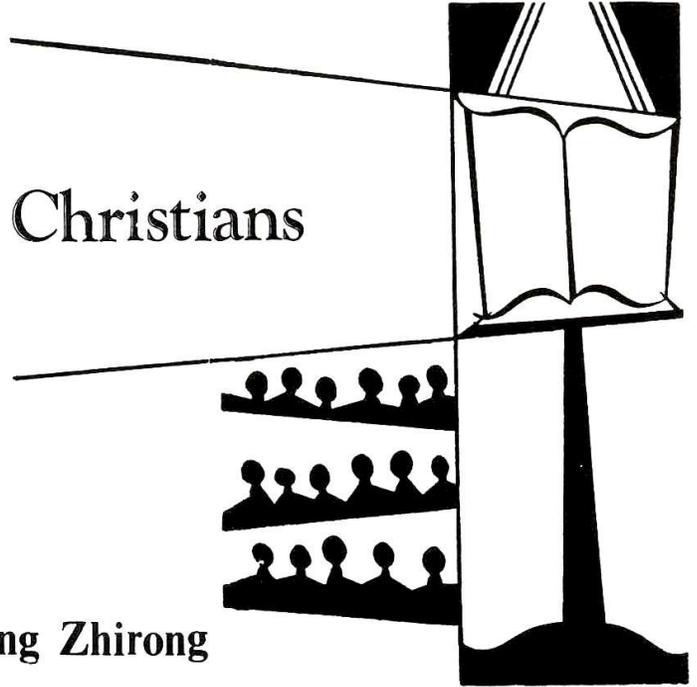


Today's Chinese Christians and Patriotism

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(A talk given by Fr. Mark Fang Zhirong, S.J. to over one hundred men and women religious of Hong Kong, at St. Mary's Canossian College, Kowloon, May 5, 1984)

In speaking about patriotism we are not talking here about the duty of patriotism, but are carrying out a brief investigation about how to love one's country. Both sides of the Taiwan Straits emphasize patriotism, advocate serving the people, affirm self-respect and self-confidence in the motherland, and both sides are on the road to modernization. However, ideologically and politically both sides are very different. Faced with this complicated state of affairs, what means of patriotism should we Christians choose? In practicing patriotism, how do we manifest the special characteristics of being Christian? To answer these questions, we will make use of three expressions: unification versus unity; unity does not mean an abandonment of pluralism; and; besides building bridges, we must also erect a ladder. I hope that everyone will feel free later to express his or her comments.

I. Unification Versus Unity: Some Special Characteristics of Being Christian.

In today's world all Chinese know that the Chinese Communists want to unite China through Marxism. This is the so-called United Front. The Nationalist Party desires to bring about unification through the Three Principles of the People. Some call this the anti-United Front. We Christians do not speak about unification, but about unity. We are unwilling, and moreover do not have the strength, to dominate others. But we can and should advocate interior repentance in each person, and in this way promote unity among all. When he first began to preach the Gospel, the Lord said: "The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand, repent and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15). As he was nearing death, Jesus said to Pilate: "Mine is not a kingdom of this world" (John 18:36). A Christian's unique characteristics come from Christ. In the situation of today's China, these characteristics can be displayed in the following different ways.

1. Do not only observe the faults of others, but look at your own faults, and continuously make repentance. In capitalism, socialism only sees "the profit motive," which is often carried out at the expense of others. Or it sees spiritual fruits becoming commercialized, or crises of the spirit brought about by freedom (cf. Hu Qiaomu, "An Address at the Seminar on Questions of the Ideological United Front," August 8, 1981). Socialists are not willing to consider the good qualities of a controlled capitalism: new inventions, self-development, efficiency and prosperity. By the same token, capitalist society only sees lack of freedom, poverty, and underdevelopment in socialism. It does not consider the moderation, the disdain for vanity and opposition to luxury, which are definitely required in today's world where the majority of people lack the necessities of life. A Christian's special quality or characteristic is to cast the plank from his own eye before being able to see clearly to remove the splinter from his brother's eye. (Matt. 7:5)

