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# **Some Words on Patriotism and John Paul II**

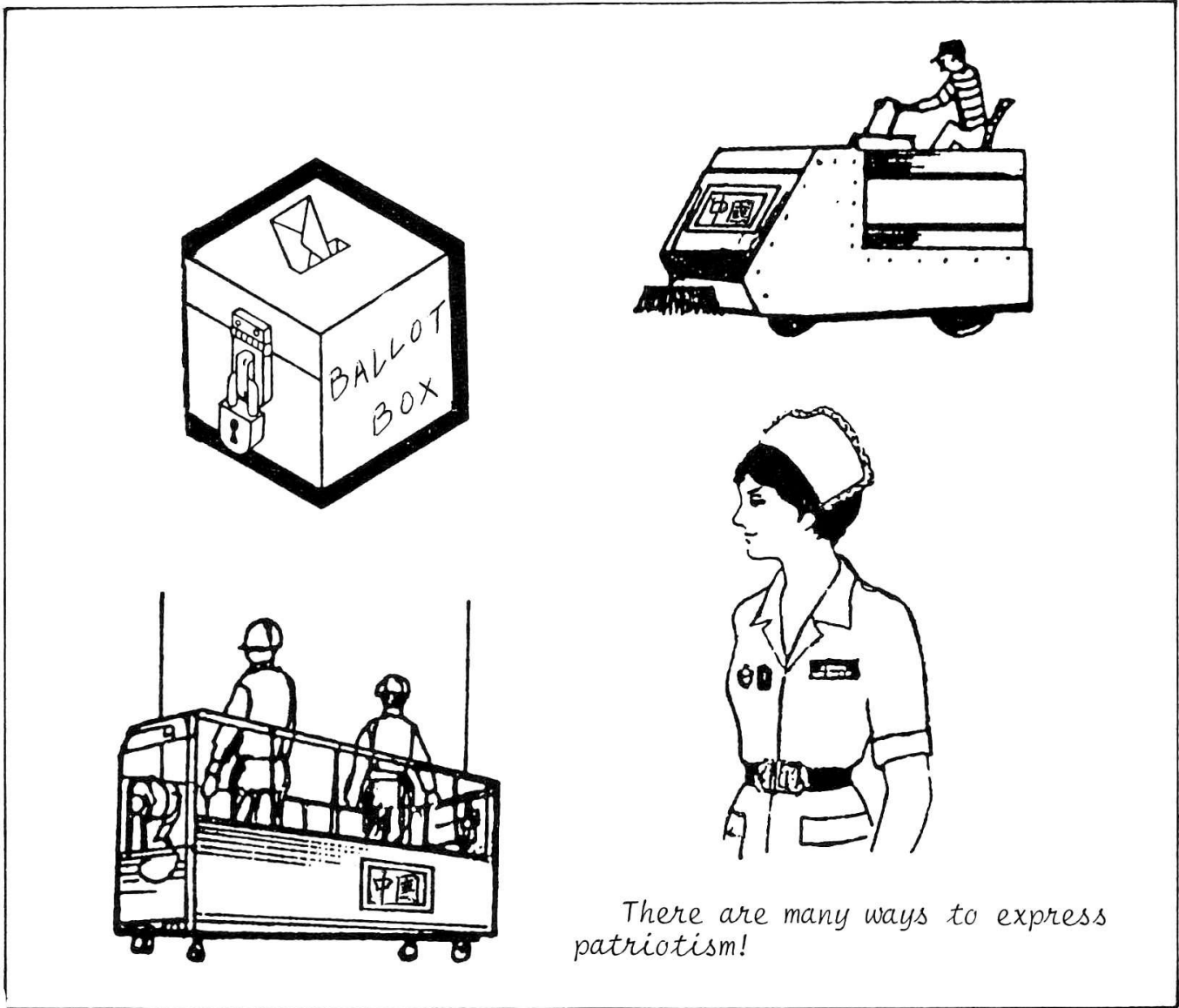
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Since Chinese Liberation the word "patriotism" has taken on quite a new meaning there. For the Chinese leadership its meaning is specific and determined; for many citizens it has become a serious dilemma. It has also become a focal point in China's discussions and relations with those outside. The Chinese interpretation differs from the way "patriotic" has generally been interpreted by others. The Concise Oxford Dictionary, New Edition, defines a patriot as one who defends or is zealous for his country's prosperity, freedom or rights.<sup>1</sup> The Readers Digest Great Encyclopedia Dictionary defines the term as one who loves his country and zealously regards its welfare, especially a defender of popular liberty.<sup>2</sup> And so, for most people patriotism simply means loving, serving and defending one's country, and then letting citizens express their patriotism in hundreds of different ways. For some it means volunteering for military service to defend the country, for others serving the country's needs by running for public office, or campaigning to help get the best possible candidate or political party elected to office, or if need be, to work to have incompetent candidates or parties ousted from office, buying defense bonds, beginning and ending the day with the singing of the national anthem, showing respect for the flag, and on and on. Patriotism reaches an extreme and dangerous point when it is interpreted to mean "My country, right or wrong!" Sometimes our commitment to the common good of all humanity must take precedence even over our commitment to our own country. One of the most memorable statements of the late U.S. President John F. Kennedy was his definition of patriotism. He said: "Not my country, right or wrong, but rather my country, right the wrong."<sup>3</sup> For him, dissent could be just as patriotic

