

Documentation

CPA Leader Addresses Ecumenical Conference

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The following speech was delivered by Mr. Liu Bainian, Vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, at an ecumenical conference held in London, England, December 1-4, 1994.

I. Lessons from Historical Experience

1. The Catholic religion entered China in 1294 through the preaching of the Italian Franciscan, John of Montecorvino. However, since evangelization at that time was mainly directed towards the ruling classes, and because it was impossible in such a short time to train a native clergy, the church disappeared with the end of the Yuan Dynasty.

2. In 1582 the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci came to China. He not only brought the Gospel of Christ, but also Western culture and science. At the same time, he chose a method of adapting the faith to Chinese feelings and customs, so that the work of evangelization could develop. However because of the Rites Controversy and a wrong decision by the church, the Chinese church suffered great damage. For over 200 years she could not publicly preach the Gospel.

3. After the Qing government's defeat in the Opium War of 1840, each super power signed unequal treaties with China, causing China to become a semi-colonial country. Many foreign missionaries came to China under the protection of the unequal treaties. They consciously or unconsciously served the political aims of their own countries. This put the Chinese church in a semi-colonial situation for a long time. Up to 1949 there were in China 2,700,000 Catholics and 137 dioceses, but there were only 29 Chinese bishops. Of 20 archbishops, only 3 were Chinese. Before and after the establishment of the new China, the Chinese church stood on the sidelines. She opposed the Chinese people's war of liberation, and after the establishment of the new China, she also opposed the people's government led

by the Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, at that time the Chinese people called the Catholic Church "a foreign religion" or "a tool of imperialism." She was considered "unpatriotic" and the phrase "one more Christian means one less Chinese" was applied to her.

The Cultural Revolution which took place in China in the 1960's brought great catastrophe to the Chinese people. People from all walks of life, including national leaders, intellectuals and artists suffered much harm. Religion was called the opium of the people and wiped out. Religious believers also met with grave persecution and churches were destroyed. This situation lasted for 13 years.

Summing up, the lessons from experience are:

1. We should follow the holy teachings of Christ and the missionary spirit of the apostles by "being all things to all men." The church should respect and become integrated with China's national ethos and popular customs, and with her culture and morality, so that the church can become sinicized and localized.

2. The church should preach the Gospel to the masses and cause the Gospel to take root among the people. She should not just depend on the influence of the upper ruling classes. She must train and rely upon local clergy, and upon the leadership of native bishops, to expand the work of evangelization.

3. Religion and politics should be separated. Missionaries should not rely on the protection of a political power or a secular authority to enjoy extra-legal privileges. Moreover they should not serve any government or work for imperialist forces. Rather, they should "struggle with one spirit and one mind together for the faith of the Gospel." (Phil. 1:27)

4. The fate of the nation, the fate of the people and the fate of the local church are intimately bound up with one another. If the country becomes semi-colonial, the church also will be placed in a semi-colonial situation. If the people meet with disaster, Catholics also will suffer harm. Therefore the church must teach its faithful not only to love the motherland and the people, to work for national reconstruction and to safeguard China's dignity and welfare in union with the great mass of citizens. But in the capacity of light and salt, the Catholic faithful should also be taught to bear witness to the Lord with good words and good deeds. Only in this way will other sheep be led

to join the flock.

II. After the Cultural Revolution the Catholic Church underwent restoration, reconstruction and development.

After the dissolution of the "Gang of Four," the Chinese government's policy of freedom of religion was once again implemented and carried out. The Chinese bishops, priests and the great mass of the faithful, following the teaching of the apostle Paul "to be self-possessed in all circumstances, to put up with hardship and to perform the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5), expended a lot of energy and overcame many difficulties. At the present time there are 115 dioceses, and over 4,000 churches, both large and small, opened throughout the whole country. The Bishops' Conference was established in 1980 and now there are 70 bishops. Priests number nearly 1,000. There are 24 major and minor seminaries containing more than 1,200 seminarians. In the last 10 years over 600 seminarians have been ordained priests. There are more than 40 Sisters' novitiates. Nearly 1,000 Sisters have made their first vows and 1,000 more are postulants. The Chinese Catholic Church has its own publishing organization, which publishes the bi-monthly *Catholic Church in China*. The Shanghai diocese also has its own publishing office: the Guangqi Society. We publish all kinds of Catholic books and magazines. In 1993 we published 200,000 copies of the Hong Kong Studium Biblicum Bible, containing both the Old and New Testaments. This is the first time since Catholicism entered China that the Bible was distributed throughout the whole country, and approval of this was expressed by both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Moreover we have published the *Old Testament*, *New Testament*, *Four Gospels*, *A Broad Outline of the Old Testament*, *A Broad Outline of the New Testament* altogether over 500 thousand copies, as well as over 1 million copies of various prayer books and other kinds of books. We have also manufactured many religious goods. Every diocese and main church has doctrine classes, and in recent years between 50 and 60 thousand persons have believed the Good News and been baptized each year. Beginning from 1993, under the leadership of the Bishops' Conference, each diocese is just in the process of positively

promoting the Chinese Mass and the work of liturgical reform. In the past two years we have selected and sent nearly 60 priests and seminarians to the United States, France, Belgium, Italy and Germany to study theology. Many diocesan organizations and Catholics positively serve society by operating supplementary schools, hygiene classes, evening language schools, kindergartens, clinics, rehabilitation centers and old folks homes. They also help the handicapped and donate money and goods to poor districts and disaster areas. They participate in all kinds of charitable activities. For this they win the praise of all segments of society. In recent years, in the effort of building a socialism with Chinese characteristics, more than 3,900 priests and Catholic faithful have been acclaimed as advanced or model workers. Some Catholic villages or Catholic families have been honored with the title "civilized village" or "5-virtues families."

