

True Catholic and Authentic Chinese: The Theologico-Political Polemic in China

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Abstract

After a lengthy negotiation between the Vatican and the Chinese government over decades, both parties signed a provisional agreement on 22 September 2018. Although they did not reveal the details to the public, both sides made a compromise on the appointment of the bishop, which is the crucial part of the conflict. Among those religions in China, the Chinese government paid much more attention upon the Catholic Church. One of the reasons would be the similarity of two entities, that is the centralization of power on one person. The current policies like restricting children going to church, dismantling the cross of the church, no Christmas decoration or promotion during Christmas, which give negative impact upon the Catholic Church, while the Beijing government signed the provisional agreement on the appointment of the bishop. Pope Francis unlike his predecessor does not excommunicate those bishops ordained without the Pope's approval but resumes their episcopal duties, while the Catholic Church in China is still under persecution. How to understand the underlying reasons of the move of the CCP and the Vatican in this agreement? This paper will investigate the nature and principles of religious policy in China and the Vatican's stance on China affairs in the light of a theologico-political polemic. This paper will first try to elucidate the theologico-political polemic. Then it will review the Sino-Vatican interaction since 1949 looking at how the CCP and the Vatican responded to this theologico-political polemic. Finally, the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement will be evaluated in perspective or in light of this history. Is the provisional agreement a step towards the solution of the theologico-political polemic in China?

Keywords: *Theological-Political Polemics, Sino-Vatican relations, Provisional Agreement, Chinese Communist Party*

1. Introduction

After a lengthy negotiation which lasted decades, the Vatican signed a provisional agreement with the Chinese government on 22 September 2018. Although the details have not been made public, both sides seemed to compromise on the appointment of a bishop, the crucial part of their conflict. Over the years the Chinese government has paid more attention to the Catholic Church than to other religions in China perhaps because all Catholics, including bishops and priests, pledge loyalty to the Holy See. The Catholic Church is like another sovereignty in the territories of China therefore the Catholic Church is always a wart of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It is not surprising that, in Xi's era, the CCP forbids children under 18 from attending Mass and demolishes crucifixes. According to the provisional agreement mentioned in the media, it seems that the CCP gives in the power of controlling the appointment of bishops to the Pope. For its part the Vatican continues to uphold its anti-Communism stance and protests against the CCPs interference in religious affairs. However, the Vatican is criticized by some media or commentaries that the provisional agreement is a sign of the Vatican's kowtow to the CCP (Sinertortus, 2018). How can we understand recent developments in the Sino-Vatican relationship? Does the 2018 provisional agreement represent a change in religious policy in China? Going forward, what will the fundamental questions be in the Sino-Vatican polemic?

The question of how to be a true Chinese and an authentic Christian has been with us since the CCP took over the political power and persecuted Catholics in 1949. An authentic Chinese person is loyal to the country led by the CCP; but a true Catholic is loyal to God represented by the successor of Apostle Peter. Jesus' principle that rendering unto Caesar the thing that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's cannot be applied in China as Caesar wants to control God's thing. How can a Chinese Catholic serve two lords at the same time? Both of the CCP and the Vatican proclaims their vision of ultimate happiness or the good life to the Chinese Catholics. But the CCP does not tolerate the visions of happiness according to Gospel but the socialist with Chinese characteristics. The tensions among and between politics, philosophy, and revelation lie in the fundamental question of "good or right life". Since the law is an instrument to guide the people to strive for the individual and communal happiness in the society, the question of the authoritative foundation of the law in the political community as the norm and the path to the good life arises.

This paper will investigate the nature and principles of religious policy in China and the Vatican's stance on China affairs in the light of a theologico-political polemic. This paper will first try to elucidate the theologico-political polemic. Then it will review the Sino-Vatican interaction since 1949 looking

at how the CCP and the Vatican responded to this theologico-political polemic. Finally, the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement will be evaluated in perspective or in light of this history. Is the provisional agreement a step towards the solution of the theologico-political polemic in China?

