
BOOK REVIEW: ANTONIO SPADARO S.J. (ED.), 2019. *LA CHIESA IN CINA: UN FUTURO DA SCRIVERE* (CROCEVIA) (ITALIAN EDITION). MILANO: ANCORA EDITRICE.

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ABSTRACT

La Chiesa in Cina features six essays by Jesuits involved in the company's mission in and for China, plus official texts of the agreement between the Vatican and the government of the People's Republic of China regarding the appointment of Catholic bishops in China, and Pope Francis' message to Chinese Catholics and the Universal Church explaining the agreement (22 September 2018). It also contains a Preface by the Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and Antonio Spadaro's editorial introduction. Given the expertise of the Jesuit contributors—Spadaro is editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the prestigious and historic Jesuit review in Rome—and the official statements presented in this volume, it stands as the essential point of departure for any realistic analysis of what the Catholic Church hopes to accomplish with this agreement. The book is written in Italian, so one may hope that a Chinese and/or English translation of it may soon become available.



A FUTURE YET TO UNFOLD

Everyone knows that the agreement between the governments of the People's Republic of China and the Roman Catholic church is controversial. No sooner than it had been announced, it was also denounced as a "sellout to the communist government" (Sherwood, 2018). The result of years of diplomatic interactions spanning three Papacies (St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as well as Francis), the agreement was described by the Vatican as "the fruit of a gradual and reciprocal rapprochement," concerning "the nomination of bishops, a question of great importance for the life of the church," which "creates the conditions for greater collaboration" (Sherwood, 2018). In principle, the agreement resolves any lingering disputes over the legitimacy of Chinese Catholic bishops, whether previously approved by the Vatican or simply appointed by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA). While the seven bishops who had not been previously reconciled with the Pope are all now admitted to full communion with the Roman Catholic church, the reciprocity expected from the PRC government of recognizing the bishops that had been nominated by the Vatican has not yet occurred. Nevertheless, the Vatican and the PRC government have established procedures for collaborating on the future appointments of China's Catholic bishops, and jointly agreed to establish a new diocese at Chengde, in northeastern Hebei Province, the historic site of the Qing Emperors' summer residence.

The agreement on procedures for nominating and appointing Catholic bishops promises to be "of great importance for the life of the church," given that there are at least 40 episcopal vacancies to be filled in China (Harris, 2019). Nevertheless, the agreement comes at a time when the PRC government is pressuring all religious organizations toward strict conformity with its own political agenda. Why, then, would Pope Francis approve an

agreement that institutionalizes the government's role in nominating Catholic bishops, apparently contrary to the declarations of Vatican II (1962-1965) and the 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law (Mariani, 2018)? Answers to this question are evident in the book of essays, edited by Antonio Spadaro, S.J., *La Chiesa in Cina: Un futuro da scrivere* (2019): As in so many of Pope Francis's initiatives, the emphasis must shift from the diplomatic, legal, and political issues all too prominent in the past, to the hope for creating space for new approaches to pastoral care and responsibility. If the Catholic church is to develop naturally in China, it requires episcopal leadership, showing the way toward spiritual renewal through personal witness to Jesus Christ. As Pope Francis indicated, the agreement is not intended to restore a hierarchy of "bureaucrats" and "functionaries." The impression created by Spadaro and his colleagues is that the results of the agreement will be consistent with Pope Francis' approach to the church's renewal worldwide, as previously seen in his approach to global challenges like catastrophic climate change or internal questions like the priesthood ordination of married deacons in the Amazon basin of Brazil. What he hopes to achieve in China is no different than the message of *Evangelii gaudium*, his Apostolic Exhortation on "The Joy of the Gospel" (2013).

The essays collected in *La Chiesa in Cina: Un futuro da scrivere* (2019) provide not only authoritative accounts of the history of the negotiations leading to the September 22 Agreement, but also important perspectives on various aspects of the pastoral situation in China, that now may better be addressed in light of it. The collection begins with a Preface penned by the Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Cardinal Parolin. After acknowledging in detail Benedict XV's epoch-making encyclical, *Maximum Illud* (1919), which highlighted the church's aspirations to fulfill its mission of evangelization, independent of the burdensome legacy of European colonialisms, Parolin suggests how those aspirations may be fulfilled now in China through the processes of dialogue and

reconciliation. If the church's attempt at a new pastoral approach is to be credible, a new attitude inspiring innovative practices is necessary. The context for understanding the significance of the September 22 Agreement is outlined by Antonio Spadaro, S.J. (Spadaro, 2019: 13-32), who acknowledges the challenges that must be addressed, if the hope animating the Agreement is to be fulfilled. The challenges he sees are complex, because they overlap in various ways: spiritual, political, internal divisions, external pressures toward the "Sinicization" of religious institutions, and finally, the theological challenge. Underlying all of them is the challenge of building trust, which requires a long-term commitment, as well as patience, mutual respect, humility and honesty. The future yet to unfold can only be realized by moving beyond the zero-sum thinking that only counts winners and losers, while moving toward pastoral responses that demonstrate these qualities of hope.

