

Speech to the Seventh National Congress of Catholic Representatives

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Esteemed Bishops Fu Tieshan and Liu Yuanren, All Representatives, and Friends:

Today Catholic representatives from every place in China on behalf of 5,000,000 Chinese Catholics, clergy and laity, here solemnly commence the Seventh National Congress of the Chinese Catholic Church (CCC). You have gathered here to sum up the past six years of work, to elect a new group of leaders, and to discuss the good and holy task of running the CCC independently. On behalf of the United Front Department of the Central Government, and the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), I express fervent congratulations on the opening of your assembly. To all of you seated here, and to our Catholic friends throughout the country whom you represent, I convey the warmest greetings and best wishes.

During these six years, under the guidance of Bp. Fu Tieshan, Bp. Liu Yuanren, and other patriotic religious leaders, the "One Association, One Conference" [Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) and Bishops Conference] of the Catholic Church, in accord with the resolutions and mandate of the Sixth National Congress,

have engaged in vigorous discussion, bravely created new things, overcome hardships, done solid work, have probed the adaptation of the CCC to a socialist society, taken new strides along that road, and have obtained manifest results.

The “One Association, One Conference” led the clergy and laity throughout the nation. Taking national interest and nationalism as cardinal principles, they resolutely opposed the Vatican’s “canonization” [of 120 saints on October 1, 2000], which was done in disregard for the autonomy of the CCC, and was a distortion and a falsification of the history of imperialist aggression. The “One Association, One Conference” received support and respect from all social strata in our nation. With a high degree of responsibility and sense of their mission, they organized their efforts to write a new chapter in the history of the CCC, compiling educational material on how to run the church independently. They offered this course in all the major seminaries nationwide, laying a sturdy foundation for the CCC and benefiting those who will come afterwards. Based on opinions gathered from all sides, they formulated “The Regulations for the Work of the CPA,” “The System for Joint Meetings of the ‘One Association, One Conference,’” and “The System for Diocesan Administration.” These three sets of systems provide institutional guarantees for promoting the democratic management of the Church. They [the leaders of the “One Association, One Conference”] independently elected and consecrated over 20 bishops and auxiliary bishops according to the requirements of Church administration. They adjusted some diocesan boundaries to accord with civil ones. They promoted the fine development of pastoral and evangelical work. They actively organized help for the poor and relief for disaster victims. They organized free medical consultation and free performances, and one in heart with people across the nation resisted the SARS epidemic. They have built up a good image of serving the people. As the facts prove, the sixth group of leaders of the “One Association, One Conference” was a team that chose to move forward, actively reaching upwards, and in

step with the times. They were a leadership team that really got things done.

The 16th Party Congress confirmed the basic direction of a new stage of religious work in a new century, i.e., thoroughly implementing the entire government policy of freedom of religious belief, supervising religious affairs in accordance with the law, holding fast to the principle of running religions independently, and positively directing religion to adapt to socialist society. Party Central, with Hu Jintao as General Secretary, is fully solicitous for the masses of religious believers, and they highly esteem religious work. At the beginning of this year [2004], Party Central and the State Council convened a National Conference on Religious Work, stressing once again that we must include religious believers among the broad masses of the people, whose embodied wisdom and strength will establish an all-around prosperous, socialist society. Facing reform and opening, and the immensely difficult responsibility of modernization, facing intricate international and internal situations, facing profound changes in the social environment, and facing new conditions and problems in the Catholic Church, how the CCC clearly views the situation, consolidates its experience, grasps opportunities, faces challenges, and plans well the work of the next five years; how the work of Catholics in loving the nation and loving the Church takes new steps forward and breaks new ground for the sake of preserving social stability, makes new contributions to promoting a socialist market economy, is not the main responsibility of this assembly only, but will also be of great significance and a positive influence on the future development of the CCC.

I take this opportunity to mention a few points, hoping that all of you will take them into consideration.

