

A Preliminary Proposal on Seminary Training

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In the past few years, under our Heavenly Father's loving care, over 10 major and minor seminaries have opened throughout China, and a new group of priests have been ordained to work in the Lord's vineyard. This is a comforting and joyous phenomenon.

In order to train future generations of patriotic and able priests to meet the requirements of church work and church development, and to continue and to strengthen spiritual education in order to help the seminarians devoutly offer themselves for service in the church, we think that the guiding ideology in operating seminaries should be persistency in the independent and autonomous administration of the church. Following the principle of "being firmly rooted in the present with an eye to the future," and starting from China's conditions and the actual situation of the Chinese Catholic Church, we should conscientiously strengthen leadership over seminary training and earnestly strive to form the seminarians in virtue, knowledge, health, culture and work, so that they will become a generation of new people, having high ideals, morals, culture and discipline. Therefore, we must energetically reform the ideology, content, methodology in the seminaries, and our supervision over them. The ideological political training of the seminarians must be planned against the wider background of social change, and new avenues in theological education must be explored in these new times, so that seminary training can meet the needs of modernization, adapt to changes in outlook and suit the actual thinking of the seminarians. Just as the "Work Report" of the second meeting of the Chinese Catholic Church Administrative Commission stated: "To run seminaries and convents well and to train young clergy is an urgent and long range task for our church. We cannot use the models of the past. Rather, we must follow our own path in accordance with the actual conditions of

our country."

What is the actual situation of the Chinese church? How does she manifest herself? In our opinion the present situation of the Church is linked to its historical background and to today's conditions. It cannot separate itself from the national character nor from the stage the nation has reached. Realistically speaking, the present situation of the Chinese church can be summed up in the following few points:

1. China is a socialist country. Catholics only number 0.3% of the total population. The church must strive to be in harmony with the socialist system and with government policies. It must continually adjust and suppress old and incompatible thinking, old outlooks, and old rules and regulations.

2. Over 80% of China's Catholics live in the countryside. Catholics, whose cultural and faith levels are comparatively low, can be easily tainted by heresy. An enormous problem which the Chinese church must solve is how to explain Christ's Gospel to Christians correctly so that their fervor and devotion is directed onto the road of loving life and loving people, into involvement in the modernization program, and in work which glorifies the Lord and benefits others.

3. There is a serious aging problem among the Chinese clergy. The contradiction mentioned in the Gospel verse: "the harvest is great, but the laborers are few" is very apparent. The phenomenon of "sheep without a shepherd" can be found everywhere. This situation gives unlawful elements a chance to enter in and deceive the Catholics. This serious state of affairs requires that we speed up the training of clerical successors by all means and on every level.

4. The Chinese church has been subject to the influence of Western colonial ideology for a long time. It has inherent shortcomings and its resistance is low. In addition, there is the increasingly rampant acts of infiltration by hostile foreign forces. The struggle between "peaceful evolution" and "opposition to peaceful evolution", therefore, will be a serious concern of the Chinese church for a long time to come.

Since this is the actual situation of the Chinese church, we must first of all correct the orientation of seminary education and increase education in patriotism and in the autonomous running of the church. We must seize the moment and definitely use a variety of methods to train clerical successors who have

self-respect and self-determination and who will contribute to the work of love of country and love of church well into the next century. We must endeavor to develop theological research as we teach so that a system of theology, characteristically Chinese, can emerge. Below I will discuss today's seminary education with the hope of attracting the opinions of others.

I.

