

# **CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA UPDATES MARCH 2013**

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1.

### **A Pope for China**

25<sup>th</sup> March

2013

First Jesuit pope may improve Sino-Vatican relations, experts say

Mary Anne McElroy

The election of Pope Francis, the first Jesuit pope of the Roman Catholic Church, has far-reaching implications for the Vatican's standstill with China over the appointment of bishops, experts say.

"The discussion will be much easier with the fact that there is a Jesuit pope," said Rev. Mark DeStephano of the Society of Jesus, chairman of the board of the U.S. Catholic China Bureau. "Certainly [Pope] Benedict [XVI] tried, but it might be a little bit easier given our tradition in China."

Unlike his predecessors, Francis is part of an order that advised Chinese emperors, brought Western sciences to China, and to this day operates cultural exchanges between China and the West, a track-record which experts say will help him at the discussion table.

"The Jesuits have been successful in China for 400 years," said Rev. Michel Marcil S.J., executive director of the U.S. Catholic China Bureau and an expert on Sino-Vatican relations.

Pope Francis indicated a willingness to revisit the Vatican's relationship

with China, which severed diplomatic ties in 1951 but where Catholicism still thrives, during a foreign policy address on Friday.

Catholicism is part of a massive religious revival in China as many Chinese look to fill the spiritual void created by communism and materialism in contemporary China, said Carsten Vala, an expert on Christianity in China at Loyola University in Maryland.

Some Chinese even see religion as a ticket to success.

“These young and ambitious people may also view Christianity as the reason for the U.S. superpower status and think that China needs a strong religious culture to underpin their country’s rise to power and influence,” said Vala.

There are currently an estimated 12 million Catholics in China, split between a state-run church and an underground community that recognizes papal authority.

The official church is the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA), which not only monitors Catholic religious activities for political compliance but also appoints China’s bishops, traditionally a papal authority.

The selection of bishops is one of two main points of contention between the Vatican and China, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters following Francis’ election.

“The new pope must cut the so-called diplomatic relations with Taiwan, recognizing the Chinese government as the sole legal representative of the whole of China and should not interfere, using the excuse of religion, in the internal affairs of the country,” Chunying said.

The Vatican has said it will cut ties with Taiwan if China stops appointing Catholic bishops without Vatican approval.

The CPCA appointed several new bishops in 2010 and most recently stripped Vatican-approved auxiliary bishop of Shanghai, Thaddeus Ma Daqin, of his title after he publicly renounced Chinese interference in religious life. He remains under house arrest.

Marxist politics and a cultural stigma of foreign imperialism that Christianity has carried for centuries have led to China’s refusal to recognize Vatican appointees, according to Marcil.

But the Jesuits have been able historically to avoid this stigma.

“We [the Jesuits] were successful in China because we came into China not as missionaries per say, but we came into China under the guise of

intellectuals,” said DeStephano.

Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci became the first foreigner allowed inside the Forbidden City in the 16th century and the first to be granted burial ground on mainland China. His notable approach to mission work in China was to learn the language, translate Western works into Chinese, and incorporate Confucian principles into his Catholicism.

Subsequent Jesuits served as scientific and intellectual advisers to China’s emperors as late as the 19th century, said DeStephano. They brought trigonometry, geometry, and astronomy to China.

They operate to this day several higher-education exchanges in China for both Chinese and international students.

“We [the Jesuits] play the same role in a sense as we had in centuries before, this intellectual outreach to China,” said DeStephano.

According to Fr. Michael Maher S.J., an expert on Chinese history at Gonzaga University, Francis already has greater appeal to the Chinese in the Jesuit tradition. “I think the new pope’s concern for the poor and emphasis on simplicity will strike a chord in Chinese values.”

Others experts are more skeptical.

“China is not yet ready to have relaxation of controlling of institutionalized religions including Catholicism,” said Sister Beatrice Leung, the author of several books about the Sino-Vatican relationship.

Vala agrees, noting the recent elevation of President Xi Jinping.

“The dynamic between the Chinese government and the Vatican is more determined by the fact that a new leadership team took power in China in November 2012,” said Vala.