2. The Theologico-political Polemic

Every member of a political community strives for the good life guided by the laws promulgated by their political authority. The “law” and “the good” are two fundamental ideas. Who knows what the good life is? And who is authorized to promulgate the law for the good life? In ancient times, the priests or the prophets came to know the idea of the good life and the commandments through Divine Revelation (Smith, 2013: 389).¹ “The fundamental question was whether man could acquire knowledge of the good, individually or collectively, through the unaided effort of their natural powers, or whether they needed Divine Revelation.... No alternative is more fundamental than this: human guidance or divine guidance?” (Meier, 2006: 6). The ancient symbol of the conflict of philosophy and religion can be found in political life of Athens and Jerusalem. Although Christianity dominated Western civilization for centuries during the Medieval Ages, philosophy dethroned religion during the Enlightenment. However, following the establishment of the modern democratic society, the philosopher was replaced by “the people”. The idea of good life was no longer monopolized by either philosophers or the Church. It became the personal choice of the people in the modern pluralistic society. Although history continues, the social thought of the Catholic Church at the turn of the 20th century was still occupied by the same Augustinian political theology that had held sway the 5th century. Augustine distinguishes two kinds of love with respect to two kinds of ends. “Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self” (Augustine, 1950: 477). The former is called the City of Man and the latter the City of God. It is worth noting that these two cities do not refer to any particular institution on earth. Which City we have depends on the choice of the object of love. The Church and the King play different roles accompanying man towards the City of God. The Church is concerned about the spiritual and moral matters and the King takes care of the temporal matters including the promulgation of laws. For Augustine, humans lost their innate tendency to choose God due to the disobedience of Adam. Since for Christians the ultimate goal of man is God; but man, carrying the punishment of original sin, lives in an earthly society, man needs the coercion of the temporal law and the government to cure the wound of sin. Politics is only tolerated as a remedy for sin; on its own it cannot lead to virtue, the

perfect love of God. Man cannot attain God's salvation without spiritual grace from God. Consequently, the Church entrusted to dispensing the spiritual power has the supremacy.

Following Augustine, Pope Gelasius in the 5th century developed the "Two Swords Theory", differentiating the power and responsibility of the Church and the King. Both of the powers serve the salvation of man by Christ. Although the King is endowed with the temporal power, he is also a Christian in need of grace. "Christian emperors are in need of pontiffs for their eternal life, and pontiffs must make use of imperial regulations for temporal necessities" (Dvornik, 1966: 807).

In the 19th century, Pope Leo XIII maintained the same thinking on the separation of powers of the Church and State. With the dream of Christian kingdom, Leo XIII hoped that the European States would work with the Church for the unity of a Christian Europe. He saw liberalism which championed freedom of speech as if there was no God as the parent of the evil of modernity. Following Aquinas' thought on the hierarchy of beings, the State, even ruling over the secular matters independently, should subordinate itself to the good of God and to work with the Church (Kainz, 1993: 90). According to Pope Leo XIII, the Church of Christ is the true and sole teacher of virtue and guardian of morals (Leo XIII, 1885: 32).²

Now, entering the 21st century, how does the Church, with the two swords theory in mind, guide Christians to the "good life" in this modern liberal society? In China, the CCP holds the idea of the good life to herself as if the CCP was god. How does the Church then strive for religious freedom in Communist China? This paper argues that the Sino-Vatican relationship needs to be viewed in the context of theologico-political polemic. The conflict of human guidance and divine guidance continues in contemporary China.

3. Historical Review of the Sino-Vatican Interaction

3.1. Mutual Hostility in the 50s

The Catholic Church before 1949 was unquestionably anti-Communist. Responding to the threat of Russian Communism, Pius XI released an Encyclical *Divini Redemptoris: Atheistic Communism in the Light of the Social Teaching of the Church* in 1937, which adopted the harshest language against Communism, describing it as a dangerous enemy, the power of darkness, and a monstrous evil. Pope Pius XI claimed that Communism, based on the law of social evolution, asserts that a new order and a modern civilization will emerge at the end of the history. Communists will make use of the political power of the State and the law as effective instruments to bring society to that goal until the coming of the golden age (Pius XI, 1937: 9-14).

Accordingly, Communism replaces the Church, preaches to all human beings a new gospel, and shows a new way to utopia in this world. The Communist government replaces God as the foundation of the law. Consequently, the Church under Pius XI stated that “Communism is intrinsically wrong and no one who wished to defend Christian civilization against extinction may *collaborate* with it in any way whatsoever” (Ibid., 61).

The Catholic Church had not misunderstood the stance and the attitude of the CCP towards Christianity. The CCP put many bishops and priests in jail and expelled foreign missionaries after having taken over the political power in 1949. In 1952, a Catholic Three-Self Movement claiming to establish a self-governed, self-financed, and self-propagated Church, was initiated at the instigation of the CCP and resulted in the establishment of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) in 1957. In 1958 the ordination of bishops without the Papal approval cut off the Catholic Church in China from the Pope and the Universal Church.

The approach of the CCP towards the rest of Christianity was no less hostile; even though religious freedom was assured in the Constitution. The *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* in 1954 states, “Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy the freedom of religious belief.” (Constitution, 1954: 88) It explained that citizens are free to become believers or non-believers without mentioning the freedom of religious practice and proselytization. Li Weihan, the head of the department of the United Front of the CCP in the 50s, explained to the CCP that religious freedom is only a revolutionary slogan. Although the Constitution sanctions the freedom of religious belief, the goal of the religious policy is to convert all the believers to non-believers (Li, 1981: 520-581). Tolerance of religions is provisional, and religions should be extinct over time.