Our country is a socialist country which pursues a policy of independence and autonomy. Our church is a sovereign church which adheres to a policy of independent administration. Our seminaries have the grave responsibility of teaching and forming clerical successors in accordance with the principle of love of country and love of church and the policy of the independent administration of the church. Today's fresh, young students are the pillars of tomorrow's church. Can we not train young men to become a new generation of clergy who, on the political level, fervently love the motherland, support the leadership of the Party and the socialist system and who, at the same time, possess a fair amount of religious knowledge, adhere to the policy of independence, offer their whole lives to the church, have definite ability and are able to do pastoral work in accordance with national conditions? We want to produce leaders with a high degree of religious knowledge and a spirit of ingenuity, so that they can withstand the tests of a complex environment. This is of prime importance since it is related to the success or failure of the Chinese church and it should be our purpose for running seminaries. Therefore, in setting their educational goals, all seminaries throughout the country must have as their priority love of country and love of church. They must persist in implementing the autonomous administration of the church, and be vigilant about maintaining the "the five loves" and "the four attributes" as the heart of political ideological education.

In view of present conditions, we think there are two trends to be overcome in political ideological formation in the seminaries.

The first is the "theory of subordination." Some people maintain that seminaries are not like ordinary schools; it is enough to ensure the spiritual formation of the seminarians; one can forget about the rest. We say this is wrong. Fundamentally

speaking, in our socialist country every school, no matter what kind, is a "learning" centre, and seminaries are no exception. Their duty is not only to impart knowledge to expand intellectual capabilities, but also, and more importantly, to nourish and inspire seminarians with deep feelings of patriotism for the motherland. It is the seminary's duty to raise the seminarians' self-respect and self-confidence in their race, so that they will possess the "four attributes" and be new persons able to face reality, the world and the future. Therefore, seminaries of all kinds must give priority to providing a firm and correct political orientation. At no time should their work in political education slacken. Of course, we do not deny the specific role of "spiritual formation" for the growth of a seminarian, but this does not mean that we can consign ideological political formation to a non-essential position. We must realize that political ideology work has its own special, important role in "education." If we subordinate it to "spiritual formation," then the many questions beyond the realm of "spirituality," such as politics, theory, social trends, the Party line etc., cannot be addressed. If a seminarian does not become a whole person in mind and heart, then after ordination he most likely will not be able to handle well the challenges he will face in society. This would be a grave omission in seminary education work.

The second is the "theory of substitution." Some people say that a person with a high cultural background is also a person of high moral qualities. Therefore, in the seminary it is only necessary to ensure good teaching: as the seminarian's knowledge grows, his ideological and moral qualities will also be perfected. This theory of "knowledge substitutes for virtue" is patently absurd and is extremely harmful. We do not deny that the imparting of knowledge is helpful in raising the cultural standards and the ideological and moral character of a person, but you cannot equate the two. Is not reality like this too? Among those so-called "elite students" who have always lived in an atmosphere of praise, there are indeed some who are superior in both knowledge and virtue, but there are also others whose intellectual and moral qualities are not so outstanding. Although some students come from peasant families, they have forgotten the saying, "The production of each grain of rice or millet requires hard work." If not to their taste, they nonchalantly throw away a whole bowl of rice or a whole steamed bun.

Some hate to leave the big city or a place where living conditions are good. After ordination they are unwilling to go to the countryside, to the mountains or to places where conditions are poor, to preach the Gospel. There are some who consider themselves to be an "elite" in the church, who are quite arrogant and lacking in humility. There are even individuals who pass off the wisdom of others as their own. They sing the tune "the moon in the West is rounder," and wittingly or unwittingly become cheerleaders for bourgeois liberalization. These examples demonstrate the unreality and improbability of the theory "If learning is good, morality will also be good."

Our society is in the initial stages of socialism. The main task is to modernize and to increase production. Reform and openness bring new changes in ideological views and lifestyles. They cause the great mass of youth, including seminarians, to make comparisons, to widen their vision and to enliven their thinking. This leads them to develop and establish new outlooks and new ideologies. However we must be clearly aware that openness to the outside world and the attendant mutual interaction of all kinds of cultures, points of view and ideologies unavoidably bring with them some unhealthy elements. This raises the question of distinguishing among elements and resisting the unhealthy ones. This situation convinces us that in all our seminary work we must give priority to political ideology work. This will correct the orientation of the seminaries, and it is the key to forming a new kind of person, whole in every aspect. All seminary personnel, from the leaders to the individual teachers, should realize that they have the grave ongoing responsibility of training new people, who in turn will have serious responsibilities. They must think up methods to strengthen the entire seminary system, and establish a holistic view of "educating people," so that all facets of seminary life, teaching, administration and logistics, will serve this one general objective. Furthermore, a healthy atmosphere for "teaching and educating people" will be created.