I. Unswervingly uphold the independence of the Church from beginning to end

Our national Constitution clearly stipulates that religious bodies and religious activities are not to be controlled by foreign

powers. This is based on our nation's experience of having suffered long period of humiliation and plunder by imperialism. The historical reality of some religions being controlled and used by imperialism led the broad masses of believers in our country to choose self-rule. The CCC firmly supports the principle of running the Church independently. This has won firm support from the Party and the government, universal welcome from all social strata, and understanding from religious organizations and individuals in many nations throughout the world. During the past fifty years, the principle of running the Church independently has penetrated the marrow of the CCC, and has become the basis on which the CCC has settled down and proceeded with its work. History has already proved, and will continue to prove, that without firmly adhering to running the Church independently, the CCC today would not be a picture of prosperity. Without adhering firmly to running the Church independently, the CCC would not have glorious prospects for the future. Today and tomorrow, just as previously, the Party and the government will support the CCC as it resolutely advances along the road of running the Church independently.

As everyone knows, the principles on which the Chinese government would improve Sino-Vatican relations are crystal clear and consistent: the Vatican must sever so-called "diplomatic relations" with Taiwan, recognizing that the government of the PRC is the sole legal government of all of China, and the Vatican must not interfere in the governance of our nation, which includes not interfering in the internal affairs of our nation in the name of religious affairs. The Chinese government is sincere about promoting the normalization of Sino-Vatican relations, and has made positive efforts in this regard. But the Vatican, without giving a thought to the repeated strong opposition and advice from the Chinese government not to go ahead, disregarded the autonomy of the CCC, and was determined to use the "canonizations" to distort and revise history. The Vatican seriously hurt the feelings of the Chinese people, thus once again destroying the foundation for normalizing Sino-Vatican relations. The Vatican should accept

complete responsibility for this. Despite this, we still hope that the Vatican will make some sincere and realistic efforts to improve relations.

We must clearly realize that the principle of running the CCC independently, and the self-election and self-consecration of bishops will be upheld for the long term. These cannot change. The religious question is long-term, involves the masses of the people, and is especially complex by nature. The Catholic Church has its own special features. The Party and the government consistently respect religion's own rules, respect the Catholic faith, and also take note of the special features of the Catholic Church. This is totally consistent with our upholding the principles of the independent running of the CCC, and with the self-election and self-consecration of its bishops. We hope that our Catholic friends correctly recognize and deal well with the relationship between religion and politics, hold firmly to the unity of loving China and loving the Church, and consciously protect the highest interests of the nation and the collective interests of the people.

In the current situation of progressively opening up, the Catholic side displays many new situations and new problems. External forces take advantage of the Catholic Church to infiltrate our nation. The plot to usurp the power of our Catholic leaders becomes more evident by the day. Upholding the principle of running the Church independently is facing ever more severe testing. Again the Party and the government emphasize that as the country opens up more and more, we must be even more unwavering in upholding the principle of the independent running of the Church, and we must be even better at carrying out the work of resisting infiltration. Upholding the principle of the independent running of the Church and performing well the work of resisting infiltration is not only related to the ability of the CCC to maintain its correct course of development, but it is also related to our country's security and stability. We support all levels of the CPA to broaden and increase their work of education in patriotism and socialism, and to deepen education in the principle of the

independent administration of the Church, among the clergy and masses of believers. They must maintain a high degree of vigilance towards foreign inimical forces using religion to infiltrate and interfere. Make resistance to infiltration automatic and self-conscious, and build up firm defenses against infiltration. At the same time, the Party and government, as they have done in the past, support the CCC's development, based on the principles of mutual respect and equality, of friendly exchanges with foreign countries, and the furthering of understanding among Catholic Churches in every country of the world.

