

Editor's note: an open letter said to be written by the entire clergy of Cangzhou (Xianxian) diocese in Hebei came to our attention on August 14, 2018. The document is being circulated in Mainland China. We have not yet been able to verify the authenticity of the letter. But it raises issues that merit attention. We therefore decide to publish the document and share it with our readers.

OPEN LETTER

Honourable Officials of the United Front Department and of the Religious Affairs Administration:

Greetings!

Following the ongoing development of the reform and liberalization, the policy of religious freedom has been constantly implemented and citizens really enjoy the progress of the nation and social improvement. However, regarding the actions recently carried out by the two official organs in our churches, we feel deeply shocked, displeased and unsatisfied. Therefore, we the entire clergy (of Cangzhou Diocese) hope that the leaders of the two organs could explain and clarify as soon as possible the following questions in order to eliminate any misunderstanding and enable us to realistically work for our mother country.

A. The Catholic Church is a legal body; the churches and all their properties enjoy legal protection, and all the clergy of the Cangzhou Diocese is officially recognized by the State. Why, without consulting the Bishop, the priests and parish communities, has the national flag been hastily hoisted in our churches?

1. Having consulted the "Law on the National Flag", we find no provision stating that the churches must hoist the national flag. The Law on the National Flag stipulates that some institutions which represent the State must hoist the flag, but, besides them, other places only "in circumstances when conditions allow should or can hoist the national flag". Therefore, we feel that the forced and hasty hoisting of the national flag in churches is inappropriate and contradicts the spirit of the Law on the National Flag.

2. The clearest symbol of state organs is the national flag. The clearest symbol of the Church is traditionally the cross. If things are mixed up, there is no separation between State and Religion, and no clear distinction.

3. Please explain: What is the meaning of hoisting the national flag in the church?

B. The Catholic Church is a legal body; the churches and all their properties enjoy legal protection, and all the clergy of the Cangzhou Diocese is officially recognized by the State. Why, without consulting the Bishop, the priests and parish communities, have you put up rules and systems you have devised in churches?

The church is a sacred place where the faithful perform religious ceremonies, not a place for propagating religious policy and rules. The church enjoys legal protection: any material or information that does not correspond to the content of our faith is not allowed to be posted or hung up in churches.

C. The Catholic Church is a legal body; the churches and all their properties enjoy legal protection, and all the clergy of the Cangzhou Diocese is officially recognized by the State. Why, without consulting the Bishop, the priests and parish communities, has the “Guiding Committee stationed in the church” been hastily established?

1. The church is the most sacred, and a legal place for religious activities. Except the faithful and the administrators of the church, no individual or committee—without the church’s permission—has the authority to station in the church.

2. According to laws and regulations, as well as to the principle of separation between State and Religion, the Church is not an organ of the State, but a religious body. The Government has no right to insert in the Diocesan community its own organization. The Church, as far as faith and internal affairs are concerned, has autonomy; other authorities or individuals cannot interfere. For this reason, it is not appropriate to establish the so called “Guiding Committee stationed in the church”.

We invite the leaders concerned to examine the issues and opinions we have raised and give us the answer.

All the clergy of Cangzhou Diocese

公开信

尊敬的统战部宗教局负责人安好！

随着改革开放的继续深入，宗教自由政策的不断落实，人们确实感受到国家的进步，社会的发展。然而，对两部门近期在我们教堂内的作为，深感突然、疑惑和不满。因此，我们全体神父希望两部门领导，对以下疑问尽快给予解释说明，以消除我们的迷茫，好能踏实地为祖国设努力工作。

一、天主教是合法的、教会的教堂及所属教产是受法律保护的、沧州教区的神父都是国家认可的！为什么在没征求教区主教、神父及堂口团体意见的情况下，贸然在教堂院内悬挂国旗？

一）查阅《国旗法》，其中并没有教堂必须悬挂国旗的法律规定；除了《国旗法》指名的代表国家的几个政府机关必须悬挂国旗外，其他地方都是用的“在条件允许的情况下，应该或可以悬挂国旗”。因此，我们感觉强行或贸然在教堂内悬挂国旗是不恰当的，也不符合《国旗法》精神。

二）政府机关最明显的标记应该是国旗；教堂的最明显的标记历来就是十字架，如果相互混淆就是政教不分、就四不像了。

三）请解释教堂悬挂国旗的意义是什么？

二、天主教是合法的、教会的教堂及所属教产是受法律保护的、沧州教区的神父都是国家认可的！为什么在没征得教区主教、神父及堂口团体意见的情况下，在圣堂内张贴你们制定的规章和制度？

圣堂是教徒举行宗教礼仪的神圣场所，不是宣传宗教政策法规的地方，它是受法律保护的，任何与信仰内容不相符的文字和内容，都禁止在教堂内张贴或悬挂。

三、天主教是合法的、教会的教堂及所属教产是受法律保护的、沧州教区的神父都是国家认可的！为什么在没征得教区主教、神父及堂口团体意见的情况下，贸然在教堂内成立“驻堂指导小组”？

一）教堂是教会最神圣且合法的宗教活动场所，除教徒和教堂管理人员，任何个人和团体没有教会允许是无权“驻堂”的。

二）按照法律法规和政教分离原则，教会不是政府机关，是宗教团体。政府无权在教会团体内部安插自己的组织机构的；教会对于信仰和内部事务，有权自行管理，其他权力和个人是不能干涉的。因此，在教堂内成立所谓“驻堂指导小组”不恰当的。

以上是我们提出的问题和意见，请领导审阅，并给解答！

沧州教区全体神父