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## Cardinal Joseph Zen: ‘For Love of My People I Will Not Remain Silent’

By [Terence P. Jeffrey](#) | February 18, 2019 | 5:13pm EST



(CNSNews.com) - Cardinal

Joseph Zen, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, gave an interview to CNSNews.com on January 28 in which he discussed his new book, “[For Love of My People I Will Not Remain Silent—On the Situation of the Church in China.](#)”

*Cardinal Joseph Zen receives the biretta cap from Pope Benedict XVI in Saint Peter's Square, March 24, 2006. (Getty Images/Franco Origlia)*

In the interview, Cardinal Zen discussed the agreement that the Holy See made last September with the government of the People Republic of China on the appointment of Catholic bishops in China.

Here is the complete video and transcript of that interview.

**Terry Jeffrey:** Hi, and welcome to this edition of Online With Terry Jeffrey. Our guest today is Cardinal Joseph Zen. Cardinal Zen is a native of Shanghai, China, and is the bishop emeritus of Hong Kong. Today we are going to talk about his new book “[For Love of My People I Will Not Remain Silent](#)”—and about the relations between the Catholic Church and the current government of China.

Your eminence, the first sentence in the U.S. State Department’s report on human rights in China is the following. It says: “The People’s Republic of China is an authoritarian state in which the Chinese Community Party is the paramount authority.”

Is it in fact the case that the current government of China is communist and atheist?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah. So, the system is well-known the whole world over. They always want to have complete control because they have no more other foundation for their government than the power. Because I don’t think anywhere in the world you have sincere Marxism. They are more capitalist than many other people. So, the control is paramount for them. So, all the religions have to follow the leadership of the party. Now, we Catholics we have our problems because we are a universal church. We have the authority of the Roman pontiff. From our faith, he is the successor of St. Peter, the head of the apostles



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and the leader of our church. So, all of the religions suffered persecution but probably we Catholics we are even more targeted by the government.

**Jeffrey:** In China, I know they speak of the underground church and also this entity called the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. What exactly is the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association? And who does it answer to?

**Cardinal Zen:** From the very beginning the Catholics faced a choice: either to accept the orders of the government, which demand that we should renounce our dependence on the pope. So, many people, probably the majority, said that we cannot do that. So, they were all sending to prison, labor camps. That means in the years 50s. And then some others, for any reason, they thought that maybe we can have some compromise. So, they accepted that control of the government, and so they could run the church for an amount of time.

And when the Cultural Revolution came even those in the above ground they were persecuted and then put into prison, labor camp, because during those same years all religions disappeared.

**Jeffrey:** Your eminence--

**Cardinal Zen:** Now, this is the history. But then at the end of the Cultural Revolution with the new policy of openness they were all out of prison, finished their sentences also. So, those who went into prison in the fifties, they had no reason to change their mind. So, they came out and they went underground. And the other people, who used to run the churches, they were forced to go back to the churches. They reopened the churches.

And that's the two communities.

Now, the situation is different from place to place. You can understand that China is big, so the situation is very different. But both parts are under control of the government.

**Jeffrey:** Both parts. I'm sorry, go ahead—

**Cardinal Zen:** Because the underground church is out of law so they are always harassed by the government. But sometimes they can tolerate something, because if you are numerous, you are united, they will not create more problems for themselves.

But in the so-called official church, they are slaves also. They have no real freedom.

Unfortunately, there are also opportunistic elements who voluntarily work for the government instead of for the church.

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**Jeffrey:** Should a government like the Communist, atheist government of China today, have any control over who becomes

a bishop in the Catholic Church?

**Cardinal Zen:** They should not, according to our Catholic doctrine, especially after the recent, I mean, the Ecumenical Council. The church has said we ask all the Catholic governments to allow us our own autonomy. So, now it is in Canon Law that the appointment of bishops is exclusive authority of the pope.

**Jeffrey:** It belongs to the pope alone? It's his authority?

**Cardinal Zen:** Alone. Yes.

**Jeffrey:** Not a government?

**Cardinal Zen:** No, not a government. But now it seems that the Vatican has accepted to hand that power into the hands of the government.

**Jeffrey:** Now, what do you know—we know that the Vatican, Pope Francis, made some kind of deal with the government of China last year. What do you know that it actually entails? What does that deal mean?