Catholic priests and laypeople were asked to join this new independent Church and accept the leadership of the illegitimate ordained bishops; otherwise, they were regarded as unpatriotic and anti-revolutionary (Bates, 1968: 210-211). Chinese Catholics were caught in a dilemma. If a Chinese Catholic remaining loyal to their faith and kept the allegiance to the Pope, s/he was not a patriotic Chinese. Faithful Catholics could not be authentic Chinese in this context.

3.2. The Darkest Hour of Religions in the 60s

The CCP went to an extreme left position during the Cultural Revolution in 1967 accelerating the extinction of religions by force. All faiths were reckoned as feudal superstitions and came under severe attack. All expressions of religions and rituals were brought to a halt. Many religious buildings including Buddhist temples and Christian Churches were torn down and

demolished. Priests and believers were sent to labor camps for re-education (Zhou, 1991: 101).

In the darkest hour of the Church in China, Pope Paul VI made an *Appeal to China for Liberty and Peace* in 1967. He reiterated that the Catholic Church has no temporal interest but tries to help China develop its natural moral riches and contributes her best to the education, welfare, and prestige of Chinese people (Paul VI, 1967: 155). Unfortunately, the Pope did not receive any positive response from China. All religions without exception were under severe assault during the Cultural Revolution. It was not until the reformation of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 that the Church saw the dawn of revival.

3.3. The Reformation era of Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin in the 80s and 90s

China was moving from the extreme left to open reformation in the 80s. In the first part of Religion as a Historical Phenomenon of *Document No. 19*, the CCP states with clarity, “Religion will eventually disappear from human history. But it will disappear naturally only through the long-term development of Socialism and Communism when all objective requirements are met” (MacInnis, 1989: 9). Was the communist government pushing religions to perish in a short time by force in the past right or wrong?

Those who think that with the establishment of the Socialist system and with a certain degree of economic and cultural progress, Religion will die out within a short period, are not being realistic. Those who expect to rely on administrative decrees or other coercive measures to wipe out religious thinking and practices with one blow are even further from the basic viewpoint Marxism takes toward the religious question. They are entirely wrong and will do no small harm (MacInnis 1989: 9).

Then what is the proper way to treat religions in the reform era for the Communist regime? “Under Socialism, the only correct fundamental way to solve the religious question lies precisely in *safeguarding the freedom of religious belief*” (Ibid., 26, emphasis added). As mentioned in Li Weihan’s speech, freedom of religious belief guarantees the liberty of believing or non-believing in religion, but not the freedom of religious practices.

Article 36 of the *Constitution* in 1982, which is along the line of *Document No. 19*, promulgates the freedom of religious belief by which a citizen enjoys the freedom of believing in or non-believing in any religions.³ Moreover, the *Constitution* also points out that:

The State protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that *disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State*. Religious

bodies and religious affairs are *not subject to any foreign domination* (Constitution, 1982: art. 36, emphasis added).

From the perspective of the *Constitution* and *Document No. 19*, freedom of religious belief pertains to the private realm of the citizen, and this freedom is conditional and subject to the control of the CCP in the public arena. The command that religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination is problematic for Chinese Catholics. It is without doubt that, since the Three-Self Movement in the 50s, foreign interference or domination of religions has been forbidden in China. Chinese Catholics pledge loyalty to no other authority other than the CCP.

However, according to the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* made by the Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has a different understanding of religious freedom.

The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all men should be *immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power* so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters *in private or in public*, alone or in association with others. (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1965: 2, emphasis added).

With the assumption that the Church is dealing with a constitutional government in a liberal democratic society, the Vatican Council demanded freedom from any coercion from the State in private or in public, individually or collectively (Murray, 1966: 585). It is not a right to specific freedom for believers but a matter of civil liberty for all citizens. This right to freedom from coercion in religious matters is not based on an arbitrary law-making; it is based on the intrinsic dignity of the human person.

The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is *known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself*. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed, and thus it is to become *a civil right*. (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1965: 2, emphasis added).

Thus, “the function of government appears as the protection and promotion, not of religious truth, but of religious freedom as a fundamental right of the human person” (Murray, 1966: 587). Human dignity is the goal of protection and promotion for both the Church and the government. It is worth noting that the communication of the bishops with the Pope is a religious practice in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The exercise of this power should not be interfered with by the government.

In the performance of their apostolic office, which looks to the salvation of souls, bishops per se possess *full and perfect freedom and independence of any civil power*. Wherefore it is not permissible to impede, directly or indirectly, the exercise of their ecclesiastical office or *to prohibit their free communication with the Apostolic See*, with other ecclesiastical authorities, and with their subjects (*Christus Dominus*, 1965: 19, emphasis added).

