



A woman prays Oct. 1 outside St. Joseph Catholic Church in Beijing. (CNS/Isaac Brekken, EPA)

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The Vatican this month announced the signing of a "provisional agreement" with Chinese authorities to address a seven-decade dispute over the appointment of Catholic bishops in the world's most populous country.

On the show today:

- Mary Li Ma, co-author of [Surviving the State, Remaking the Church: A Sociological Portrait of Christians in Mainland China](#) and research fellow at the Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Jesuit Fr. Michael Agliardo, executive director of the [US-China Catholic Association](#), which was founded in 1989 to support the church in China.

Background reading:

- The four-paragraph Sept. 22 statement announcing the Vatican-China deal [was light on details](#), but it may represent a diplomatic achievement of historic proportions for Pope Francis' five-year papacy. Four days after signing the agreement, [Pope Francis wrote a letter](#) asking the members of China's Catholic Church to have faith in the Vatican's judgment in signing an agreement with their government.
- Catholics in Macau, Taiwan and Hong Kong are [divided over the provisional agreement](#) between China and the Vatican on the appointment of bishops, reports Catholic News Service. The deal is [seen as just a first step](#) by Rome to exerting more influence on the Chinese church.
- [Debate continues](#) about whether the Vatican's provisional agreement with China will improve relations between the Chinese state and members of religious groups, which have had a long history of conflict. A Sept. 27 hearing on Capitol Hill, chaired by Rep. Chris Smith, R-New Jersey, drew attention to the challenges faced by the Chinese government in adapting its stance toward religion in modern times.

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