**Cardinal Zen:** We know nothing precise because it is a secret. And I have no more communication with the Vatican. I am marginalized. So, I don't know the content of the agreement.

**Jeffrey:** So, your eminence, the pope made a deal with the government in Beijing about how the Catholic Church would be treated and even who would become bishops in the Catholic Church in China, but Catholics in China and Catholics around the world, in the universal church, they don't know what that deal is exactly?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah. Now, we make our conjectures, we try to guess, because some details leaked out. So, we know about what they call the 'democratic election,' they say. But that is fake. There is no election at all. The second step is the appointment by the bishops' conference. But that is fake, again. Because there is no bishops' conference at all. It's the government.

**Jeffrey:** In your book, you write about that. The bishops' conference, basically, is an entity controlled by the government of China.

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah. Completely.

**Jeffrey:** So, what you understand of this secret deal is that the bishops' conference will nominate bishops?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** Which means the government will nominate bishops?

**Cardinal Zen:** Exactly.

**Jeffrey:** Now, you know the underground bishops in China, I take it.

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah, more or less. Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** Okay, you communicate with many of them?

**Cardinal Zen:** Not many, no.

**Jeffrey:** Some of them?

**Cardinal Zen:** It's dangerous for them to communicate with me.

**Jeffrey:** It's dangerous for them to communicate with you, because they live in--

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah. But they are few and fewer. Because when the old bishop dies they are not giving successors.

**Jeffrey:** They are not naming new true Catholic bishops to replace those who die?

**Cardinal Zen:** So, they appoint some delegate for the underground communities. That doesn't work well.

**Jeffrey:** But of the underground—if you can say—of the underground bishops that you know in China, do they know what the facts are about the deal that the pope made with the Chinese government?

**Cardinal Zen:** I don't think so.

**Jeffrey:** No.

**Cardinal Zen:** It's secret.

**Jeffrey:** It's secret.

**Cardinal Zen:** It's secret. Maybe, maybe, many of the above ground, they know. Many of the people in their church, they know.

**Jeffrey:** Because they are working directly with the government?

**Cardinal Zen:** Because the Vatican communicates with them.

**Jeffrey:** So people who are working, who were named by the Communist government, they may know what the deal is, but underground Catholics who are faithful to the Church don't--

**Cardinal Zen:** They must know the deal also because the government may tell them what is the deal.

**Jeffrey:** Right. So, is your understanding, under the deal, this Catholic conference, the bishops' conference, which is controlled by the government, names the bishops, not the pope?

**Cardinal Zen:** Nope, they say the pope has the last word. He can approve. He can veto.

**Jeffrey:** But he can't take someone who isn't put up by this group controlled by the Chinese government and put his own bishop up without their---

**Cardinal Zen:** No. No. No.

**Jeffrey:** He has to take who they offer?

**Cardinal Zen:** He is passive. He wait [for] them to make names. He has last word to say yes or no. That is all he can do.

**Jeffrey:** So, ultimately, control over who gets to become a bishop is now in the hands of the Chinese government?

**Cardinal Zen:** Exactly. According to our conjecture. We cannot 100 percent conclude. We haven't seen the text.

**Jeffrey:** Because the Vatican won't release the actual deal. So, but the understanding of it is that's the way it works?

**Cardinal Zen:** Sorry.

**Jeffrey:** The understanding of it is that's the way it works--

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** --even though we haven't seen the deal. And that would violate Canon Law?

**Cardinal Zen:** Oh, sure. Not only Canon Law but the doctrine of the church.

**Jeffrey:** Right. In your book, you mention that Jesus Christ famously said "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." Is the choosing of who shall be bishops in the Catholic faith something that can be rendered unto Caesar?

**Cardinal Zen:** You know, in history, sometimes the Caesar got something also from the church. During the period of Christian emperors, they had also power to intervene in this choice of bishops. But now, the governments now are secular and the Communist government is even atheist. So that's all different.

**Jeffrey:** So, if the deal works the way you understand that it does, an atheist government has control over who can become a Catholic bishop in China?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** And the pope has agreed to this?