He added that Xi has already sent mixed signals as to his openness to reform.

However, Marcel sees a watershed moment for China and the Vatican, noting Xi and Francis were elected on the same day.

“For me, it is providential, a sign from God.”

\* This entry was posted in China and tagged China, Pope Francis. Bookmark the permalink.

## **His predecessors and St Francis of Assisi show Pope Francis the way to China**

Verbiest Update  
March 2013

22<sup>nd</sup>

Jerome Heyndrickx cicm

These days Pope Francis will find on his desk dozens of dossiers which he will have to study and decide upon. One of them is the rather complicated and delicate question of “how to deal with the Church in China and how to relate to the Chinese government?” Relations between Rome and Beijing have been problematic since 1951. At one time (2008-2010) dialogue was going on showing some positive results in a mutual agreement on the appointment of ten bishops; but that dialogue was broken off again since 2010. Since 2011 three bishops were even excommunicated.

No doubt, also in dealing with this delicate matter the new pope will be inspired by the spirit of his patron Saint Francis who, in the history of the Church was a pioneer of dialogue. Already in the 12th century he went from Italy to the Middle East to engage in dialogue with the Mohammedans who were at that time the staunch opponents of the Church. In our time Communism has been the staunch opponent of the Church in China. Pope Francis will have to deal with this matter. He will find inspiration in the way his predecessors approached China.

Already 43 years ago (in 1970) Pope Paul VI walked the way of dialogue with China

Inspired by Vatican II, Pope Paul VI wrote an encyclical on dialogue -- *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) – and he also started concretely walking that way at a time which was even more critical for the Church than ours. Indeed in 1965 the Cultural Revolution started in China. The communist regime destroyed and closed churches, arrested bishops, priests and faithful putting them in prison. In the logic of any political leader this would call for confrontation. But the pope, guided by the logic of the gospel sought reconciliation and unity. He demonstrated this clearly in 1970 when he visited the Food & Agricultural Organization in Rome where he pleaded that China should be accepted in the UNO. China responded on July 11, 1970 by releasing the American Maryknoll Bishop James Walsh who had been detained in China for 15 years.

That same year Paul VI planned to visit Australia and the Far East from where he wanted to send another positive signal to China. That was not evident because the internuncio of the Vatican – who had been expelled from China [1951] – stayed in Taipei. But, apparently, Rome knew about

the plans of President Nixon to open an embassy in Beijing. In October 1970, well before his visit to Australia, Paul VI appointed Mgr Luigi Accogli, then internuncio in Taipei, to Ecuador without appointing a successor in Taipei. That was meant as a positive gesture towards China. Moreover the pope, together with his Secretary of State Cardinal Cassarole, planned a stopover in Hong Kong during his visit in the Far East. That would become yet another positive signal for China. But from Taiwan civil as well as Church authorities insisted strongly, through diplomatic channels, that the pope should change his plans and make a stopover in Taipei instead of Hong Kong. The pope did not change his itinerary but as a gesture to Taiwan he appointed on October 28, Mgr. Edward Cassidy (later Cardinal Cassidy), as new internuncio in Taipei. That satisfied partly the expectations of Taiwan but the Taiwan media continued to publish critical comments on the stopover in Hong Kong.

The pro-China media in Hong Kong, influenced by Beijing, remained silent about the planned Hong Kong stopover of the Pope. The pro-Taiwan media in Hong Kong however, criticized in sharp language. They understood all too well that the pope, right at the border of China, wanted to reach out to China, possibly as a step towards renewing diplomatic relations. As a result of all the critique – possibly also after some signals from Great Britain, the then colonial power in Hong Kong – the pope felt obliged to drop the greeting to China which was included in the prepared text of his homily during the Eucharistic celebration with Hong Kong Catholics in the Happy Valley soccer stadium. I stood at about 5 m. distance during the homily. It was very clear, all what the pope could do was, after he had greeted the Catholics of Hong Kong, raising his voice while saying slowly ...”...and I greet all the Chinese people wherever they may be...”..... Paul VI had wanted to say more.

