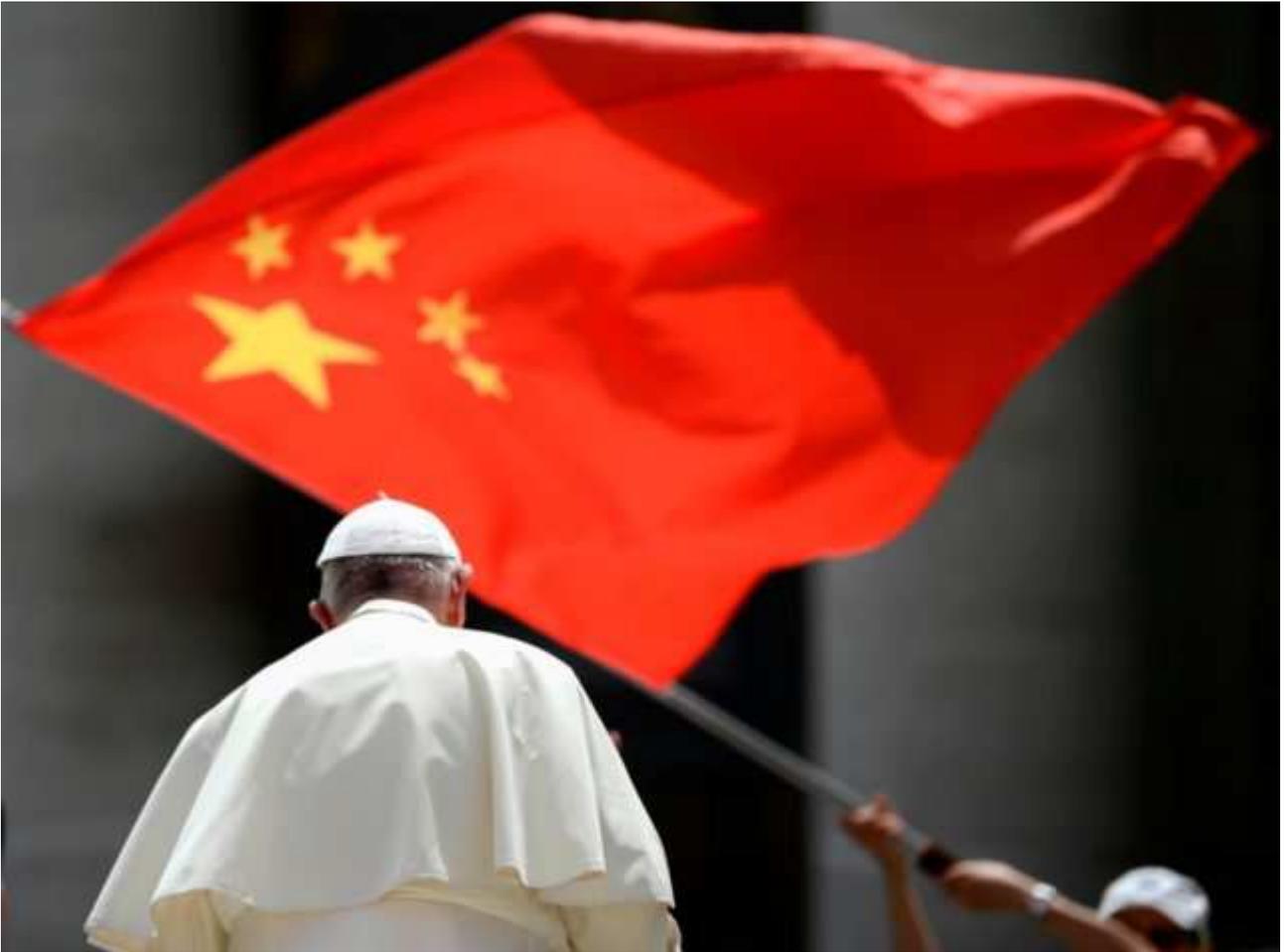


## New Documentary Slams Vatican Deal with Chinese Communists



*FILIPPO MONTEFORTE/AFP/Getty*

*Thomas D. Williams, Ph.D.*

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ROME — A poignant new documentary on the state of Christian persecution in China blasts the Vatican’s 2018 deal with the communist government, saying it has created a “double persecution” for faithful Catholics.

Directed and produced by veteran filmmaker Elisabetta Valgiusti, the founder of Save the Monasteries, the hour-long [documentary](#) highlights the absolute control wielded by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over churches, despite government claims of religious liberty.

“In China there is freedom of worship, a freedom that permits going to Mass, but clergy are controlled in their activities, controlled in their meetings, controlled in their subject

matter, and even controlled in their homilies,” states Father Bernardo Cervellera, the director of AsiaNews, the official press [agency](#) of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME).

“So religious freedom is stripped to the bone,” the priest notes.

“All the religions in China are controlled in the same way,” Cervellera declares. “Especially now as in China there is a great religious rebirth of all religions but especially of Protestants and Catholics, the government is really scared of this religious growth, so it tries to control all religions and tries to suffocate this religious rebirth.”

According to the priest, the 2018 China-Vatican agreement on the naming of bishops “serves for a precise government motive: that is, to eliminate the so-called non-official church, whose faithful do not identify with the Patriotic Association.”

There are some 12 million Catholics in China, split roughly down the middle between those of the underground Church faithful to Rome and members of the state-controlled Catholic Patriotic Association, founded by Mao Zedong in 1957 to nationalize the Church and to separate believers from the authority of the Vatican.

Among those who speak in the film is also Cardinal Joseph Zen, the former bishop of Hong Kong and a vocal critic of current Vatican policy toward the CCP.

“Now, because of this wrong Vatican strategy, with the provisional agreement signed with the Chinese government, it is easy for them to keep all the church enslaved,” the cardinal declares. “Now there is a double persecution.”

“There is no basis for the least optimism because the decision coming from the center, the Chinese government, is to control everything, I mean everything,” Zen states. “It is not only about the Catholic Church, but all religions. And freedom in general. All freedoms, like freedom of speech, not just for Catholics but for everyone.”

The most scandalous thing is that “seven bishops of the Church ruled by the Chinese government were excommunicated by the Holy See, which then legitimated them,” Zen declares, not only because they were ordained without authorization from Rome but because they were absolutely not worthy of becoming bishops.

“Now all the seven bishops are legitimate and we know what kind of people they are,” Zen states. “It is not a sudden thing; it is the conclusion of over ten years’ wrong Vatican politics.”

Christians in China “are suffering enormously,” Zen says, and the Vatican China agreement left Catholics “in bewilderment.”

“They say: ‘What’s going on? Were we wrong all those years to remain faithful to our religion? It looks like we were wrong, seeing that those who had always acted against the church are now triumphing.’”

The underlying problem of the agreement, along with new Vatican permissions for clergy to enlist in the Patriotic Association, adds Father Cervellera, is that “in the end these bishops and these priests become like state functionaries.”

No longer evangelizing and under state control, “they become supporters of state politics,” he says.

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