**Cardinal Zen:** Seemingly.

**Jeffrey:** And he won't release the deal so that all Catholics around the world--

**Cardinal Zen:** But he says, the pope has last word, he said.

**Jeffrey:** But only from that pool of people that the atheist government gives him?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** If the atheist government does not give him a nominee, he can't pick him?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** So, the type of person who would have gone to prison to stand up for the truth of the Catholic faith, or might have been martyred for the Catholic faith at one point in China, that type of person cannot become a bishop in China today because the atheist government won't nominate him.

**Cardinal Zen:** Yes, obviously.

**Jeffrey:** Now, in your book, you talked about some of the bishops that are recognized by the Chinese government do not observe celibacy. Is that correct? They are not celibate?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yes, we know of two. For many years it's common knowledge, but now they are going to be legitimized probably. And the Vatican says we don't have cogent evidence. That's ridiculous.

**Jeffrey:** They say they don't have evidence that they were not celibate?

**Cardinal Zen:** Now, they say. But after so many years, everybody knows. It's common knowledge.

**Jeffrey:** And they have not been legitimized yet, but they might be?

**Cardinal Zen:** We don't know because now everything is confused

**Jeffrey:** So, you don't even know if they've actually been legitimized

**Cardinal Zen:** We guess that they have already been legitimized

**Jeffrey:** You guess that?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yes, because some letter addressed to some of those bishops, but signed by the Secretary of State and by the Prefect for the Congregation for Evangelization, they say you are called to be the bishop. So, that means they are legitimized. But it is not according to the church rules. They should have a bull signed by the pope, not by cardinals, and it should be made public. And not just by private letter.

**Jeffrey:** And that hasn't happened with these individuals who did not live a celibate life? As you understand it?

**Cardinal Zen:** Sorry?

**Jeffrey:** And that did not happen. That process did not happen.

**Cardinal Zen:** No. No.

**Jeffrey:** And you know of people familiar with the church in China who tried to inform the Vatican that these would-be bishops did not live a celibate life?

**Cardinal Zen:** Sure. Those things are for us decades that we know. So, it is no secret at all.

**Jeffrey:** And you do not believe that the Vatican sufficiently investigated whether that is true?

**Cardinal Zen:** I have a thousand reasons to believe that the common knowledge was true. And what they are saying now I cannot believe.

**Jeffrey:** Okay. You do not believe that they know or looked into it. Your eminence, in your book you write the following, quote: 'Pope Francis is a man full of love and has great compassion for the poor and the weak, but he has no experience of real Communism (in power). He knows the Communists of Latin America, where they are the voice of the people who have suffered persecution. Pope Francis naturally has a lot of sympathy for them.'

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah. I think that's the trouble. That's the trouble. The trouble is the people around him, they know better. But they are not advising him for the right direction. I really, I'm very sorry that the people around him are giving wrong advice and maybe even wrong information, because people like Parolin, the Secretary of State, he knows very well the situation. He knows very well.

**Jeffrey:** And he's not advising the pope--

**Cardinal Zen:** He's pushing the pope on this wrong direction.

**Jeffrey:** To fulfill this deal with China and give China control over who becomes bishops?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** Now, in your book, which focuses on Pope Benedict's 2007 letter to the church in China, you write that there is a key passage in the book that was incorrectly translated into Chinese.

**Cardinal Zen:** Manipulated.

**Jeffrey:** Tell us what happens?

**Cardinal Zen:** It was on the very crucial point: whether the underground should come into the open. Now, the pope says, we are right to bring our pope in the open. But, in China, if you want the government to recognize, we have to accept conditions and the conditions are unacceptable to our Catholic conscience—not sometimes but almost always. Now, the close 'almost always' went missing.

**Jeffrey:** That word disappeared.

**Cardinal Zen:** Disappeared.

**Jeffrey:** In the Chinese translation.

**Cardinal Zen:** Only Chinese translation.

**Jeffrey:** And you tried to get it fixed?

**Cardinal Zen:** Yes, by an official in the Holy See.

**Jeffrey:** And it was difficult for you to get it fixed?

**Cardinal Zen:** I had to fight for one year.

**Jeffrey:** And you believe it was purposefully removed. That--

**Cardinal Zen:** Oh, sure. It could not have been an oversight.

**Jeffrey:** Your eminence, Cardinal Zen, thank you very much.

**Cardinal Zen:** Thank you.

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