In this context, we come to see the underlying reason for the identity conflict of the Chinese Catholic. The Catholic Church in China has faced the charge that Catholicism was a foreign and divisive religion as it came with Western imperialism and colonialism in the nineteenth century. The Catholic Church, for the CCP, was a threat to China's sovereignty and was not suitable for China (Paul VI, 1967). Different popes have responded to this criticism in their encyclicals or letters. Pope John Paul II, a major actor of the committee drafting *Dignitatis Humanae*, expressed the idea of the authentic Chinese Catholic throughout his pontiff (Hittinger, 2008: 365).

Pope John Paul II first stated that there is no conflict between the duties of a Christian and that of a Chinese citizen. The religious duties of a Catholic consist in the commandment of love, i.e., to love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12: 30-31). The love of God is specifically expressed in liturgical worship and prayers. Nonetheless, Jesus identifies the love of God with the love of neighbour in the teaching of the judgment. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25: 40). Religious duty and moral duty of love become one. Christian faith is the foundation and the source of moral duties. Accordingly, "every Catholic, like other Chinese citizens, will fully contribute to the building up of China, since a genuine and faithful Christian is also a genuine and good citizen. A good Chinese Catholic works loyally for the progress of the nation like all good Chinese" (John Paul II, 1981: 184). A good Chinese Catholic citizen was inspired by the Christian faith and strengthened by the Chinese moral tradition. "Religious faith and practice is a *dynamic source of commitment in the spheres of social and civil responsibility*. There can be no opposition or incompatibility between being at the same time truly Catholic and authentically Chinese" (John Paul II, 1994: 274, emphasis added). Christian faith became the source of the civil commitment and also the force of unity of the country. Pope John Paul II delineated the Christian faith as the soul and the citizen duties as the body.

Responding to the problem of the connection of Chinese Catholics with the Vatican, John Paul II elucidated the nature of the Universal Church. First of all, the nature of the Christian faith is for all people of all ages. "The Christian message is not the exclusive property of any one group or race; it is addressed to everyone and belongs to everyone. There is, therefore, no opposition or incompatibility in being at the same time truly Christian

and authentically Chinese” (John Paul II, 1981: 185). The Catholic faith is universal for all people. Secondly, the communion of the particular Churches with the Universal Church is based upon the nature of the faith and the command of Jesus. The Pope, as the vicar of Jesus on earth, is entrusted with the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical government. Appointment of the bishops is an internal religious affair of the Church. Therefore, an independent “national” Church cannot exist and continue to be one with the Catholic Church according to the Christian doctrine.⁴

The CCP did not understand nor care about the theological foundation of the connection of the local Church with the Pope. The Chinese government was concerned with the political implications of this connection. The interference and the domination of foreign sovereignty was a threat to the political power of the CCP. John Paul II, in response to the worries of the CCP, wrote a letter to Deng Xiaoping saying, “Chinese Catholics feel a deep loyalty and love for their own land... and at the same time feel united with the Pope and with the Catholic communities of all the other countries. This essential union with the Pope cannot harm the ideal and concrete unity of their own nation or be to the detriment of its independence and sovereignty” (John Paul II, 1983: 202). However, the Pope received only a silent reply from Deng.

Besides, while the Pope was clarifying that the Church is not a threat to the CCP, the Vatican also consoled the suffering underground Church that their sacrifice for faith was well acknowledged and praised. In 1981, Pope John Paul II appointed Bishop Tang Yee-ming Archbishop of Guangzhou and upheld him as a model of a faithful Catholic. His suffering of captivity and prison due to his loyalty to the Successor of Peter made him an outstanding bishop of the Church (John Paul II, 1991a: 330). This appointment was rejected by China immediately. In addition to Tang, Cardinal Kung Pin-mei, was another icon of the suffering Church. The Pope said to Kung in an audience, “I felt that the whole Church could not but honor a man who has given witness by word and deed, through long-sufferings and trials, to what constitutes the very essence of life in the Church.” He continued, “By honoring you the Holy See honors the whole faithful Church in China.... With what prayerful longing and love do I follow the life of the loyal Chinese Catholic communities!” (John Paul II, 1991b: 334). The praise of the suffering underground Church in China was a slap on the face of the CCP. The underground Church, under the jurisdiction of the Vatican, was illegal in the eyes of the CCP. The Catholics suffered or were punished for political crimes, not for religious reasons. The endorsement of the suffering of loyal Catholics seemed to be a condemnation of the CCP. However, the Vatican did not understand why the response of China to the appointment of Tang and Kung was so harsh. The Vatican made another unfortunate move in the

canonization of the Chinese martyrs in October of 2000. The eulogy for these martyr saints was scandalous to the CCP (Chu, 2014: 157).

This surprising cases of conflict of the Vatican with the CCP surfaced the dilemma of the Vatican. How was one to reconcile the desire for dialogue with China and the acknowledgment of the suffering of the underground Church? The underground Church became a living example of the identity dilemma of a Chinese Catholic.