as supporting political leaders if they were judged to be inadequate for the common good of America or the world.



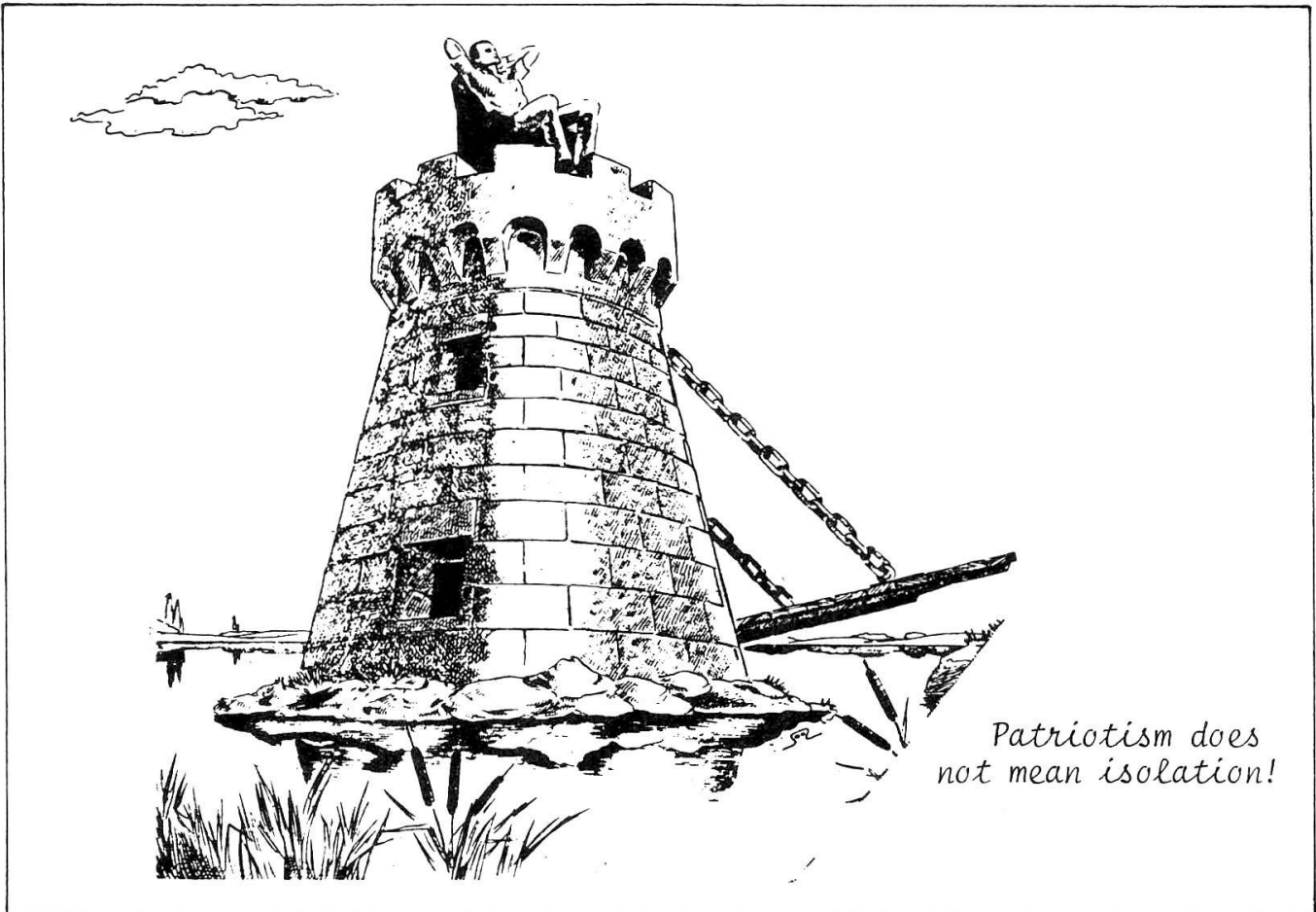
*There are many ways to express patriotism!*