II.

Today's students were "born during the Cultural Revolution, grew up during the period of rectification, and began their studies during the period of openness and reform." This special

social environment created many outstanding characteristics in them, like support for reform, opposition to conservatism, sharp intellectual powers, careful thinking, a desire for knowledge and a determination to improve. The environment has also created many weaknesses which we cannot ignore. Examples are a lack of a spirit of arduous struggle, ways of thinking which tend to go to extremes, a relatively strong spirit of defiance, an indifference to and an evasion of education in political ideology, and even an attitude of confrontation. This pluralistic and mixed-up thinking in the young seminarians is something which we cannot take lightly because, after a few years, they will form the backbone in all segments of our church. Their political, intellectual, professional and faith dimensions will have a direct bearing on the image of our Chinese Catholic Church.

In today's climate of openness and reform, how should we carry out political ideology work in the seminaries? We think that, first of all, the outlook of the clergy and teachers involved in seminary work must be the same regarding a complete and correct understanding and implementation of the policy of the autonomous administration of the church. Their perception must be one regarding the religious training required to satisfy the spiritual needs of the Catholics. They must be united around the common purpose of training a new generation of patriotic clergy and around the basic goals of raising standards in the church, and training more and better personnel. It must be understood that each seminary should first of all train the whole student body to become patriotic and obedient citizens who possess social virtues and wholesome habits. Only on this base can they gradually be taught to develop a spirit of selfless sacrifice, of joy in helping others and of taking pastoral care as their life's work, and not just as a profession. This training should proceed in an orderly fashion on two levels: first, from the moment he enters the seminary, ideological political education should permeate the seminarian's whole course, and secondly, based on the special characteristics of each class, different educational plans and criteria must be drawn up. For instance, for seminarians in the lower grades, education in the legal system can be emphasized, as well as education in the norms for thinking and personal morality, so that they will understand the basic principles for meeting the standards of citizenship. For seminarians in the middle years emphasis can be placed on

education in patriotism and labor. Since at the present stage of development the manifestation of patriotism is to offer oneself for building up and protecting the modern socialist enterprise, each descendant of the Holy Emperors should conscientiously work for creating a bright future for the Chinese race. For seminarians in the upper classes education in professional ethics should be emphasized. The opportunity should be created for them to go to the grassroots, to come in contact with the masses, to understand society and to live in the real world. From this they will gain an accurate knowledge of national conditions, of society, of life and of themselves. Recently a young priest, who was deeply affected by his work experience at a mountain church in a certain province, said that although his time there was short, it was good training for him. He not only understood what the Catholics required of the priest, but he also understood that the development of pastoral work required that evangelization be united with alleviating poverty. Thirdly, all levels of leadership in the seminary, both clerical and lay should make use of their own patriotic fervor, their excellent knowledge and their exemplary behaviour to teach by example as well as by verbal instruction. Only if the clergy and teachers have a strong sense of responsibility for bearing the important burden of training successors for the autonomously run church, and only if, beginning with themselves, they give a good example of love of country and love of church, will a healthy climate be created in the seminary. Only then will dependable successors come forth who can understand conditions in a complex environment, handle contradictions, recognize each wrong trend and stand the test of every storm. Concretely, we think the following issues must be addressed:

First of all, the starting point should be education in patriotism. Patriotism is a great unifying force for the Chinese race. In China's modern history from beginning to end patriotism has been a glorious standard moving the people to unite in the struggle against their enemies. In different historical periods its contents are different. The patriotism we speak of today is patriotism under socialism: fervent love of the motherland, of the Party and of socialism. Therefore, in carrying out education in patriotism for the seminarians, we cannot stop at the level of simple love for one's native land. Nor can we lower the standard to the broadest United Front level. Rather we should

raise simple patriotic feelings to the new level of socialism. That is to say, through education in national integrity and in national conditions, help the seminarians to understand the motherland's long history, especially the history of the last 100 years, when the people were unyielding and resistant to foreign aggression. This will increase their self respect, self confidence and pride in their race. It will also lead to a close unity between their individual futures and the future of the country, a close unity between patriotism and socialism, and strengthen their determination to work for the benefit of the motherland and the people.

