

VATICAN, CHINA WILL ESTABLISH TIES

Chinese Catholic Official Says Vatican, China Will Establish Ties, Newspaper Reports



In this photo made available by the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi and Pope Benedict XVI walk past presidential "Corazzieri" horse guards inside the Quirinale Presidential Palace, in Rome, Friday, June 24, 2005. Pope Benedict XVI made an official visit to the Italian president on Friday, just two weeks after the Roman Catholic Church was accused by some of interfering in a national referendum on assisted fertility. (AP Photo/L'Osservatore Romano)

HONG KONG Jun 26, 2005 — A Chinese Catholic official said Beijing and the Vatican will establish ties, but the process will take a long time, a Hong Kong newspaper reported Sunday.

Liu Bonian, identified as an official at the state-approved Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, praised a recent comment by Vatican foreign minister Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo that difficulties preventing official ties are not "insurmountable," the Wen Wei Po newspaper reported.

Liu said Lajolo's comments showed the Vatican was working to forge official links with China under new Pope Benedict XVI, who assumed his position in April, according to the report.

China doesn't recognize the Holy See and requires followers to worship at state-sanctioned churches. About 4 million Chinese worship at official churches, while foreign experts say up to 12 million more do so at underground churches. Priests and bishops of the underground church are regularly arrested and harassed.

The communist Chinese government wants the Vatican to drop its recognition of Taiwan, an island its rival Nationalists retreated to amid civil war on the mainland in 1949. Taiwan has been separately ruled since.

Beijing has also expressed reservations about the pope's power to appoint bishops a prerogative it considers an interference in domestic affairs.

The Vatican is believed to be willing to drop Taiwan, but the pope's appointment powers appear to remain a stumbling block. Liu said one solution would be to allow the Holy See to nominate bishops and let Beijing formally appoint them, Wen Wei Po reported.

Liu said no matter how the bishops are picked they must be "patriotic" a code word for loyal to the communist regime.

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