Shortly after the Hong Kong visit Msgr. Edward Cassidy presented his credentials in Taipei to President Jiang Kai-Shek [December 1970]. But only ten months later – just a few weeks before China replaced Taiwan in the UNO [26 Oct. 1971] – Msgr. Cassidy was called back from Taipei “for consultation” so it was said.....but his return was postponed “sine die” (for an undetermined time). In fact he never went back, not even after several attempts from Taiwan to still obtain the return of the internuncio. In 1972 Msgr. Bacqué was appointed as temporary observer at the Vatican embassy in Taipei. On June 30, 1972, at the celebration of the 9th anniversary of the coronation of Pope Paul VI, the topic talked about by all invited guests was: their common expectation that the same celebration the following year would most probably take place in Beijing. Later that same year Rome appointed Msgr. Francesco Colasuono as “Chargé d’Affaires ad interim”. Today, more than forty years later, the present representative of the pope in Taipei – Msgr. Paul Russel – still has the same function and title. During all those years there have been highs and lows in the relations between Rome and Beijing as well as in our hope for normalization of diplomatic relations.

The aim of diplomatic relations of the Vatican with any country is to promote the good of the local Church. Priority concern goes to favoring evangelization and pastoral of the particular Churches. That has been the guiding principle of the popes through the centuries. That's what distinguishes Vatican diplomacy from that of other countries. China is obviously an important country for evangelization today and will be so in the future. It is therefore important for the Vatican to have relations with China and consequently to do what it takes to prepare such relations. When in 1958 Bishop Dong Guangqing (Wuhan) was illegally ordained a bishop by the Patriotic Association in China Pius XII condemned the act referring to the excommunication "latae sententiae" prescribed by Canon Law but without promulgating it and therefore without applying it. He also avoided entering into further open polemics with China. Pope John Paul II had many reasons to enter into confrontation with China when on Epiphany 2000 five bishops were illegally ordained and afterwards when China used insulting and aggressive language reacting against the canonization of 120 Chinese martyrs by the pope. But Pope John Paul II avoided all confrontation. He went even as far as apologizing, but not the apology which Beijing wanted to impose on him. He apologized only "for what happened in the 19th century and what possibly may have caused pain and injustice to some Chinese". Nothing more!

All these were positive signals from the popes to China. Theirs was not a policy of appeasement and compromising aspects of faith, but a courageous search for dialogue in mutual respect in the spirit of the gospel. The response to these signals from the side of China was disappointing. The popes had expected a more magnanimous attitude of China. But Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI persevered following the line of Pope Paul VI searched patiently for dialogue. This history in itself carries a message and an invitation for the new leaders in China and for Pope Francis.

The content of this message can be better understood from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. In trying to realize his dream to enter into dialogue with Islam Francis of Assisi encountered many problems. The five brothers he sent to Morocco in 1212 were murdered. When he himself tried to join them travelling from Spain he had to abandon it because of health problems; even his visit to Egypt and Palestine did not produce the fruits he had hoped for; and on top of it all he had to deal with internal discord among his friars. Pope Francis may experience also that dialogue with China will not bring quick success and he too may find out that there are different opinions in the Church on entering into dialogue or not. But it is in line with the spirit of Saint Francis not to give in to the temptations to enter into confrontation, because that will lead only to more division. By persevering in seeking dialogue, reconciliation and unity Pope Francis will meet Saint Francis and also the popes who preceded him. In fact that's where we all meet with what Christ preaches in the gospel.

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### **Taiwanese President meets Pope: a cautious success**

20<sup>th</sup> March

2013

Xin Yage

The Taiwanese media gave great air time to Ma Ying-jeou's participation at Mass for the beginning of Pope Francis' pontificate and personal encounter with him. No prior agreement between Taipei and Beijing over visit to Rome. A meeting with Merkel and Biden. But without offending China.

Taipei (AsiaNews) - Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou and First Lady Christine Chow's participation in the inaugural mass of Pope Francis' pontificate in St. Peter's Square is being seen as a success that it also requires caution.

