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Video Message of the Holy Father to participants in the international Conference “100 years since the Concilium Sinense: between history and the present”

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis to participants in the international Conference “100 years since the Concilium Sinense: between history and the present”, organized by the Pontifical Urban University in collaboration with the *Agenzia Fides* and the Pastoral Commission for China, taking place in the Great Hall of the University:

Video Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, dear sisters!

I am happy to be able to address you on the occasion of the conference dedicated to the centenary of the *Concilium Sinense*, the first and so far only Council of the Chinese Catholic Church, which took place in Shanghai between May and June 1924, exactly one hundred years ago.

The title of your conference is “One hundred years since the *Concilium Sinense*: between history and the present”, and certainly this anniversary represents a precious occasion for many reasons.

1) That Council was indeed an important step in the journey of the Catholic Church in the great country that is China. In Shanghai, the Fathers gathered in the *Concilium Sinense* had an authentically synodal experience and made important decisions together. The Holy Spirit brought them together, made harmony grow among them, led them along paths that many among them would not have imagined, overcoming even perplexity and resistance. So does the Holy Spirit who guides the Church.

They were almost all from distant countries, and before the Council many among them were not yet ready to consider entrusting the leadership of their dioceses to priests and bishops born in China. Then, gathered in the Council, they all made a true synodal journey and signed the provisions that opened up new ways for the

Church, including Catholic China, to increasingly have a Chinese face. They recognized that this was the step to take, because Christ's proclamation of salvation can only reach every human community and every single person if it speaks in their native language.

The Council Fathers followed in the footsteps of great missionaries, such as Fr. Matteo Ricci - Li Mǎdòu; they embarked on the path opened by the Apostle Paul, when he preached that it was necessary to be all things to all people in order to proclaim and bear witness to the risen Christ.

2) An important contribution in the promotion and guidance of the Concilium Sinense came from Archbishop Celso Costantini, the first apostolic delegate to China, who by decision of Pope Pius XI was also the great organizer and president of the Council.

Costantini applied a truly missionary outlook to the real situation. And he treasured the teachings of *Maximum illud*, the Apostolic Letter on the Missions published in 1919 by Pope Benedict XV. Following the prophetic drive of that document, Costantini simply repeated that the mission of the Church was to “evangelize, not colonize” At the Shanghai Council, also thanks to the work of Celso Costantini, the communion between the Holy See and the Church in China manifested its fruitful fruits, fruits of good for all the Chinese people.

3) But the Council of Shanghai served not only to cast into oblivion the erroneous approaches that had prevailed in previous times.

It was not a matter of “changing strategy” but of following paths more in keeping with the nature of the Church and her mission. Trusting only - only! - in the grace of Christ Himself, and in His appeal.

The participants in the first *Concilium Sinense* looked to the future. And their future is our present.

The Church's journey through history has taken unforeseen paths, also through times of patience and trial. The Lord in China has kept the faith of God's people along the way. And the faith of God's people has been the compass that has shown the way throughout this time, before and after the Shanghai Council, up to the present day.

Chinese Catholics, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, walk in the present time. In the context in which they live, they also bear witness to their faith with works of mercy and charity, and in their witness, they make a real contribution to the harmony of social coexistence, to the building of the common home.

Those who follow Jesus love peace, and stand together with all those who work for peace, at a time when we see inhuman forces at work that seem to want to hasten the end of the world.

4) The participants of the Shanghai Council looked to the future. And, a few days after the end of the Council, they went on a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan, near Shanghai.

Like the Council Fathers of Shanghai, we too can look to the future. And remembering the Shanghai Council can also suggest new roads to the whole Church, and open paths to be taken boldly in order to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel in the present.

In these very days, in the month of May, dedicated by the People of God to the Virgin Mary, many of our Chinese brothers and sisters will undertake a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Sheshan, to entrust their prayers and hopes to the intercession of the Mother of Jesus.

In a few days, on 24 May, the feast of Mary Help of Christians, the Church around the world will pray with the brothers and sisters of the Church in China, as Pope Benedict XVI asked in his Letter to Chinese Catholics.

I too symbolically climb Sheshan Hill. And all together, let us entrust our brothers and sisters in the faith who are in China, all the Chinese people, and all our poor world, to Our Lady, Help of Christians, asking for her intercession, so that peace may always prevail everywhere.

Mary, Help of Christians, Our Lady of Sheshan, pray for us!