Despite the Vatican's repeated statements that Christian faith does not harm the society nor threaten the political power of the CCP, religion became an insidious threat to her ruling. Religious belief seemed to be the rival of atheistic Communism. The flourishing of religions was perceived as a severe threat. Since only non-believers are eligible to join the CCP, the Party has a problem when many people of different social classes become converts. (Albert 2018: 4).

Over the 90s, China was eager to rebuild the relationship with the West and to boost economic development. Jiang Zheming took a more relaxed and tolerant approach to religion (Potter, 2003: 321). The Director of the United Front Work Department, Wang Zhaoguo, made Jiang's principles known in the national work conference in 1999, "We must first, comprehensively and correctly *implement the Party's religious policy*, secondly, strengthen the administration of religious affairs *according to law*, and thirdly, actively guide religions *to adapt to socialist society*" (Ibid., 322, emphasis added).

Jiang himself articulated these principles clearly in the National Religions Conference in 2001. Jiang's three sentences in fact are coherent. According to the Constitution, citizens are free to believe in, or not believe in, any religion as long as the religious practices do not harm society and are not subject to any foreign interference. Laws are an instrument for social and economic development and national security. Hence, believers are guided to the adaptation of the socialist society by law. The degree of freedom of religious practices is controlled by religious laws. Law-making, on that account, is pivotal. In Hu Jintao's era, the government felt the need to make a more comprehensive and detailed religious law because of the vibrant economic growth and the complexity of social problem. The new religious law aimed to provide a systematic rule to manage religious activities in every aspect (Leung, 2018: 373). The State Council passed the Religious Law in 2004 and revised it in 2007. Religious affairs are political and legal matters at all times for the Chinese government. For the CCP, they do not believe they have infringed on the religious freedom. Religious believers are punished not because of their religious practices but because of their crimes against the law.

In this time of tolerance, Pope Benedict XVI sent a letter to the Catholic Church in China in June 2007. Benedict acknowledged that the misunderstanding between China and the Vatican was an obstacle for the good of

China. The Holy See “hopes for the opening of some form of dialogue with the authorities of the People’s Republic of China. Once the *misunderstandings of the past* have been overcome, such a dialogue would make it possible for us to work together for the good of the Chinese People and peace in the world” (Benedict XVI, 2007: 4, emphasis added). The Catholic Church viewed the Sino-Vatican issue from the theological perspective, but the CCP considered it from the political perspective. The misunderstanding of the other side caused an impasse. Despite differences, the Pope said that an open dialogue could benefit China and the world.

The primary concern of Benedict’s letter was religious freedom. Following the principles from the *Dignitatis Humanae*, Benedict clarified the Catholic Church and the State share the same object of service but in a different arena.

It is clear that “The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State” (Ibid.). Striving for justice by making laws and setting up policy is not the duty of the Church but the State. Nonetheless, it should not be interpreted that the Church keeps silent about the injustices in society. “A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet *the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply*” (Ibid., emphasis added). In spite of the clarification by the Vatican, the Church’s promotion of social justice for the CCP was regarded as an offense against their political power. For China, it is the right and obligation of the State to interfere and rule the religious affairs for the common good by law. Benedict admitted that “in the light of these unrenounceable principles, the solution to existing problems cannot be pursued *via an ongoing conflict with the legitimate civil authorities*; at the same time, though, *compliance with those authorities is not acceptable* when they interfere unduly in matters regarding the faith and discipline of the Church” (Ibid., emphasis added). Confronting the civil authorities is not a solution to the problem for the Chinese Catholic but neither is submission to the CCP. Benedict urged the Chinese authority to untie the knot by respecting the religious freedom of the Church.

The second concern mentioned by Pope Benedict in the letter was the unity of the Church. Pope Benedict reiterated that the communion of the bishops with the Pope comes through tradition of faith continuing down the centuries through the apostolic succession. This communion is a symbol of the unity of the Church. It has nothing to do with politics nor intervention of foreign domination (Ibid., 5).

Despite his hope for an open dialogue, Pope Benedict did not hide his objection to the interference of the State and he denounced the Chinese

Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China as illegitimate according to the Catholic doctrine. “It is clear that the claim of *some entities, 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’” (Ibid., 7, emphasis added). The most provocative issue was the appointment of a bishop without the Vatican’s approval. In Benedict’s time, Father Guo Jincai was ordained bishop without the Vatican’s approval in 2010. Pope Benedict personally criticized Liu Bainian by name, “Chinese government let the leadership of the CCPA, under the influence of Liu Bainian, adopt an attitude which seriously harms the Catholic Church and hinders the dialogue.”⁵

As both parties insisted on their stances and claimed their principles are unrenounceable, Sino-Vatican dialogue was still a deadlock even in the time of religious tolerance.