2. Do not look at your good points only, but consider the good points of other people, and give glory to God (cf. Matt. 5:16). When Peng Zhen was explaining the fourth Chinese Constitution (1982), after affirming the economic system of ownership by all the people and the cooperative system of the working masses, he added a section about workers' individual enterprises: "Workers who participate in a rural collective economic organization, within the confines of the law, have the right to manage private plots, private orchards, household side-

line productions and feed for private livestock." This is basically part of Deng Xiaoping's open policy, which has already had a great effect on the peoples' livelihood in the whole country. However, they do not admit that this is a benefit of a free economy. They call it only a supplement to socialism: "The individual economic enterprises of workers in the city or countryside, which are set up in accordance with the law, are a supplement to the public ownership economy of socialism." At the same time, most western societies only take into consideration the achievements of a free economy. They are unwilling to accept the challenges put to them by socialism, namely, waste, selfishness and the unequal distribution of goods.

3. Christians do not consider themselves to be the highest criterion for judging good and evil, or right and wrong. This "self" can stand for an individual, a party, an organization or a political power. What is the highest criterion, then? Christians acknowledge this to be the Word of God - the Bible is the highest standard for distinguishing right from wrong and good from evil. The Word of God was revealed to man in order that man might be saved. However as long as man is in this world, he also undergoes the judgment of God's Holy Word. Men mutually blame one another, pass judgment upon one another, find it difficult to separate the noble from the base, or are unable to distinguish right from wrong; therefore, Jesus exhorted us: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged" (Matt. 7:1). But "The Word of God is something alive and active. It cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts." (Heb. 4:12)

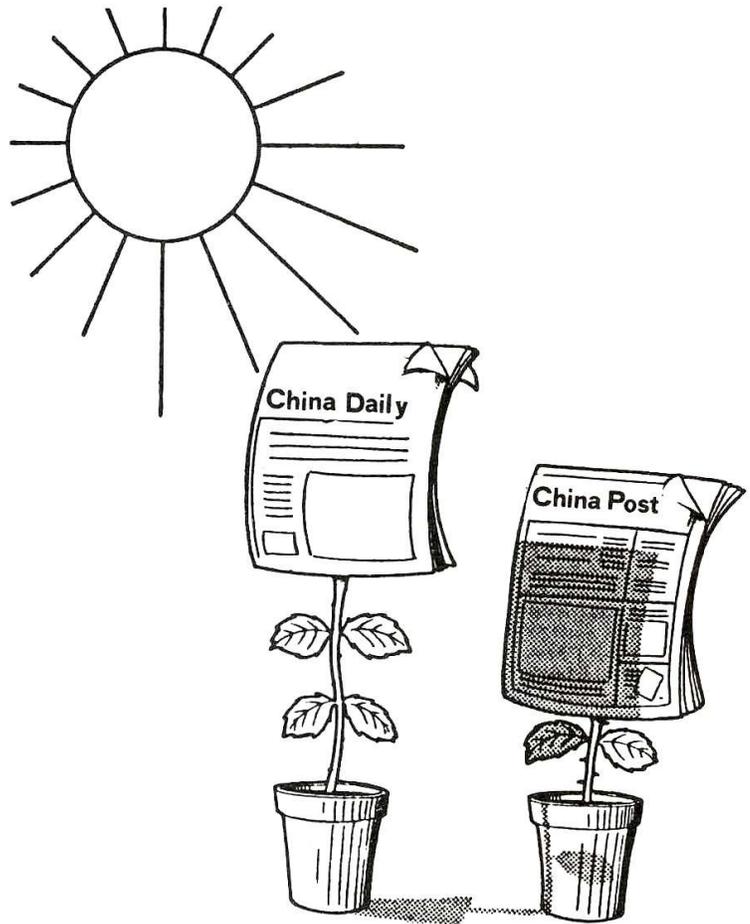
4. Besides the Bible, Catholics have tradition and the magisterium. The Bible and sacred tradition are closely bound together. The latter flows out from the same divine source, converges into one stream, and proceeds towards a common objective. (Vatican II's Constitution on Revelation, No. 9). The Church's magisterium is not located in God's word, but has been passed on by tradition. It is clear that sacred tradition, the Bible, and the magisterium of the Church mutually support and complete one another. All three elements must exist together. (Ibid., No. 10). The lessons of history are very painful. Our separated brethren and Churches bring to the Christian faith a certain vitality and creativity. However, the split in Christianity has led to a weakening of the Christian faith. It is difficult to propagate abroad a complete faith, and even more difficult to face the attacks of atheism. If we as Christians are split apart, how can we erect defenses when

