

Religion in the Two Great Assemblies

From March 3 to 13, the Fifth Session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) was held in Beijing. The agenda included hearing and deliberation on a report about the work of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC. At the 5th Session of the 12th Chinese Political People's Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Catholic delegates participated, namely seven Bishops, Bps. Ma Yinglin (馬英林), Fang Xingyao (方興耀), Lei Shiyin (雷世銀), Li Shan (李山), Zhan Silu (詹思祿), Shen Bin (沈斌), Meng Qinglu (孟清錄) and one layman Liu Yuanlong (劉元龍).

From March 5 to 14, the fifth session of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC) was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, with Premier Li Keqiang delivering a report on the government work and discussion on a draft of the general provisions of civil law. Among the participants, there were three Catholic Bishops, namely Fang Jianping (方建平), Guo Jincai (郭金才) and Huang Bingzhang (黃炳章).

Regarding religion and religious issues, the President of CPPCC, Yu Zhengsheng in his annual report, dealt with the ethnic minorities and religions together, underlining the “unity among nationalities and harmony among religions”. For religions, in particular, he pointed out the need

- * for studying the spirit of the 2016 National Assembly on Religious Work (Xi Jinping's advocacy of Sinicization, *Zhongguohua*) and of the new Regulations of Religious Affairs,
- * for holding symposia on religious knowledge,
- * for supporting the religious leaders in making use of core values of Socialism in explaining religious rules and doctrines,
- * for improving the formation of religious operators,
- * and for paying special attention to the religious issues in Yunnan and in Tibet.

The Premier Li Keqiang in the report on the Work of the Government, invited religions to fully implement the basic orientation of the Party for the religious work, to follow the laws and regulations in religious affairs, to promote harmonious relations among religions, to increase the positive role of the religious leaders and believers in promoting the economic development of society. He said:

We will fully implement the Party's fundamental policy on religion, manage religious affairs in accordance with law, promote harmonious relations among religions, and encourage religious leaders and believers to actively get involved in promoting economic and social development.

On the afternoon of March 15, all the Catholic leaders of the One Association and One Conference (*yihui yituan*) held a meeting to evaluate and spread the spirit of the recent two Assemblies. Bp. Shen Bin presided. Bp. Ma Yinglin reported on the work of the CPPCC Assembly. According to a report on the official website of the Catholic Church (see below), he invited all Catholic leaders and faithful to deepen their political awareness, their concern for the present political and social situation with its main values, in order to welcome the 19th Party

Congress, accept its decisions and live its spirit, in order to assure the harmony and order in society and successfully implement the appeals of the 19th Congress.

Bp. Guo Jincai reported on the work of the NPC assembly; again according to the official report, he gave special attention to and repeated the above quoted words of Li Keqiang on religions. Then he added: The appeal of the Assembly was to strictly unite all the nationalities of the country around the Central Committee of the Party with Xi Jinping at its core, keep high the banner of Socialism with Chinese characteristics, and fully implement the spirit of the party.

Bp. Shen Bin made the closing speech, emphasizing the high results, honesty and the realism of the assembly, with a strong sense of initiative and discipline: “We the eight (Catholic) delegates kept united walking together: every morning we celebrated Mass, had meals and took part in the meetings and discussed together, taking active initiatives and creating a good image of the Catholic responsible leaders of the *yihui yituan*.”

Bp. Shen Bin pointed out that this year is a very important year since it is the first year of the 13th Five Year Plan and the first year after the 9th Assembly of the Catholic Representatives. We have to learn well the spirit of the Two Assemblies, combine well our work and proceed with one heart and mind in order to welcome the 19th Party Congress and the glorious objectives of the Two Centenaries (*of the CPC in 1921 and of the People's Republic in 1949*) thus struggling for the achievement of the ‘China Dream’ of the Chinese Renaissance.

The official report concluded by mentioning in particular the participation of Liu Yuanlong, secretary of CPA, of Bp. Yang Xiaoting and of Mr. Tan Lizhu (谭立铸) who is the deputy secretary of the Catholic Patriotic Association, and director of the research office of the Chinese Catholic Theological Committee.