4. Xi Jinping and Pope Francis

Xi Jinping, unlike his predecessors, took an aggressive approach to religion. The Chinese government launched a report on national security called “The Blue Paper on National Security: A report on the National Security 2014” on 6 May 2014, in which the government put security in religious matters into the category of the ideological security which comes under national security. It is clear that for CCP “religious” matters are not religious but political (Liu, 2014). In the National Conference on Religion held on 22-23 April 2016 in Beijing, Xi promised: i) to fully implement the Party’s policy of religious freedom; ii) to manage religious affairs in line with laws; iii) to retain the principle of religious independence and self-administration; and iv) to help religions adapt to the socialist society. It is worth noting the independence and self-administration of religions mentioned in Xi’s speech was added on top of Jiang’s three sentences. This emphasis aligned with Xi’s efforts at Sinicizing religions and proclaiming the Religious groups should be developed under the leadership of the CCP. Religions should “merge religious doctrines with Chinese culture, abide by Chinese laws and regulations, and devote themselves to China’s reform and socialist modernization in order to contribute to the realization of the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation” (Xi, 2016). The social function of religions is definitely to serve the CCP and the national dream.

Religions, according to Xi’s address, should be under the guidance of the CCP. Based on the 2004 Religious Law, a revised Religious Law was launched in 2017, aiming to tighten, monitor and control religious affairs in details (Leung, 2018: 373). In the July 2017 issue of *Qiushi*, the CCP’s official

magazine, the director of the National Bureau of Religious Affairs Wang Zuoan wrote an article, “Politics is indispensable in good work on religions”, as the political directive of religious affairs instructed by Xi. Four aspects of religious matters should be paid more attention. Wang first suggested enhancing political consciousness. CCP cadres should be politically aware that foreigners made use of religions to infiltrate China. Many religious groups did not observe the religious laws, and religious extremists stretched their influence in certain provinces. It is essential to know the underlying complex social and political factors of religions (Wang, 2017). The second aspect is the practice of religious rule. There is no excuse to disobey or comment on the religious policy set by the Party. The third aspect is about the direction of religious policy. The two foundations of the direction are to adapt religion to Socialist society and to gather people around the core of CCP. In a nutshell, the only direction is the sinicization of religions. The fourth aspect is the commitment to the political responsibility of the party cadres. Wang urged the party cadres to handle the thorny religious issues with old and new mentalities and methods. In sum, the cadre should be aware of the political nature of religious matters and is obliged to channel the religions for the good of the socialist society.

Furthermore, after the 19th Party Congress in which Xi affirmed the leadership of the CCP in all political life in China, the Religious Affairs Bureau was transferred to the United Front Department. It signified that religions as the targets of United Front should be led by the atheist political Party (Leung, 2018: 374). In recent years, the CCP controlled religions by promulgating different new laws with brutal force. For instance, the Religious Affairs Bureau issued a document, “Methods of implementing some items in Religious Law 2017” in February 2018 to implement some items listed in the Religious Law 2017 (Religious Affairs Bureau, 2017). The venue of religious education or the appointment of teaching staff needs to get approval from the Religious Affairs Bureau. Furthermore, the religious institutes must seek approval from the Public Security Office 30 days in advance of holding any large-scale religious activities. In order to eliminate the influence of religions on society, in particular the children and youth, religious symbols will not be allowed to be shown on any religious buildings. A campaign for the demolition of the cross on the top of the Church was launched starting in 2013. The demolition act demonstrated that only the CCP is the absolute power leading everything in China.⁶ The suppression of Church influences was further intensified by prohibiting children under 18 from entering the Church to attend mass. All youth religious activities were also banned.⁷ This policy has been implemented in Wenzhou, Henan and Xinjiang. All the policies, as mentioned earlier, were efforts to suppress external religious behaviours. Although the religious laws are strict, they did not shake the

substance of the Catholic faith at all. However, the Sinicization of Christianity went further forward. The Church was asked to replace Jesus's icon with Xi Jinping's portrait in the Church. It is a decisive gesture that Xi would become the only saviour of Catholics and it also implies that politics, not religion, is the only foundation of the good life in the perspective of the theologico-political polemic.⁸

Facing the forceful suppression of Christianity in Xi's ruling, the Vatican surprisingly made a friendly move to China. The attitudes towards China of Pope Francis were reflected in the interview of Cardinal Parolin with *Avvenire* (Chiang, 2019: 297-300). The Cardinal Secretary of State explained the foundational principle of papal diplomacy is building bridges to solve the conflict by promoting dialogue and negotiation. The Pope does not have any other interest other than promoting friendship, overcoming poverty, and building peace. Pope Francis did extend his hand of friendship to Xi Jinping. Francis said in the press conference en route from Korea to Rome as he wrote to Xi on the day Xi was elected president and got Xi's reply later, which can be regarded as a friendly gesture.⁹ The negotiation about the appointment of bishop between the Vatican and China has been resumed in 2014 and resulted in a provisional agreement signed in September 2018. Both sides have not disclosed the details of the agreement. According to Vatican's announcement, the Pope, as part of the agreement, would recognize seven excommunicated Chinese bishops who were illegitimately ordained without the Vatican's approval. The accord, a source told Reuters, gave the Vatican a say in the naming of bishops and granted the Pope veto power over candidates (Sherwood, 2018).