In Taiwan, for days news programs had given ample air time to the Presidents intention to attend the mass. Yesterday the afternoon and evening bulletins broadcast live images with President Ma sitting in the front row during the ceremony.

After Mass, when Pope Francis received the State representatives, Ma became the first president of Taiwan to meet a Pope.

The President and his wife had arrived in Rome on March 17, and attended mass on the 19 at the Vatican, which is the only European country to have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The island has full diplomatic relations with only 23 countries in the world, although the Taiwanese can now travel to 114 states without a visa.

Ma Ying-jeou said that in the few words exchanged with the pope, he was able to congratulate him and express his gratitude for all that the Church does in Taiwan. In the days before the president had said that he comes from a Catholic family and as a child together with his grandmother often frequented the parish in the district of Wanhua, Taipei.

He pointed out that the Church has always given a great help to Taiwan, "personally, I learned French and English when I was at university thanks to a nun and a Catholic priest," plus all the humanitarian work for the disabled and the poor carried out by Catholic institutions on the island "is well-known to all Taiwanese."

One sensitive issue concerns the fact that in recent days Beijing had said

that the Holy See should "cut off diplomatic relations with Taiwan." In recent years the Government of Ma Ying-jeou has been very cooperative with Beijing and focused on easing tensions that had arisen in previous decades. Both Taipei and Beijing want to continue on this line which brings advantages and development for both sides. The Deputy Foreign Minister Shih Yea-ping said that there were no contacts between Taipei and Beijing regarding Ma Ying-jeou's journey to Rome.

Garfie Li, spokesman for the president, recalls that on the morning of March 18, while visiting the Taiwanese embassy to the Holy See, Ma Ying-jeou said that the reaction from the Chinese government, "according to some" was less harsh than in the past, however, he pointed out that every call from the Chinese leadership "should not be taken lightly" and that Taiwan should always be cautious in its relations with the continent in a constructive manner. In this sense, he explicitly mentioned the "three lines of national defense": institutionalized relations with China soft power and international support.

Yesterday, on the late evening news the Foreign Ministry spokesman, Calvin Ho pointed out that the opportunity to participate in the inaugural Mass of the pontificate, was also an occasion for Ma Ying-jeou to meet many diplomats and foreign heads of state during the period of his stay in Rome. In addition, on the face to face meeting with Pope Francis, the television images focused importantly on Ma Ying-jeou and his wife while they were talking with Angela Merkel and Vice President Joe Biden.

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## **New Pope Inherits Troubled China Relations**

Radio Free Asia  
2013

15<sup>th</sup> March

China on Friday called on the Catholic Church to "remove barriers" to better ties, implying the Vatican should break off diplomatic ties with rival Taiwan, as the island's president Ma Ying-jeou prepared to fly to Rome to attend the inauguration of the newly elected Pope Francis.

However, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying gave a more muted response than in 2005, when Ma's predecessor Chen Shui-bian attended the funeral of Pope John Paul II.

"We hope Taiwan will keep in mind the overall interests of cross-straits relations, and work with China to maintain the sound condition of [ties]," she told a regular news briefing in Beijing.

But she added: "We hope the Vatican will take concrete steps to improve



relations and remove barriers to the improvement of ties."

While Beijing has offered its congratulations to the new pope, it has also made it clear that better ties with the Vatican, currently strained by the ruling Communist Party's appointment of unapproved bishops, can only follow a severing of diplomatic links with Taipei.

The Vatican is the only European state with which Taiwan—as the seat of the 1911 Republic of China founded by Sun Yat-sen—still has full diplomatic relations.

Meeting likely

According to Chang Teh-fu of the Vatican's Chinese-language radio station, Ma would likely hold a brief meeting with the new pope.

"I'm sure there will be a brief meeting, because we have diplomatic ties, so it would be very natural for this to happen," Chang said.

While Taiwan has governed its own affairs under the Republic of China name since defeated Nationalist forces fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing the Chinese civil war, Beijing regards the island as a renegade province awaiting reunification.

Currently, only 23 states have formal diplomatic ties with Taipei, as Beijing refuses to recognize governments that maintain such links.