The faith of the Chinese Catholic Church is identical with that of the Catholic Church in every country in the world and with that of the Vatican. There is one baptism and one faith, and it is the same Holy Catholic Church which is one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. Like the bishops, priests and Catholics of every other country, the Chinese bishops, priests, and Catholics pray every day at Mass for the Pope, the vicar of Christ. When, based on historical experience and the Chinese Church's own benefit, the Chinese Church promotes love of country and love of church and the three-self principles, they refer to politics, economics, church affairs and church supervision. They do not refer to doctrines to be believed and disciplines to be observed. In the last few years, local churches throughout China, following the principles of equal friendship, mutual respect and Christian charity, have welcomed Catholics from over 90 countries and districts. These visitors have included bishops, priests, Sisters and theologians. Our bishops have been invited for friendly visits and pastoral exchanges by the Catholic churches of nearly 20 countries. This year the churches of Belgium and France invited young priest-administrators of 7 major seminaries to their countries for training and an exchange of experiences. Both last year and this year the Hong Kong church invited priests who teach dogmatic and moral theology at 10 Chinese seminaries to Hong Kong for 6 weeks of training and an exchange of experiences. During the last 5 years the Catholic churches of such countries as Germany, Belgium, Italy, the

United States, France, Australia, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Macao, because of their concern for China and out of Christian charity, have unconditionally donated printing machines, medical equipment, computers and about 40,000 theology books to many Chinese dioceses and seminaries. They have also offered scholarships and travel expenses to nearly 60 students (priests, seminarians and Sisters) for study abroad. Over 20 theologians and professors from abroad have given short courses in 8 Chinese seminaries. Overseas churches have helped to train medical personnel. They have also made great financial contributions to the renovation or building of churches and seminaries. They have helped China's liturgical reform by training personnel and by offering materials to help in the publication of Chinese missals. This has led to China's liturgical reform being carried out in a positive and smooth manner.

The reason that the Chinese Church could be restored, rebuilt and developed to the level of prosperity it enjoys today is not only due to the acceptance of the lessons of history, the overcoming of every kind of difficulty, the support of the people's welfare, and the witnessing to the Lord by good words and deeds in accordance with the Gospel spirit (for which they have won the admiration of the people) of the broad mass of Chinese clergy, but it cannot be separated from the many prayers offered for and the unconditional aid given out of Christian charity to the Chinese Church by Catholic friends from every country of the world. This is especially true of the funds for China's economic reconstruction introduced by the churches of many countries, to the aid and exchange taking place in the technical and medical fields, and to the donations given to China's educational programs and to disaster-stricken areas. Also, invitations extended to government religious affairs officials to go abroad to increase mutual understanding will gradually change their outlook of Catholicism's being "a foreign religion" and "a tool of imperialism." This lays a good foundation for further understanding, an increase of friendship and mutual communication in the future.

III. The Most Important Tasks Facing the Chinese Church at the Present Time

1. Although there are already 24 major and minor semi-

naries and about 200 new priests being ordained each year, from the aspects of the spiritual life, theological knowledge and capability, this is far from meeting pastoral needs. Therefore we must enhance our seminaries. But we face three difficulties: (1) a lack of qualified teachers, (2) insufficient funds and (3) too few books and reference materials. Therefore in the next few years we will send some priests and seminarians abroad, to Europe and Asia, to study theology and to obtain degrees. This is not only for the purpose of training personnel for the seminaries, but in order to raise up a group of Chinese theologians having certain theological attainments and a pool of possible successors to present-day diocesan bishops. In 10 years we hope to have in China one high level theological institution (one which can grant degrees), large regional seminaries and preparatory seminaries at the provincial level.

2. Improve Sisters' convents and raise the level of administration of the convents.

3. Enhance the bishops conference itself. The Chinese Bishops' Conference is lacking in experience. It must learn from and exchange with the Bishops' Conferences of other countries, so that the Chinese Bishops' Conference can take up a prophetic role in the pastoral, social and moral fields.

4. Positively initiate Bible study activities among the Catholic faithful and raise the quality of their faith, so that their lives will gradually come to be guided by a Gospel spirit.

5. Continue to carry out the liturgical reform.

6. Continue to encourage Catholics to become positively involved in building the two civilizations, to introduce foreign investment, to work for the public good, to share the same fate as the people throughout the country, and to prove to their fellow countrymen that one more Catholic means one more patriotic citizen. Thus they will attract more people to accept the Gospel of Christ.

IV. Our Hopes in Regard to the Churches of Other Countries

1. With historical experience as a reference, they should separate politics and faith, and respect the choice of the social system made by the Chinese people.

2. They should realize that China is a large country with 1.2

billion people, where Catholics only number .04% of the population, and 1.1 billion people do not believe in any religion. This is not the same national ethos as in Western countries. Therefore in regard to pastoral work, foreign churches should respect the Chinese Church's right of independence.

3. They should continue to increase communication and exchange under the principles of equality, friendship, mutual respect and mutual support.

In conclusion let us paraphrase St. Paul: "The church of each country is a part of the body of Christ; towards the weaker parts we should increase our concern, and let each part respect every other part." (1 Cor. 12)

(Mr. Liu wrote many notes in longhand in the margin of his text, which are indecipherable. What is reproduced here is only the printed text).