Pope Francis issued a message to the Church in China and the Universal Church four days after signing the agreement (Francis, 2018). The purpose of the message was to elucidate the principles, the aims, and the instruments for the unity of the Church. The Pope said that after having heard of the signing of the agreement, some people felt confused, and some felt abandoned and were not sure about the meaning of the suffering they endured due to the loyalty to the Holy See (Ibid: 1). The whole tone of the message is spiritual and pastoral, which was different from the theological writing of Pope Benedict's letter in 2007. Opening a dialogue with China has been sought by the Vatican since Pope Pius XII. However, for the Vatican, the foundation of the dialogue consists in the revealed truth of Jesus and the moral truth known by conscience. Pope Benedict reiterated the importance of love with truth in his 2007 letter. "Truth and charity are the two supporting pillars of the life of the Christian community" (Benedict, 2007: 7). The Church should not neglect the Church law based on the truth in the name of love. The interference of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishop Conference of China with the Catholic Church Affairs in China was illegitimate. Ordination

of a bishop without the approval of the Holy See was illegitimate, and both the chief celebrant of the ordination and the ordained bishop should be excommunicated according to the Canon Law (Ibid).

In order to break the deadlock in the Sino-Vatican relationship for the unity of the Church in China, Pope Francis made a bold step forward toward a journey of faith. Despite the suppression of the Church in China by the CCP, Francis was willing to place his trust in God and the Chinese Communist government as his ancient Jesuit fellow, Matteo Ricci did. The agreement's pastoral aims were to support and advance the preaching of the Gospel and to re-establish and preserve the Catholic Community's full and visible unity in China. Pope Francis believed love is more significant than justice by rule. He reconciled with the seven illegitimately ordained bishops and readmitted their full communion with the Holy See as long as they expressed a concrete and visible gesture of the restored unity. He advised the Chinese Catholics not to apply a justice derived from rules alone but to a power flowing from divine grace (Francis, 2018: 4). By accepting the seven illegitimate bishops and asking the State to accept the bishops of the underground Church in return, Pope Francis worked strenuously for the unity of the Church in China. By the provisional agreement, there is no more underground or official Church but only one Church in China. All members of the Church in China are in communion with the Successor of Peter but also under the control of the CCP. Although the Catholic Church in China is still suffering from the suppression by the CCP, the unity of the Church, which is more essential than religious freedom for the Vatican, is maintained.

5. Conclusion

Is the political truth of the CCP or the religious truth of Christianity the foundation of the idea of good life? The Catholic Church, facing the challenge of the modern liberal society, adopted the reality of the pluralistic idea of the good life. The vision of good life in the light of the revealed truth is only one of the ideas in the contemporary society in which all ideas are tolerated and free to be proclaimed and lived. The principle of religious freedom, according to Vatican II, has been adopted since Pope Paul VI. Both State and the Church work for their own good without the interference from others. The Catholic Church is free to proclaim the Gospel and to live a life according to the moral values envisioned by the faith. Religious freedom is assured by the Constitutional law, which prevents the interference of the State.

For the CCP, there is no room for negotiation. There is only one political truth kept by the Party which is absolute. Regarding the controversy of the power of the law and the CCP, Xi said in a meeting with the provincial officials in 2015 that "the law is the conviction of the Party and the integral

realization of the people's will. The CCP *leads the people* to establish and implement constitutional law. The Party herself has to work within the constraint of the constitutional law. The law is the embodiment of the leading power of the Party."¹⁰ The Party, as the core of the leadership, is the embodiment of the people's will, and she establishes the law in the name of the people for her ruling. In other words, the CCP is the foundation of the law, leading people to the good life. The law is the expression or the actualization of the will of the CCP. The Catholic Church in China practices her faith within the legal constraint, which is established under the leadership of the CCP. Unlike the Catholic understanding of religious freedom, the religious practice in China, including the preaching substance, is bounded by the religious law and is channelled to the good life envisioned by the CCP.

According to her view of religious freedom, the Catholic Church would seem to have more flexibility to live with other ideologies as long as she can maintain the essential parts of her faith, like the unity of the Church. Thus, it is not surprising that the Vatican signed the agreement if the CCP accepts the Papal authority of appointing bishops.