However, a series of landmark trade and business agreements since Ma took office have led to an unspoken diplomatic truce across the Taiwan Strait.

Relations between Beijing and the Vatican have come under repeated strain as China moves to ordain more and more of its own bishops without Vatican approval to meet the needs of a growing Catholic population.

The Vatican typically responds by excommunicating bishops who accept Beijing's consecration ceremonies, saying that only the Pope can appoint bishops.

Consistent policy

Chan Chi Ming, Vicar General of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, said the Vatican's policy so far on China's estimated 16 million Catholics was that only the Catholic Church could ordain priests, consecrate bishops, and minister to the faithful.

"He issued an edict clearly stating the policy on the Chinese Catholic Association, worshippers, priests and bishops," Chan said.

"This will still be the direction regardless of whether there is a new pope."

He said he expected some improvement in bilateral ties, but added: "This isn't going to change in a short space of time."

He said both sides would have to reach an agreement for diplomatic ties to be established.

"We'll see what China's reaction [to the previous pope's edict] is. It hasn't been very clear in recent months," Chan said.

China's officially sanctioned Catholic Church has between five and six million members, while an underground church loyal to Rome has an estimated 10 million followers.

Stripped of title

In a recent blow to bilateral ties, China stripped a Shanghai bishop of his title in December after he outraged officials by resigning from the state-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association.

Rev. Thaddeus Ma Daqin has reportedly been held in a seminary since he resigned from the association on July 7 in front of a packed church in Shanghai during what was supposed to be his consecration as an auxiliary bishop, a position he had been named to in a rare consensus between Beijing and the Vatican.

His move was widely understood as a protest against the Party's political control over Catholics in China.

Officially an atheist country, China has an army of officials whose job is to watch over faith-based activities, which have spread rapidly.

Party officials are put in charge of Catholics, Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, and Protestants.

Judaism isn't recognized, and worship in nonrecognized temples, churches, or mosques is against the law.

\* Reported by Xin Lin for RFA's Mandarin Service and by Ho Shan for the Cantonese Service. Translated and written in English by Luisetta Mudie.

## **Will China change its tune on the Vatican?**

Lack of diplomatic progress is a product of repression

UCA News  
2013

15<sup>th</sup> March

Lucia Cheung, Hong Kong  
China

Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis on Wednesday. On Thursday the boss of the Chinese Communist Party Xi Jinping became the new President of China. Their elections will affect the lives of billions of people.

The Chinese print media only carried the news of the new pope on Friday because of the time difference between Europe and Asia.

As a long-time Church media worker, seeing the two news stories juxtaposed and covering the entire front page of a Hong Kong newspaper, I feel that now is both a moment for hope as well as a moment to sigh.

Coming from Latin America and not being a curial cardinal, Pope Francis may not know too much about the complexity of the Church in China. But I have no doubt he will be concerned about a local Church where an estimated eight million Catholics are living under an authoritarian regime.

Perhaps it is the will of Providence. Besides having had the chance to collaborate in post-Synodal meetings since 2005, Hong Kong's Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun told us that he got the chance to sit next to the then Cardinal Bergoglio during a farewell event for Pope Benedict and spoke about China Church issues.

The annual plenary assembly of the Vatican's Commission of the Catholic Church in China, which was supposed to meet in April, was postponed when Pope Benedict XVI renounced his Petrine ministry. When a new date is rescheduled, I expect Pope Francis will take particular interest to gain a much better understanding of the China Church.

Yet an important task for him is to identify, with wisdom, the real situation in China.

The voices of ordinary Catholics are generally difficult to hear due to language barriers.

Sometimes, Church affairs are complicated because of the vested interests of individuals who try to influence the Universal Church through different channels. Thus, in handling China Church affairs there

is a need to look deep under the surface with great care.

Xi's resume shows he was sent to work in Shaanxi province when young and then served at different levels in governments in Hebei, Zhejiang and Fujian provinces, and in Shanghai municipality.

All these places are strongholds of the Catholic Church, especially the unregistered Catholic community. I have good reasons to believe he will be aware of the complexity of the Catholic Church.