various forces are poised to attack? It is clear that the movement towards unity has an important role to play if Christians are to express love of country. They must first energetically strive for unity among themselves, and then work for unity among others. Catholics have reason to believe that their church is a cornerstone in the great task of Christian unity.

II. Unity Does Not Do Away with Pluralism: Rather It Requires Pluralism

Times have changed and things have become very complicated. There are many realities today which are impossible not to accept. In order to accept reality, it is impossible not to have a pluralistic attitude. However, pluralism does not mean that we give up our principles or abandon our faith. Rather, we must seek a 'modus vivendi.' We ought not recklessly to "create a situation in which heroism becomes a moral obligation, or else we run the risk of grievous injustice." (John E. Linnan, Tripod, #19, p.46).

What does pluralism mean? In today's discussion it means the different lifestyles, the different attitudes and opinions flowing from these, and even the different ways Catholics in Taiwan, China and Hong Kong solve their problems. I will attempt to explain what I mean below.



In order to accept reality, it is impossible not to have a pluralistic attitude!

1. Based on their own life experiences, Taiwan Catholics desire to maintain the purity of their faith. They absolutely do not want to compromise with atheism or with a political power which hinders religious freedom. They have their reasons and necessities. For example, a book published recently (written by Wu Yan) entitled "A Perspective on the Catholic Church on the Mainland - A Discussion of the CCP's Religious Policy" (Tainan: Window Press) is worthwhile to read. The five points mentioned in the book are rich in content and reliably documented. Another writer, Father Ladany, although not in Taiwan, in an essay entitled "A Look at the Catholic Church in China at the End of 1983" severely criticizes the Communist Party and Marxism. In his article, Father Ladany gives the historical background of the Vatican's 1958 decision not to allow the Chinese Church to elect and consecrate their own bishops. It helps people to make a more balanced evaluation of this incident.

The two above mentioned authors are Catholic priests with substantial educational backgrounds, strong faith and high moral standards. We should take the opportunity, while they are still in our midst, of having them enlighten us further on some aspects of truth and reality by their speaking and writing. Otherwise, a very important side of reality and an important aspect of the truth would be blotted out. This would result in, compromise, opportunism and ambiguity and cause the resolve and determination of the loyal Christians who courageously defend their faith to be abandoned. Then the only road open to them would be to place themselves in the hands of God.

2. In talking about pluralism, the mainland should also be included. Actually, in the interior of the mainland, the situation is even more "pluralistic", if we, involved as we are in the work of unity and reconciliation, would avoid using words like "split" to describe the situation. Fundamentally, the Church on the mainland is divided into two main parts: the bishops, priests and Catholics of the Patriotic Association (Wu Yan calls this the public, or open, part of the mainland Church), and the Catholics, priests and bishops who do not belong to the Patriotic Association (Wu Yan calls this the hidden part of the Church on the mainland).

The priests and bishops of the Patriotic Association find themselves in a very difficult position today. There are not only problems of lack of relations with the Vatican and the Pope (this comes from external forces, and is not a situation which they can control); but there are also many deeper and more internal problems: concern for the

future of the Chinese Church, difficulties in training clergy (their successors in the Church) and the heart-felt pain of priests who have married. One of these has said: "I do not live with my wife anymore. When I move back to the Church, then I can officially perform the work of a priest."