The essence of patriotism in China today is expressed by the leadership as furthering the four basic tenets of the Revolution, viz. socialism, dictatorship of the proletariat, adhering to Marxist-Leninism-Mao thought, and leadership of the Communist Party, and recently also working for the Four Modernizations. Economic ventures, education, journalism, religion and all aspects of life in China are, according to the Communist Party, patriotic or not in so far as they adhere to this policy. And so, what we see happening is that patriotism now takes on the new and narrow meaning of "supporting an ideology" rather than lov-

ing one's country. It is this ideology, or rather the interpreters of it at any given time, which determines what it means to love one's country. This denies the word patriotism of its objective meaning. If this line of reasoning is followed, a capitalist ruled country could then make the furthering of capitalism a sign of patriotism, a Moslem ruled country could declare anyone unpatriotic who does not work for the spread of Islam, etc. The meaning then changes from love of one's country to love of someone else's ideology. Individual citizens can no longer determine what love of country means to them personally. This has happened in other countries in the course of history with dire consequences for that country and the world.

With the establishment of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the interpretation of patriotic became even more hazardous for Chinese Catholics. By using this term as part of the title for this association within the Catholic Church in China, sides were drawn up and tensions arose. The implication was made that anyone who does not subscribe to the CCPA cannot consider himself/herself to be patriotic. Many Chinese Christians vehemently disagree with this assertion. They do not see why love of Motherland and joining this government sponsored association are inseparably connected. Of course, the central bone of contention is the claim that being a member of an international church with a non-Chinese spiritual leader is contrary to China's drive for independence, and so unpatriotic. This is no more logical than saying that Chinese banks and all their directors are unpatriotic because they have applied to the International Monetary Fund, the chairman of which is not Chinese, thus endangering China's economic independence. Or that adhering to the spirit and regulations of the International Olympic Commission makes China's Olympic Committee and all its members unpatriotic because the IOC's chairman is not Chinese and dictates much of Olympic policy and chooses sites for each Olympic Games. Or that the Party itself somehow showed a lack of patriotism by applying for admission to the United Nations, thus taking the chance of being dictated to by its non-Chinese leader and other nations. The same would follow for China's recent application to join the International Atomic Energy Agency. No doubt the Chinese agree with the statement of Hans Blix, the present director general of IAEA, who said: "I am confident that China will both benefit from and contribute to the global cooperation within the agency."<sup>4</sup> Apparently these groups feel they can maintain a large degree of independence while still gaining many advantages from sharing in dialogue and mutual assistance with the other members of these international organizations. Many Catholics feel they can do the same by remaining in union with the Catholics of other nations under the spiritual leadership of an elected pope from any nation.

Other popes since Liberation and the founding of the CCPA have spoken against its insistence on independence from Rome, but they have not addressed themselves to the interpretation of patriotism in the life of a Christian to the extent that John Paul II has. He seems to have made the proper understanding of what it means to be a patriotic Christian, or rather to insist that all Christians should necessarily be patriotic, a priority in his speeches and writings regarding China. Naturally, this is due in part to the fact that since China has opened up more to the world, it is easier to know what is happening and being said by the government and the CCPA leaders in China, but also because John Paul II, like popes before him, has made so many overtures for greater dialogue with China. It also stems, perhaps even more, from just who John Paul II is.