However, we should not forget that Xi is merely a figurehead under the collective leadership of the seven-member Politburo. There are also several entities responsible for religious affairs: namely the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the Communist's United Front Work Department.

A typical example of the complexity of the China Church was last year's incident concerning Coadjutor Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin of Shanghai. His movements were restricted almost immediately after he declared he was leaving the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, which advocates an independent Church, during his episcopal ordination. This was regarded as a highly sensitive political incident and has yet to be resolved.

Since Pope Benedict XVI's resignation, there have been calls on the internet for the new pope and the new Chinese leader to put aside historical burdens and look ahead.

I cannot help but sigh. What are these people actually referring to when saying "historical burden"?

Do they mean excommunicating illicit bishops who defied the Holy See's warnings and were ordained without papal mandate? Is opposing the Patriotic Association, an entity that advocates an independent Church, a burden that the Holy See is to be blamed for? Who creates these burdens in the first place?

Cardinal Zen is right. He stressed that "on China-Vatican relations, we [the Church] don't have any problem. It is entirely the Chinese government who doesn't cooperate.

"When people ask me about this issue, I always say that it is not the problem of the pope. The Holy See is also open to this. It is the Chinese Communist Party who does not change that makes dialogue impossible."

Indeed, the message of the Chinese government to the new pope yesterday showed no change at all.

While the Foreign Ministry spokesperson offered congratulations, she reiterated old tunes: to sever so-called diplomatic relations with Taiwan and not to interfere in China's internal affairs.

Like many other issues that blight the ruling Communist Party, the problems in China-Vatican relations need certain kinds of changes to resolve. But the ball is in China's court.

High expectations regarding China-Vatican relations often surface when there is a new pope or a new Chinese president. However, unless there is radical change on religious policy and on the freedom of the people in China, these expectations are all but unrealistic.

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### **Papal mission to build trust in China**

Asia Times Online  
March 2013  
Greater China  
Francesco Sisci

15<sup>th</sup>

BEIJING - The names of popes are policy statements on the governance of the Roman Catholic Church, and it is no coincidence that the new pontiff has chosen to call himself Francis, the name of saint of Assisi in the 12th century, but also like the great Jesuit Francis Xavier, who went on missions in Asia and China in the 16th century. It was Francis Xavier who sent to China the famous missionary Matteo Ricci, the one man who almost managed to convert China, if his efforts were not rebuked by Rome.

China, concerned about the concept of "soft power," is paying great attention to the immense and unparalleled soft power of the Church, as this are the true "armies of the pope."

Roman Catholicism is the single largest religion in the world and has by far the most influential spiritual apparatus. Every week, millions of the 1.3 billion baptized Catholics (equal to the entire Chinese population) repeat the rite of adherence to their faith and their church by attending mass. The Vatican also can count on millions of volunteers; hundreds of thousands of priests, deacons, and officials of various kinds; and thousands of bishops in every corner of the planet.

The Pope has influence over hundreds of millions of Protestants and a small but also significant number of Orthodox Christians, though they were born or raised in defiance of Rome. He also commands respect in the Muslim countries, divided among thousands of mosques and mullahs, but in total with perhaps 1.5 billion followers.

Of course, today more than ever, this immense power, stretching more than an empire, fears the many direct or indirect signs of deep crisis or split, which are material issues and not just questions theology. There are spiritual issues, but also very practical ones, and the Holy See is well aware of both elements. After all, it is a religion that has consciously worn the garments of the late phase of Roman Empire and made them sacred. Beijing knows that the Church is well aware of its power. And paradoxically, the many global problems of the Catholic Church, bring the Vatican to pay a closer attention to China, as we shall see.

The first major problem weighing on the papacy that is about to begin is that of child molesting. It is a deep issue of morality, and therefore threatens the overall credibility of the work of evangelization, but also more worldly financial concerns. The American Church, the most under siege by the allegations, provides about 40% of the funds for the Vatican, although it is home to perhaps only 5% of Catholics overall.