By the agreement, both the CCP and the Vatican cooperated together for the appointment of bishops. From the Chinese side, CCP opened the door to the foreign intervention of internal affairs, but the Vatican accepted the involvement of the State in the papal appointment of bishops. It seems both sides adjusted their stances. In the perspective of the theologico-political polemic, whether politics or religion is the foundation of the appointment of bishops? In fact, the CCP did not share their power with the Vatican. It is clear for the CCP that the appointed bishops should be loyal to the Party instead of the Church. Xi says in the United Front Working Meeting, "The United Front should train strenuously more religious representatives who are *politically reliable*, excellent in religious faith, have moral authority and *can make a difference in a critical moment*" (Xi, 2015). The requirement of political reliability is the priority. On the contrary, the bishop candidate in the eyes of Pope Francis should be an *authentic shepherd* according to the heart of Jesus, a man committed to working generously in the service of God's people, especially the poor and the most vulnerable (Francis, 2018: 5). An authentic shepherd should follow the hearts of Jesus not the voice of political power ultimately. However, is an authentic shepherd politically reliable for the CCP? A test to the Chinese clergies was coming. The clergies were asked to sign an agreement to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and accept the principles of Self-governed, Self-financed, and Self-propagated, should they sign it? The CCPA is an illegitimate institute governing the Catholic Church in China for the Vatican and the three Self-principles violates the Catholic doctrine. Which voice should the clergies follow? For China, a Chinese clergy should go for the CCP in the critical moment. The Vatican, however, leaves

the decision to the individual clergies according to their conscience in this case (*Pastoral Guidelines*, 2019).

It seems that Pope Francis gives in to the political power of the CCP. However, Francis, in fact, placed his trust in God, who is the Lord of history. The ministry of the Church is to bear witness to Jesus Christ and to the forgiving and saving love of the Father. The good life for a Christian is imitation of Christ, sacrificing one's life for a friend. This is, for Pope Francis, the religious truth, the foundation of human behaviour, and the good life. If the unity of the Church in China can be maintained by the provisional agreement, it is worth suffering from the loss of religious freedom. Pope Francis stipulates a solution based on the revealed truth to the theologico-political polemic in China. Christian faith is the foundation and the norm of human behaviour.

Nonetheless, a Chinese Catholic imitates the model of the suffering servant of Jesus Christ but gives up his prophetic role to criticize the unjust act against the human dignity of the government. The Sinicizing of religion distorts and corrupts the doctrine and the faith of Church. The Church with Chinese characteristics is no longer the authentic Church. Is the agreement a step to the real solution for the Vatican? It is expected that there is no more underground Church after the provisional agreement and the Catholic Church in China is in unity. However, in other words, the whole Catholic Church in China would be under control by the CCP. It is clear for the CCP that the Party is the absolute foundation of the good life and the law.

Both the Vatican and the CCP strive for solving the theologico-political polemic. Nonetheless, the struggle of the true Catholic and authentic Chinese still occupies the mind and heart of the Chinese Catholic. The theologico-political polemic does not fade away in China.

Notes

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1. The typical example in the Old Testament is the promulgation of *Ten Commandments* by Moses, who was sent by God. Exodus 19:18-20:21.
 2. The Papal documents related to China in 1937-2005 are referred to in Betty Ann Maheu's edited book (2006).
 3. Andrew Lynch (2014) makes an excellent similar comparison of religious freedom between *Dignitatis Humanae* and Constitution Article 36.

4. Cardinal Tomko asserts five points on behalf of John Paul II to the audiences in Taiwan that the communion with the Pope is essential to being Catholic. "Document #47: Communion with the Pope is Essential to Being Catholic," pp. 282-283.
5. Retrieved from <http://www.rfi.fr/cn/中国/20101124-梵蒂冈点名批评刘柏年>.
6. Forced Demolition of the Cross in Northeastern China, *Bitter Winter*, 2019. Retrieved from <https://zh.bitterwinter.org/crosses-purged-from-churches-in-northeastern-china/>
7. "Henan, Church banned for children under 18," *AsiaNews*, 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Henan,-church-banned-for-children-under-18:-'taking-the-legs-from-under-the-Christian-community's-growth-among-young-people%27-43646.html>
8. "Christians in China Must Replace Jesus with Pictures of Xi Jinping or Lose Social Services," *Newsweek*, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.com/china-christians-jesus-x-jinping-social-services-welfare-711090>
9. *Ibid.*, p. 300. Pope John Paul II has written to Deng Xiaoping three times but got no reply.
10. Xi responded to the debate of the power of the Constitution and the CCP with reference to the Constitution (黨大還是法大習近平用憲法回答), Retrieved from <http://cpc.people.com.cn/xuexi/BIG5/n/2015/0206/c385474-26520345.html>

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