

A Comment on the Core Values of Socialism and Their Relationship to Religion

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Recently Chinese authorities have put a lot of effort into spreading the core values of socialism. *China Religion*, the official publication of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) in its April 2014 issue, reserved quite a few pages to cover this topic. They published reports from each religion, presenting each one's relationship to socialism's core values. Mr. Liu Yuanlong, a vice-president and the general secretary of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, wrote the article on behalf of the Catholic Church. It appears on pp. 35-36 of the journal, and is entitled "The Catholic Faith and the Core Values of Socialism."

The article starts with a lengthy presentation of the role of socialist core values in achieving the "Chinese dream." Then the article points to the existence of core values in each group of people, in each country and in each period of time. It also elaborates on the difference between Chinese and Western values. Finally, almost as an appendix (just about one sixth of the whole article), it gives the following presentation of Catholic core values:

The core laws of the Catholic Church are the Ten Commandments, which are religious commandments to be practiced by all Christians. The Ten Commandments were originally the laws (legal system), which God proclaimed to the Hebrew people through Moses on Sinai Mount to regulate their religious and secular lives. The laws are called "Torah" in Hebrew. The moral dimension of Western civilization, which is based on the foundation of Christian religious faith, has absorbed to a great extent the spirit of the Ten Commandments, which have become the principles Christians observe in dealing with human and world affairs.

The first three of the Ten Commandments deal with the relationship between God and human beings. The other seven Commandments are concerned with relationships among human beings themselves, such as, “honor your father and mother, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet other people’s property”, etc. These are all related to the moral conduct of believers, reminding them to examine their lives within the constant presence of the Holy Spirit, and requiring them to maintain constant vigilance over their words and actions. In contemporary society, “honor your father and mother” extends to “love your fatherland, and love your people.” This requires Christians to have “patriotism, respect and friendship.” The leaders and faithful of the Chinese Catholic Church keep this commandment by “loving the nation and loving the Church.” That is, they are to maintain the direction and the principle of “administering an autonomous and independent church.” “Do not kill and do not steal” of the Ten Commandments requires Christians to keep the legal system and to obey the law; “do not bear false witness” requires them to be honest.

The Ten Commandments, which are to be taken in a religious spirit, show believers how to live their faith in the present world. This can be identified with the spirit of the core values of Socialism. For the masses of Christians, learning, understanding, practicing and spreading the vision of the core values of socialism provide a foundation and support for their faith.

It is really disheartening and disappointing to read the above article. It appears to be an unfair reduction and misinterpretation of Catholic values! In fact, it reduces Catholic faith to just *Old Testament* doctrine, without a single word about Jesus Christ himself and His teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mountain, the Eight Beatitudes, the parables of God’s mercy and the prodigal son, etc. There is not a word either about the teachings in other books of the *New Testament*.

The article admits that the first three Commandments deal with the relationship between God and human beings, but it fails to point out the values of our sharing a common origin, of being open to the transcendent and to the spiritual realm, of belonging to the same human family, of mutual dependence upon and concern for one another, etc.

There is also no mention of the specific values of the Catholic Church, such as the universality of the Catholic faith, the universal bond that links all Catholics, their solidarity and charitable services to the poor, the sick and the needy. The article mentions “love for the country and love for people,” but it does not specify who those are who need our love, giving the distinct impression that its concern is just political!

The disciples and the contemporaries of Jesus called him Rabbi or Teacher. How does the teaching of Jesus Christ differ from other teachers? Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, reveals to all people that God is love. He taught, not by abstract rules or legal compulsion, but by sharing His life with us, by becoming one of us, and by giving His life for our salvation. This act, which is different from mere rhetoric, changes our lives because humanity now realizes who we are. We are all children of God. We are loved, and are joined to one another as brothers and sisters.

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love” (1 *Jn* 4:18). As Christians (followers of Christ), we are called to be witnesses to this love. Catholics indeed love the country and the people. But we are challenged to do more. As members of Christ’s body, we heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds.

St. Paul, the apostle who brought the Christian faith to “foreigners”, and who was credited with building up the institution of the Church, did not stop with the law. “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful nor arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love never ends” (1 *Cor* 13: 4-8). The Catholic Church which is the sign of God’s reign on earth does not exclude anyone. She does not set up boundaries. She shares God’s love with all.

Mr. Liu's article admits that Western civilization is based upon and has absorbed Christian values, but it fails to point out that Socialism too is rooted, and has developed in the West, taking its main values from the Christian faith.

As a consequence, readers of the article cannot but be disappointed that the article presents such a limited and biased understanding of the Catholic faith. They cannot avoid thinking that the objective of the article was to exploit religion to support one's political stance. What if God, instead of politics, were the master?