In the past years, US President Barack Obama's administration has threatened to remove the time limit for prosecuting parishes and dioceses guilty of covering up molestation by priests. In fact, in the case of allegations of sexual harassment, the diocese has always chosen to pay any price necessary to avoid public trials that could humiliate the Church.

If you remove the time limits for prosecuting the allegations, those allegedly molested 20, 30, or even 40 years ago could implicate virtually all of the American dioceses and cause the physical and spiritual bankruptcy of Catholicism in the US. American Catholics could have no more churches where to pray and would not pay a dollar to Rome - thus leading in practice to the Catholic Church worldwide going bust. Today as never before, the issue of sexual misconduct of the priests gives the US administration unprecedented leverage over the Church. There are similar problems in Europe, where churches are empty of followers, and thus deprived of alms, contrary to America where churches are still packed.

To escape this blackmail as quickly as possible, the Church should develop "alternative markets." This is then a challenge in both the short and long terms. Latin America, Africa, and Asia in particular have distinct challenges. Latin America, with many former colonies of ultra Catholic Spain and Portugal, is being infiltrated by Evangelicals, who are making many converts in lands that were once exclusive preserve of Rome. For some Catholics this evangelization is another side of the ancient conspiracy by US Protestants to fan the flames of controversy over sexual misconduct and reduce the number of catholic followers globally. In this case, less of the faithful directly translates into less money.

Things are better in sub-Saharan Africa, the continent where Catholicism

is growing fastest, with over 170 million members today. But even here the problems are enormous. Contributions from Africa, poor today and in the near future, are far from a replacement for the decrease in donations from America and Europe. Furthermore, the Church in Africa, which has spread in areas that are deeply animist, has all kinds of problems, from priests who are often married with children to some kind of priest-sorcerers.

Relations with the Muslim world are in some ways the best they have been in centuries: there is no frontal opposition and no holy war, as it was often the case in past centuries. However, Christians there are constantly expelled in a practice that almost amounts to religious cleansing. Meanwhile, rich sheiks and mullahs finance mosques in Europe and America, converting new believers, supporting Muslim migrants to Europe and America and spreading Muslim views in areas once exclusively Christian. What to do with this new dual challenge of Islam is a pressing question for Rome.

This brings everything back to Asia, where problems are also both short- and long-term. The Asian economies run better than in any other part of the world, 60% of the world's population lives in the region, and will soon produce most of the wealth on the planet. For the Catholic Church to be here now, when it is under siege in every other part of the world, could mean the difference between staying relevant in this century and slipping into rapid decline.

Here the Church is weak and faces greater opposition than elsewhere, in the form of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and local governments without any real reverence for the throne of Peter. The numbers are lowest, less than 5% of the local population, a proportion already distorted by the fact that half of that is in the Philippines. Without the contribution of the Philippines, the percentage would be around 2%.

On the continent, according to Yan Kin Sheung Chiaretto in China and Prospects for the New Evangelization, it is hard to plan for a rapid program of evangelization. The only real opening is in China, where despite the official proclamations there is in fact more religious freedom than elsewhere, Buddhism is very weak, and Chinese have a hunger for new religions. The Protestants proved this since, without any special effort, they captured about 10% of the population within a decade.

Catholics, on the other hand, are certainly less than 1% - maybe around 0.5% - and that number is extremely divided, with almost no evangelization. China is the second-largest economy in the world, has no problem with accusations of sexual misconduct, it has concerns about the Muslim world similar to those of the Church - and it might be the real solution to the overall future of Catholicism. China needs to understand the world and to be understood by outsiders. Rome could have an unmatched role in integrating this vast country into a world dominated by the US and Europe.

Without China, in short, the Church has to defend itself from all sides and may see all its problems multiplied.

For the Church, once the overall defense was at Lepanto, now it is in Beijing. Without Rome, China is rendered much weaker among nations. This should bring the two together. But broad concerns rarely work in a world where attention is focused on small details, and the crowd of details is theologically also often considered the work of the devil, a work of separation.

Perhaps a the first Jesuit Pope will be able to bridge the gap, and China's new president, Xi Jinping, elected just hours before the Pope, could see in this coincidence some yuanfen, destiny bringing the two sides together.

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End