Following Spadaro's overview, Federico Lombardi, S.J., provides a detailed review of "The History of the Relationship between China and the Holy See (Spadaro, 2019: 33-48). Beginning with the Opium Wars (1839-1842), and the establishment of a French protectorate over the Catholic churches in China, the recent history is marred by a series of shameful events, of colonial humiliations, sporadic persecutions, and revolutionary transformations, in which Chinese Catholicism came to be seen—particularly by the partisans who founded the Peoples Republic of China (PRC)—as a foreign religion, fundamentally hostile to Chinese governance and culture. While this is clearly a distorted picture of that history, it does describe the context in which recent Popes have attempted a reconciliation. Lombardi notes the change that occurred in the wake of Benedict XV's *Maximum Illud* (1919), and celebrates the memory of Cardinal Celso Constantini, the first apostolic delegate assigned to China, and his work paving the way for the consecration of the first ethnically Chinese bishops in 1926. Despite the disruptions of World War II and the civil war between the nationalists and the communists that followed, the church

made progress among the Chinese people, only to fall afoul of the revolutionary government, especially when it turned its attention in 1950 to the reform of Chinese religious institutions, with the so-called "Three-Self Movement"—self-governing, self-maintaining, self-developing—which led to the expulsion of all foreign missionaries, and the prohibition of all foreign financial support for Catholic institutions. The Bureau of Religious Affairs, which was to regulate all religious organizations and to align them with the policies of the PRC government, was founded in 1951. The Vatican responded by repeating its condemnations of communism and denouncing the so-called Patriotic Association among Catholics, as in Pius XII's encyclical letter, *Ad Sinarum Gentem* (1954). The CCPA's first unauthorized consecrations of Catholic bishops followed in 1958.

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A thaw in the relationship was not to occur until after China repudiated the excesses of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). At that point, the long march toward reconciliation began with diplomatic initiatives supported by St. John Paul II, and the proclamation in 1982 of China's new Constitution which, among other things, recognized the legitimacy of five Chinese religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism. In subsequent years, the Catholic communities of China remained split between the "clandestine" and the "patriotic" churches, with considerable ambiguity and confusion in the relationship between the two. Lombardi rightly highlights the role of Aloysius Jin Luxian, S.J., the bishop of Shanghai, who, while at first lacking the formal appointment

from the Vatican, nevertheless managed to train and ordain a generation of Chinese priests who served the needs of both communities. The history told by Lombardi makes clear that the ambiguous relationship had to be resolved, if Chinese Catholics were to realize the church's hope for full communion, and to contribute to China's development through the exercise of its authentic mission of evangelization. Understandably, Pope Francis and his advisers saw the urgent need to bring peace to the churches, even though the processes of reconciliation would require sacrifices on the part of many who had learned to survive in a limbo of near schism.

The remainder of the essays in this book, contributed by Benoit Vermander, S.J., Stephan Rothlin, S.J., Thierry Meynard, S.J., Joseph You

future of the universal church yet to be written will depend, to a great extent, on how Chinese Catholicism develops, once the burdens of the past have been set aside. Vermander offers a second essay assessing the "religious and spiritual geography" of Shanghai (Spadaro, 2019: 115-126), which highlights hopeful indications that at the level of ordinary people's experiences of religious community, that is, in their popular festivals and traditional practices, "the sacred" continues to flourish. What is left unsaid in his anthropologist's sampling of the soil of Shanghai religious and spiritual life is how the struggle over control of the church's organizational structures may help or hinder the renewal of its mission of evangelization. No doubt the soil is amazingly fertile, given the history of Chinese attempts to suppress or coopt Chinese religious and spiritual

The fact is that there is great vitality evident in the ways that Chinese Christians—both Catholic and Protestant—are renewing their own traditions to address the challenges of China's global awakening.

Guo Jiang, S.J., Antonio Spadaro, S.J., and Michel Chambon, illuminate various aspects of the pastoral challenge and opportunities that may be addressed, now that the Agreement has been signed. Each one of these makes an invaluable contribution, because they alert readers to what is going on, and how Catholics may respond with hope, wisdom, and courage, as China continues to transform itself in this epoch of unprecedented social and economic development.

Benoit Vermander's essay on Christianity becoming more Chinese should help correct the false impression that "Sinicization" is just a government plot to further weaken the influence of the churches (Spadaro, 2019: 49-60). On the contrary, it is an opportunity for Chinese Catholicism to fulfill the vision of the earliest Jesuit missionaries, inspired by Matteo Ricci, S.J., who recognized that the opportunity for cultural synthesis in China was every bit as historic as the encounter between earliest Christianity and the Hellenistic culture of the Roman Empire. The

energies since the revolution, but the soil must be tilled, watered, and weeded, if there's to be an abundant harvest. In light of the September 22 Agreement the struggle is precisely over who will be allowed to do the tilling. On whose terms will "Sinicization" proceed, and with what goals in mind?

