

## **Wenzhou Priests' Letter About Crosses**

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The recent “Three Rectifications and One Demolition Campaign” has the name of a regular administrative decree. However it ignores normal legal procedures and disregards the heartfelt feelings of the great mass of religious believers. In reality, it is a large-scale attack on every Catholic and Protestant Church. This action is simply a re-play of the tragedies and farces of the Cultural Revolution. True, it can be said, that in the building and renovation of some churches in Zhejiang Province, the construction superseded the original plan. However, the reason for the expansion is not the fault of the Church. As a legal entity in society, we sincerely hope that we can follow the proper channels and legal procedures to put up a building on a scale to meet our needs. However, many times our lawful requests do not receive a satisfactory answer. The concerned government offices are not so supportive of church construction. They are passive, outwardly open, but inwardly strict.

Regarding this attitude, we “second class citizens” already understand, and we meekly submit to oppression. Therefore, if you violently tear down those overbuilt churches, you will lose even more the confidence of the people because most of the cost for erecting those church buildings came from the offerings of the faithful. And those believers are good-living, patient and hardworking citizens. They positively give their whole selves for the economic development of Zhejiang Province. Once they lose their trust and good feelings for the government, their creativity and fervor for development will definitely decrease. Actually, we think that it is not necessary to forcefully tear down buildings such as churches, which in some aspects break the rules. Other means can be used to appropriately solve the problem. It is not necessary to move troops about, and wave weapons, thus stirring up the people. One need only follow the spirit of Document 19, issued in 1982, which says: “Of course, we should not demolish existing structures, but fully consult with believers and important persons in religious circles concerning them in order to reach a satisfactory solution based on the actual situation”.

Moreover, what is even more unthinkable is that the so-called demolition movement has gone a step further and changed into a movement to remove the crosses from churches. Regardless of whether a law has been broken, it does not look good. Maybe the upper echelons of leadership have a certain quota of crosses to be removed, or the perpetrators must completely carry out the orders from above to destroy the crosses at all costs. They do not think about the results, nor do they worry about the heavy police presence, which carries out forcible destruction as if facing an enemy. In this way, the hearts of all patriotic, good-living Christians who are originally supportive of the government, have been severely wounded. This is especially the case when we see the cross, which in our hearts is so holy, so revered, and the symbol of our Christian faith, one by one being forcibly removed from the church buildings, this does great harm to our religious feelings!

At this time when our whole society is energetically working for development, to violently destroy our churches is really going against the historical trend, and it brings to society unnecessary reasons for turmoil. Certain leaders in Zhejiang Province not only do not recognize their mistakes, but they further aggravate the situation by removing the crosses from church buildings. Although the floor space in some churches is beyond the limit, which process was not carried out in conformity with

what rules and regulations? In civil law, or in religious law, which regulation states that a cross on top of a church is illegal? Or which regulation states that in a certain district, only one cross is allowed? Or how is it manifestly offensive to the eye? Can it be that the cross is a bad-luck charm, or a place of evil spirits? According to this robber logic, the symbolic cross on hospitals should also be torn down, right? If that is really the case, then we cannot peacefully and bravely erect crosses. We must then do what we did in the past, and practice our religious life “in the underground”. For the past several years we have always followed the concerned policies and regulations. We have built our churches in accordance with the law and under government supervision. Why suddenly today this has changed to being illegal? And the churches must definitely be destroyed? Have the laws and regulations become useless pieces of paper? How, in this way, can we build a society ruled by law? How can you gain the trust of the citizenry? Can a certain small group of leaders in the government ridicule the law, and place themselves above it?

... [Editor's note: Skipping 2 pages, we proceed to the conclusion.]

Therefore, we Catholic priests of the Wenzhou Diocese strongly cry out: respect our faith, respect our holy and inviolable cross, and respect the religious feelings of the great mass of Christian believers! We courteously request that the Zhejiang government leaders absolutely call a halt to the campaign to destroy churches and to remove crosses. Stop destroying the democracy, harmony and peace of society. Do not let your stupid actions become the laughing stock of history for a thousand ages. Desist from your current actions, “dear peoples’ servants” of Zhejiang Province. Restore to Zhejiang clear skies, harmony and peace!