Generally speaking, besides problems of canon law and theology, there are problems of the heart, of the spiritual life, and of adapting to the times. We ourselves cannot forget the time of the Second Vatican Council and the fifteen year period before and after it (1960-75). We recall that it was a time of great change in the whole Catholic Church. It was a time of great turmoil especially in clerical circles and in the religious life. These fifteen years were also the most painful and self-destructive period of communist rule on the China mainland. The people on the mainland unanimously admit this. What is different is that we outside of China have various means and opportunities at our disposal for overcoming obstacles, but for their part, they are restricted. It was difficult for them to have a chance for renewal and updating. It is like this to the present day.

As for those non-Patriotic Association Catholics (still the majority), priests (not many) and bishops (even fewer), they are certainly worthy of our admiration. On the one hand, we should not disturb their consciences or their heroic lives. We should certainly not make any decision for them. On the other hand, we should think of a way to help them absorb the new spirit of Vatican Council II, and the attitude with which the Church now faces the modern world, which is different from the past. Lastly, we should help prepare their hearts to face calmly the possibility that contacts between the Vatican and the Chinese communists will take place in the future. Last year the Vatican asked all the foreign missionary bishops to give up the titles to their sees on the mainland. At the beginning of this year, in the Annuario of the Holy See where the "Chinese Bishops' Conference" is listed, the word "regional" was added to show that the Taiwan bishops' conference does not represent all of China. These are quite significant changes. We must be sympathetic to the efforts the Holy See is making. This does not mean that we forget the faithful resolve of many courageous people of principle. It only signifies an effort to bring about greater freedom for the Church in China, so that it might more openly practice and propagate its faith, and that it might have more contacts and exchanges with the universal Church. We must admit that this unlimited openness of the Church is really the same spirit and attitude as that of Jesus Christ. "What proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while

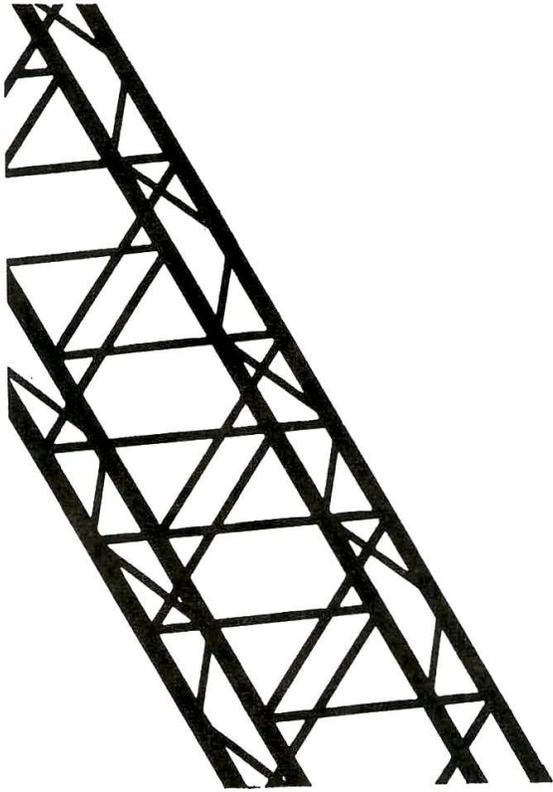
we were still sinners." (Rom. 5:8). If Christ had to wait until we were not sinners before dying for us, how long do you think he would have to wait?

