

Dialogue between the two cardinals on the Sino-Vatican Agreement is urgently needed

by Bernardo Cervellera

We need to follow Pope Francis' line of thought, according to which "the whole is superior to the parts". There are two impervious sides in the Church: pro-China and anti-China; pro-Bergoglio and anti-Bergoglio. We must find a common position, also in view of the deadline of September 21, 2020, when the Agreement expires. This Agreement, although it has positive aspects, has never been put into practice. We must reject an "independent Church" that does not allow ties "with foreigners" and the evangelization of young people. The division among Catholics serves the purpose of the Chinese Communist Party.

Rome (AsiaNews) – It is with great pain that I write these words having watched two cardinals whom I have the honor of knowing, two witnesses of the faith and coworkers of the pontiff in the mission of the Church, have a very public discussion without perhaps ever having spoken directly to each other (see letters of [Cardinal Re](#) and [Cardinal Zen](#)). It leaves me with the impression that in the Vatican, as in the rest of the world, the affirmation of one's own truth or rather one's point of view, without ever seeking to listen to the other, is what matters most, thus making it rather difficult to reach any synthesis.

Card. Zen has told me that in his visits to Rome he often found himself in front of a wall of silence.

Precisely during the pontificate of Francis, who so often stresses that "the whole is superior to the part" (E.G., nn. 234-237), two opposing and impermeable fronts have established themselves in the Church: traditional and liberal; pro-China and anti-China; pro-Agreement and anti-Agreement; ... It would seem that everything can be assimilated into two fundamental parties: pro-Francis and anti-Francis, so much so that the expression of a minimum perplexity on a fact or on the life of the Church is immediately judged a priori: is it pro or anti Bergoglio?

Even Card. Re's letter risks falling into this pattern when he says that the "very serious claims" of Card. Zen "contest the same pastoral guidance of the Holy Father". Yet even Card. Re recognizes that in China "on a doctrinal level" and "on a practical one ... tensions and painful situations remain", which is what the emeritus bishop of Hong Kong highlights.

The necessity for dialogue is evidently clear, to find a synthesis between the position of the Card. Re, according to which the Sino-Vatican Agreement is positive and "at the present time, it seemed the only possible one", and that of Card. Zen, who is close to "all my desolate brothers and sisters" who are under pressure, violations, expulsion, suffocation and destruction every day. They include the faithful of underground communities, but also many priests and bishops of the official Church who see no improvement in religious freedom after the Agreement.

It is time for the two sides, pro-Agreement and anti-Agreement to talk and find a common position, also in view of the deadline of September 21, 2020, when this agreement expires. If it is necessary to renew it, it must be greatly improved, correcting some discrepancies in the one already signed in 2018.

1. As I have said before, the Agreement - which provides for the "last word" of the Pope on the appointment of new bishops - has a positive aspect because it somehow links the appointments of Chinese prelates to the pontiff. And this is a new fact that has not appeared since the days of Mao. But the doubt remains whether this bond is merely an external "blessing" because it is not clear whether the pope has a right of veto and whether this right is permanent or temporary. It should also be explained why there has been no episcopal ordination in China since the Agreement. The [two ordinations that took place in 2019](#) had in fact already been decided long before and we cannot lie - as the so-called "pro-Francis" press did - saying that they "are the result of the agreement". From this point of view, it must be said that the Agreement, even if it has a positive aspect, has never been put into practice.

2. The requirement of belonging to an "independent Church", as suggested by the ["Pastoral Guidelines ..."](#) needs clarification. If, in fact, for the Vatican it is clear that only "political independence" is spoken of, ambiguity lies in the Party which continues to demand independence "tout court", without distinction. So much so that in joining the ["independent Church"](#) it is required that bishops and priests must not "contact foreign powers, welcome foreigners, accept any delegation from foreign religious communities

or institutions". In addition, the "package" of the "independent Church" includes denying "religious education to minors" and not carrying out any religious activity outside the boundaries of the registered place (no extreme unctions in hospitals, nor prayers or blessings at home , ...). That bishops and priests accept these things with obviousness is worrying.

3. It is clear that the **situation of the Church in China after the Agreement has worsened**: churches closed or destroyed; crosses torn from the bell towers or from the walls of the churches; domes razed to the ground; ancient statues of sanctuaries seized; religious signs at home or outside erased; priests driven out of their ministry. Is it possible that the Catholic Church and the Vatican remain silent while many brothers and sisters suffer such violence? Reporting is often the only way to save these brothers and sisters of ours.

I once asked a member of the Chinese Communist Party why they used so many resources to control a small group of Catholics in China (less than 1% of the population). He replied: "We are afraid of your unity." To the extent that we keep silent, that we are divided and that we contest each other, we play the Party's game of "divide and conquer".



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