The challenge of urbanization is also developed in the essay presented by Antonio Spadaro and Michel Chambon on "urban Catholicism in China" (Spadaro, 2019: 99-114), which provides an aerial view beyond what is happening in Shanghai. Patterns of internal migration, responding to China's dramatic development particularly in manufacturing for export, mean that the church's future cannot be focused on the rural villages where Catholic missions were once so successful. China is on the move, and mostly toward better economic opportunities in rapidly expanding urban areas. Effective strategies for pastoral care and evangelization must follow the people, as they

and their religious needs respond to changing environments.

Similarly, the essay on “aggiornamento in Chinese Catholicism,” presented by Thierry Meynard, S.J., and Michel Chambon, acknowledges the continued success of Chinese Protestantism in shaping Christianity in China (Spadaro, 2019: 75-86). The growth rates for Protestant churches far surpass the relatively modest success of Catholicism. Rather than regard Chinese Protestantism as a rival, Meynard and Chambon ask what can be learned from it, so that Catholicism might similarly be renewed. They present an accurate sketch of Protestant development, beginning with the decision of many churches to work within the “Three-Self” Movement. While they also acknowledge all the historic vicissitudes that Chinese Protestants have faced—including the ongoing split between churches that are operating in conformity with government policy and those so-called “house churches” that are not—they admit that the clarity of Protestant evangelization focusing on faith in Jesus Christ as living Lord and personal Saviour, along with the simplicity of their worship services and flexibility of church administration, are appealing to Chinese people. The lesson for Catholicism coincides with the spirit animating the September 22 Agreement: a genuinely pastoral approach that makes Catholic faith and practice equally transparent and accessible is the only way forward. As Chinese Catholicism continues to develop, ecumenical outreach with Chinese Protestants as well as interreligious dialogue with other must become a top priority.

What can be accomplished through such outreach is well illustrated in Joseph You Guo Jiang’s S.J., essay on NGOs (“Non-Governmental Organizations”) in China (Spadaro, 2019: 87-98). You’s analysis of the situation facing NGOs reflects important recent changes in the government’s laws regulating charitable activities. It is clear that the reform of these regulations was necessary in order to respond to the crisis in credibility that NGO’s faced in the wake of highly publicized scandals following natural disasters

like the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. The changes in government policy, therefore, should not be misread as an attempt to exclude religiously-based charities and NGOs, but as a way toward greater accountability that will enable them to be more effective. Jiang’s message is to encourage the continued development of Catholic NGOs in China, and in doing so he cites two case studies, both successful, the Protestant Amity Foundation and the Catholic Jinde Charities. Here, too, the path toward development must be pastorally motivated, consistent with Chinese law and regulations, and open to ecumenical collaboration.

The recent rise of NGOs and concern over their activities, of course, is a reflection of the success of China’s economic development. Chinese Protestantism has benefited dramatically from increased business activity, especially in the Pearl River Delta, where Christian entrepreneurs from Hong Kong and overseas are involved personally in the work of evangelization. Similar efforts are also underway among Chinese Catholics. Stephan Rothlin’s experience in creating and distributing educational programs and materials to promote business ethics and corporate social responsibility is reflected in his essay on Catholic Social Teaching (CST) understood as a resource for business ethics (Spadaro, 2019: 61-74). Rothlin emphasizes the importance of the Vatican’s Justice and Peace Commission document on “The Vocation of the Business Leader” (2011), which is available in Chinese with the Shanghai Xu Guangqi Press (2015), as a basis for dialogue not only among Catholics but also with others facing the moral and spiritual challenges of today’s business environment. The program outlined in that document—recalling the Catholic Action movement of a previous generation—“See-Judge-Act”—forms the basis for research and development of business ethics case studies available through the Rothlin Ltd. website (www.rothlin.org). Rothlin sponsored research has also contributed to the development of an approach to business ethics, seeking to define a new cultural synthesis between CST and Confucian traditions of moral philosophy.

Taken together, the essays collected in Spadaro's *La Chiesa in Cina* (2019) show that the hope animating the Vatican's September 22 Agreement is not just wishful thinking. China is changing and there really are new opportunities for Catholic evangelization. Despite the discouraging impression created by a passing familiarity with the religious situation in China, namely, that the government is bent on eliminating all cultural and spiritual influences not directly under its own control, the fact is that there is great vitality evident in the ways that Chinese Christians—both Catholic and Protestant—are renewing their own traditions to address the challenges of China's global awakening. As these essays make clear, the Agreement is not an attempt to normalize institutional relationships, as if everything will then go on as it did before the Revolution of 1949, but should be received as a progress report on an open-ended process of reconciliation, not only between the Vatican and the PRC government, but also among the churches and the Chinese people. For Catholicism to develop properly, a pastorally oriented episcopal leadership is just as essential today as it has always been. The hope is that the Agreement will enable that leadership to emerge naturally among Chinese Catholics committed to serving the common good through witness to their Crucified and Risen Lord. One must also hope that this collection of essays will soon be translated into Chinese and English or both, so that the Church's stakeholders in China and abroad can also come to understand how and why there really is a future yet to be written.



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