3. There is a reason for speaking about Hong Kong in the last place. If the Holy Father has given the Taiwan Church the task of being a bridge-church between China and Chinese overseas (cf. Speech of Pope John Paul II to seven Taiwan bishops, Feb. 28, 1984), then Hong Kong is already serving as a bridge. Regarding this, you know more than I do, and your experience is fuller than mine. I need not say much about it. Today I will give just one example to show what I mean by being a bridge. For the last ten days I have stayed at Holy Spirit Seminary and Holy Spirit Study Centre. Since its establishment in 1930, Holy Spirit Seminary has trained many clergy and pastoral workers for the Chinese Church. In Taiwan at the present time there are many priests who have studied there. Now the facilities, environment and faculty have developed greatly from the past. There are also several young priests doing special studies abroad who in a short time will join the teaching ranks.

The Holy Spirit Study Centre has been in operation for more than three years, and already there have been observable accomplishments. Besides the research team and the materials which have been gathered, the centre's bi-monthly magazine, Tripod, is a public forum which displays an open attitude and a willingness to accept opinions from all sides. Such a magazine could not be published in Taiwan. It is even more improbable that it could be published in China. Hong Kong is the only suitable place for it. This clearly demonstrates the Hong Kong Church's function as a bridge. Of course, to be a bridge, it is necessary that both sides be connected. It is somewhat easier for our side of the bridge. We have only to nourish our mutual trust, cooperativeness and openness. At least we should make every effort to be understanding. Due to past experiences, the other side of the bridge is apprehensive. They have been closed off for many years and lack self-confidence. Ought not we, rooted in the love of Christ, be less fault-finding and more expressive of our concern? Ought we not make a greater effort to help people on the other side of the bridge hear what this side is saying, and help them to understand what is being said?

III. To Achieve Unity: It Is Not Enough to Build a Bridge; We Must also Raise a Ladder.

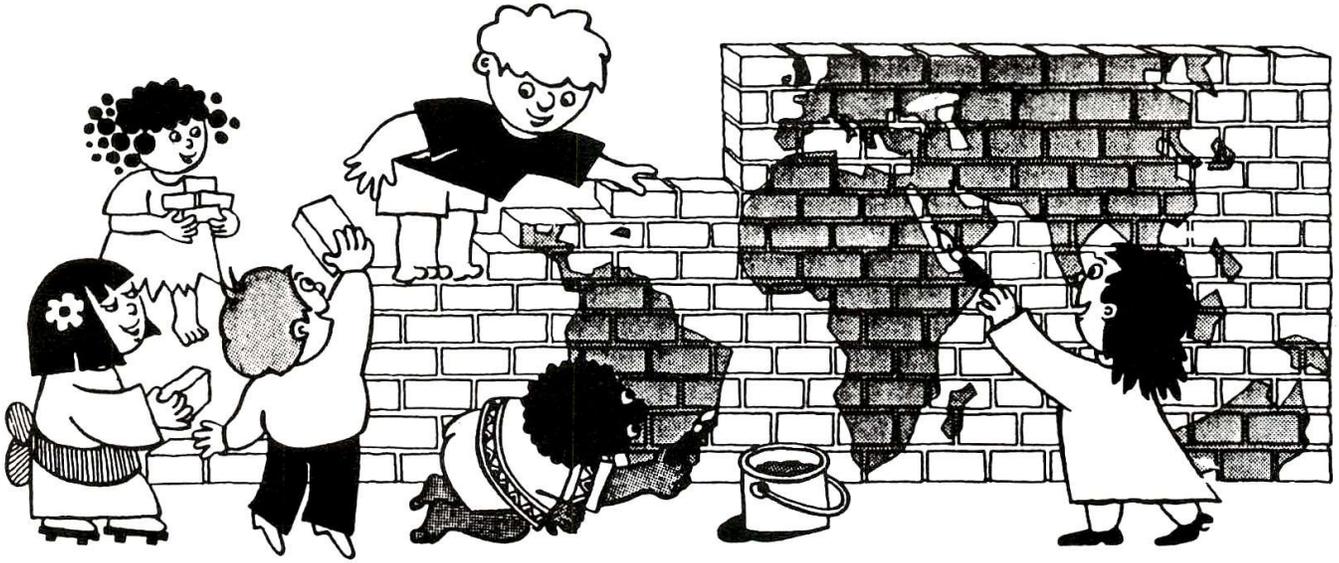
This ladder extends from earth to heaven, a heavenly ladder (cf. Gen. 28:12-17; John 1:51). From human history or from the history