Secondly, through the study of history, especially a combination of modern, recent and missionary history; that is, by following the main threads of the last 100 or so years of historical development, the seminarians will understand that the socialist road was the only correct choice for China. In socialist new China the Catholic Church will have a bright future only if it follows the road of independent and autonomous administration. Historically, this is inevitable. Of course, our education must conscientiously detach itself from a centrism of both the European and American varieties. We must give much attention to the history of the church in China. In a scientific and factual way, we must deal with the political relationship between the missionary movement and colonialism and imperialism. Regarding criticism of individual missionaries, we must make every effort to be impartial.

Thirdly, our education must contain criticism of bourgeois liberalization. The confusion in ideology and theory created in the last few years by the rampant spread of bourgeois liberalization is far from eliminated. Also the theory of the "failure" or the "miscarriage" of socialism trumpeted by some people, or other negative influences which sow discord between the Party and the intellectuals, are still present with us. Furthermore, bourgeois liberalization is a political ideology at odds with the four cardinal principles, [Ed.note: the socialist road, the leadership of the Party, the dictatorship of the proletariat and Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought] and although we have gained victory in pacifying the turmoil, we should not feel that now all vigilance should cease--especially today, when the Western hostile forces' strategy of peaceful evolution has succeeded in certain countries, and they are constantly increasing their activi-

ties of infiltration and subversion against our country. In all kinds of ways they are trying to fight "a war without gunsmoke" They are placing their hopes for peaceful evolution on the young generation of Chinese youth, including our young seminarians. We must clearly recognize this and remain absolutely vigilant.

Fourthly, we must increase education in hard work and struggle. The seminarians we train must not only preach the doctrine, administer the sacraments, visit the Catholics, supervise the church and handle various relationships, but they must also take on all sorts of odd jobs. They must have a spirit of sacrifice. Since most of our Catholics are scattered throughout the countryside, the seminarians and clergy will never be welcomed there unless they are willing to work in a poor place and take on hard work. Therefore, seminaries should guide the students ideologically to develop the spirit of Yanan, the spirit of Lei Feng, the iron man spirit and the spirit of Jiao Yulu, and instill in them the high moral quality of making it their duty to strive for the modernization of the motherland and for the autonomous administration of the church.

Fifthly, we must give attention to practice. Through social analysis and social practice, the seminarians can personally experience the great changes which have taken place in new China after 40 years of socialism, and the difficulties and hardships of that pioneering work. Facts have shown that going to the parishes for experience before ordination to help the pastors in their work is a good method for increasing the seminarians' feeling of unity with the people, nurturing their sympathies for workers and peasants, training their wills, expanding their abilities, solidifying their vocations and strengthening their ideological and moral character.

In summary, the guidance and education of the young seminarians must be systematically conducted. It must permeate all aspects of seminary training: class work, extra-curricular activities and pastoral practice. All facets should mutually complement one another. This will create a good atmosphere wherein the whole church shows its concern for the growth of the young seminarians. From the Dulles Strategy of the 1950's to the actions of today's anti-Chinese elements, the plots of the hostile foreign forces are still with us. Their methods may be different, but their objective is still the same. They use financial subsidies, ideological corrosion, overseas studies and other

methods to vie with us for the younger generation. From the perspective of anti-peaceful evolution we should recognize the far-reaching consequences of this struggle. We should conscientiously use the spirit of the independent and autonomous administration of the church to teach the seminarians, and enable them to become faithful and dependable successors in the cause of love of country and love of church.

III.