II. Keep Up with the Times, and Positively Advance the Democratic Running of the Church

To advance the democratic running of the Church is an objective requirement of the CCC in the new historical conditions of maintaining the principle of the independent running of the Church. It is also a necessary requirement for the CCC to adapt to socialist society. The democratic running of the Church embodies the implementation of "collective leadership, democratic supervision, mutual discussion and common decision making" in Church affairs. It emphasizes putting common wisdom into play, and depending on the strength of the masses. The democratic running of the Church does not touch upon spiritual authority, nor does it weaken the authority of the bishop. Not long ago, at a meeting of Catholic Patriotic Association secretaries in Changsha, Bishop Fu Tieshan said well that the CCC work requires collective wisdom and strength. To run the Church well by only depending on the wisdom and capability of the bishop is very difficult. The implementation of a democratic running of the Church can advance the strengths and lessen the shortcomings, or can use the strengths of all to make up for shortcomings. The bishops' wisdom and that of the priests, Sisters and laity are gathered together to create a force for developing every aspect of Church work. The deeper the democratic running of the Church enters people's hearts, the more healthily will the evangelization work of the Church develop. The

more the democratic running of the Church advances, the firmer will the foundation of the CCC's independence become.

The "One Association, One Conference" of the CCC, based on deep discussion and concrete practice, have formed the three systems for running the Church democratically. These sum up very well the several decades' practical experience of the CCC's independent running of the Church. They have raised the Church to the level of systematization and regulation. This is very significant. The three systems are not only in accordance with the Catholic Church's tradition, but they are in accordance with the CCC's practical situation. They are a practical expression of the CCC's perseverance in love of country and love of Church, and of its keeping up with the times. They will give new life to the CCC's evangelization work.

The democratic running of the Church is in accordance with the trends of development in the world today, as well as being in accord with China's national feeling and the CCC's concrete situation. It has obtained the support of the great mass of clergy and Catholics, as well as the praise of Catholic friends abroad. Inimical forces from abroad, which attack the three systems, have as their purpose the destruction of the foundation of the independent running of the Church by denying its democratic administration. They desire to seize leadership authority in the CCC and once again control over the CCC. I hope that patriotic organizations at every level will increase their propaganda and educational activities to help the clergy and the mass of Catholics to firmly ward off the noisy interference from abroad. We will continue to support the CCC to positively implement the democratic running of the Church, to conscientiously set up the three democratic systems, and through practical action accelerate the CCC's adaptation to socialist society.

While advancing the democratic running of the Church, you must also really build up and strengthen the CPA, and completely bring into play the positive functions of the CPA at all levels. You must be careful to avoid the phenomenon of emphasizing the church affairs organizations and the building up of dioceses, and

treating lightly the building up of the CPA. The CPA is the bridge between the Party and government and the mass of believers. To completely set up and to bring into the play the functions of the CPA organizations has great importance and significance for guaranteeing that the leadership authority in the CCC is always firmly in the hands of patriotic forces, for guaranteeing that the CCC always develops in the right direction, and for guaranteeing that the CCC always maintains the principle of independent administration. In the new historical conditions, the responsibilities of the CPA are even more formidable and its function even more important. The CPA not only cannot become weaker, it must be even further strengthened. I hope that the new leaders of the "One Association, One Conference" will firmly take charge of building up the CPA at every level and emphasize the bringing into play of the functions of the CPA. I hope that the CPA at every level will arouse its spirit, be self-confident, completely raise their personal standards, really change their manner of working, conscientiously solve the problems they meet in their work and cooperate closely with the church affairs organizations. This will cause the CPA to become an effective organization in the Church, and really take up the historical tasks and glorious mission, which the times have bestowed upon it.

III. Strengthen the Foundations, and Put Great Effort into Forming Qualified Personnel

One of the important topics for discussion at this representatives' assembly is the high degree of emphasis given to the building up of the Catholic Church community itself. This is especially true of the emphasis on the formation of qualified Catholic reserves. In Catholic work today this is the most important matter amongst many important matters.