It is normal, although perhaps not foreseen, that the first non-Italian leader of the Catholic Church in more than four centuries should be drawn into a verbal disagreement, one might almost say confrontation,

with Chinese government and CCPA leadership over what it means to be a patriot. He is living in a foreign country, directing a world-wide community of believers of every nationality, but he remains a son of Poland, intensely devoted to the good of his homeland. Catholics speak of "our Polish pope" and find no contradiction in this term. It is natural that he, more than any other pope in history, should find it difficult to accept the statement that a Chinese cannot be a good Christian and at the same time a good citizen of his own country, to hear the oft-quoted remark "Every time the Church gained a convert, China lost a citizen." It is easy to see why he seizes every opportunity to gainsay this claim, using his own situation as the most appropriate and forceful argument. One might say that this has become the central theme constantly recurring in his China speeches and writings, almost as if he doesn't believe that anyone could seriously make such a claim in view of all the evidence to the contrary. He points out how overseas Chinese have proven beyond a doubt that as sincere and zealous christians they have maintained a great love for China. It goes so much against his own conception of himself as a Polish Catholic. He knows his love for Poland is in no way diminished because he is a christian, and if this is true for him, why should it not be true for a Chinese or any other christian in the world? Perhaps this accusation by the Chinese has touched him so deeply that he intensifies his concerns for his homeland to the point of leaving himself open to another criticism, namely, of being too patriotic and even political as pope. Pope Paul VI, the first pope to address the General Assembly of the United Nations, said:

*"This encounter, as you all understand, marks a simple and at the same time a great moment. It is simple, because you have before you a humble man, your brother, and among you all, representatives of sovereign states, the least-invested, if you wish to think of him thus, with a minuscule, as it were symbolic, temporal sovereignty, only as much as is necessary to be free to exercise his spiritual mission and to assure all those who deal with him that he is independent of every other sovereignty in this world."*<sup>5</sup>

Historically, this is what has been expected of recent popes, to remain above partisan politics. When they were judged to have erred in this regard, history has been very critical of them. We have become accustomed to seeing our present pope offer a symbolic gesture of this love for all countries and peoples when, upon leaving his plane and setting foot on the soil of a country, he immediately bends down to kiss the ground.

The texts making the assertion that a Chinese cannot at the same time be a christian and a good Chinese citizen, and the way in which the government interprets patriotic citizenship today are probably familiar to all those interested in China. We give here just the specific statements of Pope John Paul II regarding this allegation that a Chinese cannot be both patriotic and christian. He insists that all christians in every part of the world are expected to be patriotic, not in spite of, but rather because they are christians. And, by implication, that not only those christians in China who adhere to the CCPA policy of independence from Rome should be considered patriotic.

#### STATEMENTS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II:

1) *"The Lord, who sent his Apostles into the whole world recommending that they should teach all nations, is surely close, in a particular way, to these sons and daughters of the Church in China; while keeping the Catholic Faith in the Gospel, they show at the same time their love for their country, and they work with greater good-will toward its prosperity. The Church in fact has always been anxious that her confessors should contribute to the good of each worldly country. We find proofs of this fact in the history of many peoples of the world.*

*I, as a son of my own nation, know how much I owe my love for my country to the teaching of Christ and to the mission of the Church in the history of my nation.*

*For this reason, in expressing heartfelt greetings for the golden jubilee of Monsignor Tang's religious life, I shall continue to keep in my prayers all the sons and daughters of the Church in his country, and implore from God a future of prosperity and progress for the entire Chinese people."*<sup>6</sup>

2) *"A Christian is not just a person of faith, but one who is also called to be the leaven and salt in the civil and political society that he or she lives in. The Church therefore inculcates in her faithful a deep sense of love and duty towards their fellow-countrymen and toward their native land. She encourages them to live as upright and exemplary citizens and to work loyally for the all-round progress of the nation of which they are proud to be members."*<sup>7</sup>

3) This concern of John Paul II reached its zenith in his Manila meeting with the catholic community there. It is a watershed that will be long remembered among all his references to China. This speech makes it easy to sense his own convictions and his desire to have them accept-

ed by others. The English weekly edition of the L'Osservatore Romano entitled his talk: "True Christians and Authentic Chinese" because its content emphasized this concept. He said:

*"...I know that it is your desire to be fully integrated into the life of the country where you live, and to contribute by your work, as good citizens, to the prosperity of the nation that is now your home. At the same time you wish to remain united in spirit with your relatives and friends in China. You wish to preserve the traditional Chinese moral values and culture that link you to your families' country of origin, the country you will always love dearly and to the progress of which you are willing to offer all the help desired.*