The seminary is the cradle for training self-sacrificing clergy for the independent and autonomously run Chinese church. The success or failure of this enterprise has consequences for the Church's present and future. It concerns our ability to fulfill our important mission of preaching the Gospel that God has given to us. It concerns our ability to establish a Chinese Catholic Church with Chinese characteristics to suit the socialist motherland. It touches on our capacity to open a new page in the history of the Chinese Catholic Church. In the past few years, the national seminary and every local seminary has trained group after group of new priests, thus making a contribution to the building up of our church. However, frankly speaking, our seminary training is far from meeting our pastoral needs. Our thinking must be further liberated and we must open new avenues of reform so that we can train for our church more qualified personnel at all levels.

1. Choose a Variety of Methods to Broaden the Scale of Recruitment

There are presently 3,600,000 Catholics throughout the whole country, and 3,000 open churches and meeting points, but there are only about 800 priests, and their average age is 71. If each year there is a 10% natural decrease among the clergy, then by the year 1997, there will be fewer than 300 among the older generation of clergy still able to work. In the same period of time, figuring according to a 6 year seminary course, our seminaries can only train about 400 new priests. This is far from meeting the needs of church work. Given this situation, we feel that the fundamental duty of seminaries is to solve the problem of "the harvest is great, but the laborers are few." We feel that what is urgently needed is a great number of priests

competent in ordinary church work. Therefore, the pressing need of the moment is to fittingly shorten the seminary course, to try bold new experiments, and to follow various channels on different levels in order to train all categories of personnel to meet the church's needs.

Since China is vast, the environment and conditions of the church in each place are different, and church development is uneven. We think that various categories of seminaries having different curricula can be operated to suit local conditions. The courses can last for half a year, three months or even a few weeks. The object of such programs could be to train ordinary clergy, catechists or church administrators. Under the premise of assuring development at various levels, our intent would be to broaden the scope of recruitment so that more personnel can be graduated at a faster rate, to meet the needs of pastoral work.

2. Develop Strong Points and Special Characteristics

Today in China there are more than 10 major and minor seminaries. Each seminary should divide up the work in an appropriate manner. Each seminary, in accordance with its subjective and objective conditions, can emphasize key specialties and have its own special characteristics. Some seminaries can take as their specialty the training of theoreticians, researchers and teachers. Other seminaries can take as their specialty the training of clergy for the grassroots level. We think that the emphasis of training in the National Academy of Philosophy and Theology should be placed on seminary teachers, researchers, foreign relations workers and church leaders, that is, to form a clergy of a higher rank. The National Seminary's main constituency should be middle-aged and young clergy who have attained a certain proficiency in religious knowledge and who are capable of being formed. Individualized advanced courses, or short training courses for different students using different methods could be offered. Each province then, in accordance with its needs and capabilities, could run seminaries with 2 or 3 year courses. Of course, this does not mean that properly equipped individual seminaries should abandon their somewhat longer course of studies. By the method suggested seminaries could bring into play their dominant characteristics and specialties, and this would be beneficial to raising seminary standards and training qualified personnel at every level.

3. Reform and Create New Teaching Plans and Courses

A sound curriculum is the key to achieving the goals of formation. In order to adapt to objective requirements, it is necessary to reform and devise new teaching plans and courses. According to its own training goals and specialty, each seminary should set up education programs and prepare teaching plans and courses. We think that new situations and problems encountered in actual pastoral practice should be brought into the curriculum and into teaching materials. In this way a close union will be formed between teaching content and pastoral practice. And through a policy of studying "important things first" and "frequently used things often", the goal of "learning for use" will be achieved.

In order to open up new horizons for the seminarians, to broaden their knowledge and further develop the beneficial aspects of their studies, we think that the number of elective courses can be increased (such as foreign language conversation, selections from classical poetry, health subjects and acupuncture). Courses can also be given in technical subjects, such as English typing, computer usage, and making movies. Lectures can also be given on a variety of subjects. This would foster an educational ideology of "establishing a base in the classroom, emphasizing the specialty outside of class, and teaching the students methodically." What is usually learned outside the classroom would then form part of the content of teaching, and lead the students, based on their interests and conditions, to gain some knowledge of a certain specialty outside of class.