*We must raise a ladder from earth
to heaven.*

of any race of people, we see that the work of unity and reconciliation is very difficult. The change of dynasties in our country's history often resulted in unification. However, this did not achieve unity or reconciliation. Rather, it was a situation of unification brought about by brute force, violence, wars and the shedding of blood. The establishment of the Republic of China was the only exception. And this exceptional accomplishment only came about because of the inspiration given by our national father, Dr. Sun Yatsen. He was able to fuse together the spiritual traditions of China and the west - his own Christian faith was part of this. The weapons of war have developed to such a degree today that man should never again wage war. We certainly do not ever want to witness again Chinese fighting Chinese, cruelly killing one another, and brother shedding brother's blood.

How are unity and reconciliation to be achieved? For the Chinese Christian, there is an answer to this difficult question: earnestly practice magnanimity (Following is an explanation of the Chinese characters for magnanimity, 忠恕 - "zhong shu"). Christians must also show Christian charity (as described in 1 Cor. 13). This is to be like Dr. Sun Yatsen, whom historians have called "the most compassionate revolutionary in human history." Christians have the answer because basically Jesus Christ's whole life and all his work were devoted to bringing about unity and reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18; John 17:20-26). Although among Christian believers there is the sad phenomenon of division, the Catholic Church herself is really a mighty force for unity and reconciliation. The Church brings many nationalities, cultures and systems together into one family of God. Under the leadership of the Risen Christ and of his visible representative among men - the Pope as head, together with the leadership provided by the bishops' conferences of the world, all walk together on the eternal road to heaven.



We Christians must cooperate with Christ and his Church and become involve in the work of unity and reconciliation.

This fact should inspire confidence in us, and in a hopeless situation still give us steadfast hope. Hope for what? Hope that our Lord Jesus Christ, through his "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" will be able to continue to carry out his great work of unity and reconciliation in the Chinese Church. We Christians must cooperate with Christ and his Church, and with all our mind and heart become involved in the work of unity and reconciliation. This is the best way for us Christians to love our country.

The heavenly ladder has meaning on another level. We do not only depend on human effort to accomplish this difficult task of unity and reconciliation. We must rely on the help of God. Said in another way, unity and reconciliation pertain not only to economic, social, political and cultural problems, but for us believers in Christ, there is also the spiritual dimension. Unless in our life of faith we deeply experience God's Holy Word, and believe that Jesus Christ surpasses Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed and Marx, we will not be able to pass the test. We will have no strength to face the challenges thrown at us by others, e.g. you believe in Christ, I believe in Confucius, he believes in Marx; it is a case of "six of one, half a dozen of the other;" everyone is about the same. Unless our life is permeated by the spirit of the Gospel, it will not be easy to find a path for dialogue which is both open and principled. That is, to be uncompromising on fundamental beliefs, to be open in matters where there are alternatives, and in

discussion with others to always maintain a spirit of charity.

Problems, of course, still remain. What are fundamental beliefs? What questions have alternative answers? The answer is still the same: only a deep spiritual life will make us seek the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and willingly ask opinions from others and from the Church's magisterium. My brothers and sisters in the Lord, mankind once tried to build a tower to heaven, but they failed miserably (Gen. 11:1-9). That failure should not stop us from trying again to erect a ladder to heaven. Because that heavenly ladder is already there.

It is the Body of Christ: "You will see heaven laid open and, above the Son of Man, the angels of God ascending and descending." (John 1:51). The mission of bringing about unity and reconciliation is nothing other than building up the Body of Christ. Thank you all for being here and for your attention. Thank you.



The heavenly ladder is the Body of Christ.

