
Holy See-China Provisional Agreement extended. Chiaretto Yan (from Beijing): “Church in China is moving in the right direction”

“It is a confirmation that the Church in China is heading towards a right direction.” This step fosters “dialogue with the authority and reconciliation within the Church.” This is how Chinese Catholics interpret the decision of the Holy See and the People's Republic of China to extend for another two years – “after appropriate consultation and assessment”- the validity of the Provisional Agreement regarding the Appointment of Bishops, signed on September 22, 2018 and renewed for the first time on October 22, 2020. Speaking to SIR, **Chiaretto Yan**, visiting professor at the National Seminary in Beijing and Chinese member of the Focolare Movement, author of several books, including 'The Gospel Beyond the Great Wall', offers an insight into the Chinese Catholics' response to the news. The Holy See's note reads: “The Vatican Party is committed to continuing a respectful and constructive dialogue with the Chinese Party for a productive implementation of the Accord and further development of bilateral relations, with a view to fostering the mission of the Catholic Church and the good of the Chinese people.” **Prof. Yan, what is the meaning of the renewal of the China-Vatican Agreement for Chinese Catholics and for the life of the Church in China?** The meaning of this renewal for Chinese Catholics is to continue on the line of dialogue and reconciliation.

Dialogue with the authority and reconciliation within the Church.

It is a confirmation that the Church in China is headed towards the right direction. The agreement signed 4 years ago was a breakthrough to assure that bishops in China are in communion with the Holy Father and the Universal Church. **What does the Pope represent for Chinese Catholics, especially Pope Francis, and what role do the local bishops play?** For Chinese Catholics the Pope is the successor of Peter. He represents the unity of the Catholic Church. Chinese Catholics have the *senso fidei* to follow the Pope. They are aware of Pope Francis' fatherly affection. The most significant contribution of the Agreement is to secure the communion of bishops with the Holy Father. Once this issue is settled, local bishops have the duty of maintaining this communion with the Holy Father, and at the same time they face the difficult task of maintaining a balanced relationship with civil authority. **Nonetheless it marks the renewal of a provisional – i.e. not final - agreement. In Western culture, successes are measured by quick results. By contrast, how is patience understood in Chinese culture?** As reported there has been progress in naming bishops in some dioceses with small steps taken. The limited result is especially due to the COVID situation hindering more in-person contacts between the delegations from both sides. In Chinese culture patience is much appreciated as a virtue. There are two Chinese idioms: “Too much haste will not lead to desired result, haste makes waste. When the conditions are right, success will follow naturally.” Now, four years after the signing of the Agreement, regular meetings between delegations from both sides have been reported, and mutual trust developed. The Chinese people do treasure friendship. I believe this dialogue will not be limited to Church issues in China but will encompass a wider range of issues and will certainly contribute to world peace. **What would you like to say to Pope Francis? Do you think it would be possible for the Pope to visit China?** All Catholics in China have strong desire and are praying that the Holy Father will visit China one day. I too have the same desire and pray for this to happen. When this will happen, it will be a great grace not only for China, but for the whole world.

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