4. Teaching Methods Should Stress Developing the Seminarians' Self-Study Ability

Only if we abandon the method of "spoonfeeding" or "force feeding" the students, or the method of taking notes in class, studying the notes after class and memorizing the notes for examinations, can we form personnel of high quality, and not those with "high marks but little ability." Therefore, in class we suggest that teachers explain the main points, the difficult points and give the basic views, and then allow more time for answering questions and discussion. This would constitute a conscious effort to raise the seminarians' interest in self-study and independent thought. In today's technological world, when new

discoveries are constantly emerging, the teachers must make every effort to develop the students' capability for self-study and analysis, as well as their ability to realistically handle problems. Otherwise, after ordination they will find it difficult to meet the challenges facing them from all sides. Therefore, we think that the seminarians can form groups to analyze model "confessions" and "lists of sins," or they can prepare draft models of all kinds of practical materials, such as Sunday sermons. They can also visit the Catholics frequently. Before ordination arrangements should be made for them to spend some time at grassroots churches, so that they can become familiar with and handle concrete problems met in pastoral work. This is all very useful in enhancing the seminarians' capabilities to fulfill their vocations and carry out their work well.

5. Strengthen Teaching Teams and Improve Teaching Materials

Teachers and teaching materials are two of the most important elements in education. Regarding teachers, we should have the idea of "the whole country participating in the same game." Realistically speaking, several ways can be used to achieve this: by having teachers travel around to various seminaries teaching a single course or giving short courses, television classes, etc. This would alleviate the present problem of a lack of teachers. When necessary, in the first years the method popular before Liberation-the little teachers system-can be used. In this system students sometimes take on the role of teachers, and teach and study at the same time. Of course, the ideal way to solve the teacher shortage is to train qualified teachers. As for teaching materials, at the present time each seminary has its own edited material. It is possible to transfer some old priests and teachers, who have abundant experience and high standards, and in cooperation with other priests of every age bracket, they would be well placed to take responsibility for compiling a complete set of unified teaching materials. This is a matter of the greatest urgency for us at the present time.

Looking back over the situation of our seminary education in the past few years, we think that the accomplishments are very significant. However many problems still remain. The most unsatisfactory aspect is that we have been unable to have the red thread of the independent and autonomous administration

of the church run through each phase of the seminary education system. Also, starting from the present conditions of the seminarians, we have not been able to make up for deficiencies. Some only half-heartedly participate in ideological political education. Some seminarians still have all kinds of confused ideas concerning some major issues. Even after ordination certain individuals cannot take care of pastoral work at the grassroots level in accordance with the principle of love of country and love of church. Seminary authorities and diocesan leaders are responsible for this. The patriotic association also must bear some responsibility because it is its unshirkable duty to help the church run the seminaries well. In conjunction with the concerned church administrative commissions, seminary authorities and clergy, the patriotic religious organizations must have a firm grasp of the main direction of seminary education. They should give much attention to the ideological education of the seminarians, and promote the whole development of the seminarians (in virtue, wisdom, health, culture and labor) in order to form dependable successors who will give glory to God and benefit human beings, love the country and love the church, and be faithful to the principle of the independent and autonomous running of the church. In the present circumstances of reform and openness we must be clearly aware that hostile Western forces are seizing the opportunity to infiltrate the spheres of economics, politics, ideology and culture. They use the political viewpoint, the outlook on life, the worldview, the sense of values and the lifestyles of the bourgeoisie to influence Chinese citizens, especially our young people. And because our young people lack political experience and discernment, they are easily corrupted by the ideas of bourgeois liberalization. Therefore, we have a grave political responsibility to teach our young seminarians well and solve satisfactorily the problem of clerical successors. Only in this way can we form a connecting link between the past and the future, and only by marching forever along the bright and broad road of independence and autonomy, can we gain more and more victories!

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