*You are also members of the local Church communities. These strengthen your commitment to Christ, and imbue you with the same Christian spirit that has been, in the past, the hallmark of the Chinese Christian communities in various countries of the world. Famous people in Chinese history have encountered Christ and have become Christians through the contact they had with those fervent and dynamic communities. If you maintain that spirit, if you live inspired by the Christian faith and strengthened by the specifically Chinese moral traditions, you will in a profound way be truly Christian and truly Chinese, and contribute to the richness of the whole Church.*

*... Through them (the martyrs of Nagasaki) I pay homage to all the men and women in Asia who have offered up their lives for the name of Jesus, giving proof thereby that the Gospel of Christ and his Church are not alien to any people or any nation but that they live in the hearts and in the minds of the people of all races and nations around the world.*

*... I am convinced that every catholic within your frontiers will fully contribute to the building up of China, since a genuine and faithful Christian is also a genuine and good citizen. A Christian - in any country of the world - is faithful to God, but he also has a deep sense of duty and of love towards his native land and his own people. He respects the things of the spirit and at the same time he consecrates his talents and skills to the common good. A good Chinese Catholic works loyally for the progress of the nation, observes the obligations of filial piety towards parents, family and country. Strengthened by the Gospel message, he will cultivate, like all good Chinese, the 'five main virtues' of charity, justice, temperance, prudence and fidelity.*

... The Christian message is not the exclusive property of any one group or race; it is addressed to everyone and belongs to everyone. There is therefore no opposition or incompatibility in being at the same time truly Christian and authentically Chinese."<sup>8</sup>

4) "Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world (cf. John 18, 36), the Church or People of God which establishes this kingdom does not take away anything from the temporal welfare of any people. Rather she fosters and takes to herself, in so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens and elevates them... This character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord Himself."<sup>9</sup>

5) "Father Matteo Ricci, together with his companions, then decided to take his religious witness to the very heart of the society and in order to do so, he adopted the lifestyle of the scholars, committed as he was in the social life of the community. By so doing he intended to demonstrate that religious faith did not lead to a flight from society, but to involvement in the world with regard to the perfection of social life up to the opening toward the life of grace in the Church.

... Just as the Fathers of the Church in regard to Greek culture, so also Father Matteo Ricci was rightly convinced that faith in Christ not only would not have brought any harm to Chinese culture, but would have enriched and perfected it. His Chinese disciples, some of whom became eminent men in government, showed that they were convinced that to accept the Christian faith did not at all imply abandoning one's own culture, nor did it imply a diminished loyalty to one's country and its traditions, but rather that the faith allowed them to offer a richer and more qualified service to their homeland.

... We can have faith that the obstacles can be removed and that an appropriate way and adequate structures will be found to resume dialogue and keep it constantly open. In this way all Chinese faithful will feel at ease both in the national community and in the Church as well. We are sure that this will also be to the advantage of the entire Chinese nation, which the Church deeply esteems and loves."<sup>10</sup>

The mind of Pope John Paul II is certainly clear from these direct statements. We can expect him to continue to seek opportunities to express his convictions in various contexts, but his own personal



witness as a christian son of Poland will no doubt remain his most cogent argument.

FOOTNOTES:

(1) Sixth Edition, 1976, p.809

(2) 1975 Edition, p.989

(3) Inaugural Speech before assuming office in 1961.

(4) Said when the board approved China's application and it was submitted to 111 members of the agency for a vote in 1983.

(5) Address of Pope Paul VI to the General Assembly of the United Nations, October 4, 1965.

(6) From a short address of the pope to the faithful in Rome on Sunday, September 7, 1980. Translated from Italian Edition of L'Osservatore Romano, September 11, 1980 by Fr. Angelo Lazzarotto.

(7) From 'Ad Limina' visit of Taiwan bishops on November 11, 1980. L'Osservatore Romano, English weekly edition, November 24, 1980.

(8) Address during visit to the Philippines, February 18, 1981. Quoted in L'Osservatore Romano, English Edition, February 25, 1981.

(9) Letter to bishops of the world inviting them to pray for the Church in China, January 6, 1982. English Edition of L'Osservatore Romano, February 1, 1982.

(10) Talk to participants in a study congress during the fourth centenary of Father Ricci's arrival in China, October 25, 1982. English Edition of L'Osservatore Romano, November 22, 1982.