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said.

The bishop of Hong Kong, *John Cardinal Tong Hon*, said the lack of communication and understanding between the two sides hinders the development of the relationship. He explained that Pope Francis, who used to be provincial superior of the Society of Jesus in his native Argentina, may be favorable to normalizing bilateral relations, in the same way that **Father Matteo Ricci**. His friendship was widely acknowledged by Chinese people.

"The pope is willing to consolidate relations with China... and this is his duty," Wang said.

[Sunday Examiner]



Social Issues

Two Shepherds and two Cultures

Pope Francis and the president of China, Xi Jinping, seem to be at opposite ends of the poles ideologically, but more gritty matters may give them more in common with each other than superficial circumstances would hint.

Stephan Richter, a journalist from *The Globalist*, says they have more in common than just having one billion people to lead and coming into office just one day apart in March last year. **"This is where the stunning parallels start,"** Richter observes, as both sit atop heavily male-dominated bureaucracies and offer ideologies, or faith systems, with absolutist claims in a world where fewer and fewer people are inclined towards rigid positions.

He points out that both have taken up the challenge of shaking down governing systems that deal more in corruption than their predecessors want to admit, as well as taking on poverty face to face and facing opposition to their reforms. He notes that although the motivation of the two men may be poles apart and *the pope may have done more to establish his credentials to date* than Xi, they have a lot in common.

However, both leaders have to deal with powerful people who have a lot to lose and both sit on top of systems that do not deal with change easily.

He notes that while Pope Francis has done some surprising things, citing his *consultation of the world's Catholics on family life* as an example, using different and undoubtedly more sinister means, Xi has given more space to monitoring Internet chat rooms and less attention to closing them down, as they do provide a lot of information on what his constituents think.

However, despite the fact that what the two men share may be related more to procedures than aspirations, Richter describes them as *two shepherds, two cultural revolutions*, noting that on this basis alone, if Xi ever wanted a comrade to chew the fat with, he may find in Pope Francis a more understanding one than he imagines.

[Sunday Examiner]

Cardinal Walks for Democracy

Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, the former bishop of Hong Kong, and his supporters gathered in Chater Garden to begin an 84-hour trek over seven days through Hong Kong to encourage people to turn out for the referendum on democratic procedures which run from June 20 to 22.

The group carried banners and distributed leaflets. *"Most people accepted a leaflet happily, but a few refused,"* one said. *"And while a lot of people shouted out encouragement or waved, a few were critical or occasionally rude."*

While the walk is taking place only a few days after a controversial White Paper on the status of Hong Kong was released by Beijing, plans had been made some weeks prior, although Cardinal Zen told commercial radio on June 13 that he believed it may add impetus to support. *"Hong Kong people still care about their dignity. They will hit back if they are repressed or forced into slavery,"* he said on online radio.

Cardinal Zen planned to walk for 12 hours each day covering a distance of about 20 kilometres on a trek that would take him through major railway stations and chopping centres in Kowloon and the New Territories, before returning to Central on June 20, the day the referendum begins.

A young woman in explaining why she would join the cardinal as saying, *"He walked on the frontline to fight for a better life for the next generation. Shouldn't we fight for ourselves for the life that we want to live?"*

[Sunday Examiner]

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Reading Notes

➤ ***China's Next Generation: New China, New Church, New World. (Kindle Edition)***

Luis Bush and Brent Fulton. China Source, Jan 27, 2014. 55pp.

Over the last ten years China and the Chinese Church have changed significantly; so has the world. It's a new China. It's a new Church. *CHINA'S NEXT GENERATION* gives great, up-to-date information in a clear, concise, and cogent presentation by two seasoned and reliable scholar/practitioners.

➤ ***Multicultural Theology and New Evangelization***

Van Nam Kim. University Press of America (April 1, 2014) 310pp.

Van Nam Kim is a Vietnamese-American who was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1990 and has served in several multicultural parishes and seminaries. In this book, Van Nam Kim addresses the challenges of new evangelization; and sheds light on the central role of multiculturalism in the Catholic Church of the third millennium. Kim answers questions regarding how Catholics can fulfill their evangelical mission and looks at the special roles of religious sisters and lay Catholics in the Church.

➤ ***China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture***

Yang Huilin. Baylor University Press (April 1, 2014) 264pp.

Yang Huilin is Professor of Comparative Literature and Religious Studies, and Vice-President of *Renmin University* of China. Missionaries in China have been viewed as agents of Western imperialist values. Yang has dedicated to re-evaluating the history of Christianity in China and sifting through intellectual and religious results of missionary efforts in China. Yang focuses upon local histories of Christianity to chronicle its enduring good. In a distinctly Chinese voice, Yang presents the legacy of Western missionaries in a new light, contributing greatly to now vigorous Sino-Christian theology.



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United States Catholic China Bureau

2015 Matteo Ricci Award

Honoring

*Most Rev. John Cummins,
Bishop Emeritus of Oakland*

*Most Rev. Ignatius Wang,
Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus of San Francisco*