In today's Catholic Church there is a shortage of human power. The problem of succession is very serious. Among the five religions in our country, this situation is most serious in the Catholic Church. In the 97 dioceses of our country's Catholic

Church at the present time, 36 dioceses are without a bishop. Among the present bishops, those above the age of 75 amount to 80% of the total. Speeding up the formation of episcopal reserves, and choosing qualified successors is of the utmost urgency and brooks no delay. Can this passive situation be reversed, and this outstanding problem be solved, in the shortest possible time? This is directly related to the CCC's love of country and love of Church enterprise, and directly affects the future fate of the CCC. Regarding this, the old CPA members are very worried, and they urgently hope that more effort can be put into the work of training successors.

Whether the principles of independent administration and the self-election and self-consecration of bishops can be maintained, or whether the democratic running of the Church can positively be implemented, the key is that the CPA organizations are really up to the task, and the core is that the training of patriotic and church-loving personnel is taken as a priority. Every level of CPA organization must have a sense of urgency and a sense of danger. A high degree of awareness, both strategically and from the overall situation, of the extreme importance of this problem is called for. The CPA must make the firm decision to expend great effort to choose effective methods to quickly train and form a team of Catholic personnel who love their country and their Church. I hope that after this assembly, the "One Association, One Conference" and the CPA at every level, starting from the concrete situation, will immediately and conscientiously put their hand to coming up with a plan for training personnel over the short term, the middle term and the long term. With great concentration, care, and energy, they should choose and form a new generation of Catholic representatives, who fervently love their country, support the leadership of the Party and the socialist system, maintain the principle of independence, positively advance the democratic running of the church, have religious knowledge and are acceptable to the mass of Catholic believers. I propose that the present focus of work for the "One Association, One Conference" is to strengthen

the work of examining and training episcopal candidates, and to positively and reliably carry out the work of self-electing and self-consecrating bishops. Work hard to form a core of new generation patriotic and church-loving leaders within the next three to five years, which would solve the CCC's succession problem, smoothly transfer authority from old to young, and safely pass through the crisis.

To select and train qualified Catholic personnel, especially outstanding young personnel, you must liberate your thinking, take the long view, not stick to one pattern, and have perspicacity. As Bishop Fu Tieshan said, God did not create man completely whole and entire. Every person has their good points and their bad points. This is especially true of young people. They have their outstanding qualities, and also their shortcomings. They have this or that defect. But look at the big picture, the mainstream and the opportunity for development. Don't look for perfection. The older Catholics must take the development of the CCC seriously. They must really take up the sacred mission of educating the younger generation, and form them by word and example. The younger generation should respect the older generation of patriotic Catholics, humbly study and learn from them, and continue their good traditions. They should learn from their outstanding character, accept their precious experience, and grow up more quickly and healthily.

You must earnestly widen the channels for formation, and strengthen the formation mechanisms. Continue to hold study classes, research seminars, study tours, and other kinds of effective methods of formation. Focus your efforts on forming outstanding young clergy and lay Catholics. And continue to train the responsible persons of the "two associations" and dioceses at all levels. Pay great attention to running well the present Catholic seminaries. Further correct the managerial direction of the seminaries. Conscientiously sum up the experience of the seminaries' political classes and the classes in education in the independent running of the Church, and gradually spread these into the minor seminaries and convents. Through well-run political

education classes, raise the quality of the faculty, and develop better materials. Having obtained good results, you will raise the standard of the seminaries to a new level, and make them become important bases for forming qualified personnel for our country's Catholic Church.

Dear representatives and friends: this national representatives assembly is the CCC's first important meeting of the new century. I hope that each representative will have a sense of being the master of one's own affairs, be full of enthusiasm, and have a high degree of responsibility, as you deliberate matters, participate in discussions, exchange opinions, and present proposals. I hope this meeting will result in creating mutual trust and unity among yourselves, and in strengthening your faith, so that you can give accurate direction to the development of the CCC for the next few years, and lay the foundation for that development. We have every reason to believe that with the concern and support of Party Central, the State Council, Party committees at every level and of the government, the CCC and the CPA will unite with all the clergy and Catholics of the country to create an even brighter tomorrow and to obtain even greater achievements for the Chinese Catholic Church's independent enterprise.

I wish your assembly complete success, and good health and happiness to each representative!