

Documentation

The Church in China's Economic Reconstruction

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While chairing a meeting of religious leaders recently, Li Ruihuan invited church leaders to find a role that they might play which would allow them to bring their native strengths to bear on helping to construct China's economy. Bishop Zong Huaide agreed that the Chinese Church should not only stay abreast of the economic situation, but it must also discover new ways to make a more positive contribution to its development. The question is asked: how can the religious communities adapt themselves to socialism and commit themselves to serve the immediate needs of the developing economy? As a Catholic, I would like to focus on our native unity, stability, harmony and service orientation as a first positive step in addressing what I feel are questions of substance and importance.

Know yourself; Find your niche; Emphasize your strengths.

The Chinese Catholic Church is a community of faith dedicated to worshipping the Lord and spreading the Gospel. It is also a social organization. After the establishment of the People's Republic, this organization purified itself of all colonial influences and anything else that had nothing to do with the Christian faith. This is basic to its own self-understanding.

Once we are clear about the goals, aims and basic business of the Catholic Church, then we can also gain a clearer understanding of its nature, mission and responsibilities. It is a short step, then, to finding a proper place and role to play in society.

What is our role in society? Where is our place in the national enterprise to construct the "Socialist material and spiritual civilizations"?

I think our role is to strengthen love of country and love for the church as we move along the road towards greater independence, self-government and self-support. It is also up to us to play an active role in supporting government and Party efforts to implement the religious policy. As a church we must mobilise our power and galvanise all positive elements within our community to lead both clergy and laity to a more active participation in building the 'Two Civilisations', offering our powers for spiritual motivation to each other for the building up of the whole, and in so doing to foster a better understanding of the church at all levels of society. In summary, it is to work within society to bring about greater unity, stability, harmony and service. This not only resonates with the demands of the times, but it also conforms to the will of God.

The Catholic church is an evangelical and pastoral organisation. As such, it does not offer its services directly to society, nor does it directly promote the development of productive forces, nor is it directly responsible for the production of material goods. In fact, the average church minister is neither familiar with the workings of the economy, nor proficient at economic management.

When we participate in government meetings about the economy, we cannot compare ourselves to Party groups or to popular front organisations. There is no need for religious bodies to act as advisors to the government's Religious Affairs Bureau in economic matters. This is not what we do well. Therefore it is pointless for religious bodies to make sweeping claims of their active support for economic development and their joining in the march for a market economy. It is even less appropriate to urge religious personnel to forsake their works of charity and love of church and country to open up commercial businesses. Religious bodies cannot be expected to narrow their focus on economic benefits alone. Of course, it is incumbent upon religious groups to make their own way financially. But if they are directed to make monetary profit the main purpose of their endeavour, I think this would be a grave misunderstanding of their role as supporting the goal of economic construction.

What are the Strengths of Religious Organizations?

1. Religious bodies are able to deploy doctrine, church regulations and personal morality in the service of socialism. Catholic communities are usually well organised, and disciplined in what they say or do.

The Catholic teaching of love of neighbour, and sacrificing oneself for others can be a positive and useful factor in bringing into existence the socialist spiritual civilisation. For the past few decades, Catholic villages have the reputation of being models of conduct and culture, turning out more than their share of progressive citizens. And there is no lack of praise for their good example emanating from Party and government sources. No less a personage than Jiang Zemin, Party Secretary, commented on this at a National United Front Working Meeting, saying: "We must learn to utilise the numerous positive factors present in religious teaching, discipline and morality in the service of socialism." If we religious believers can fully understand and grasp firmly the unique strengths of religious bodies, then it will be easy for us to find our place and raise our efforts to an even higher level.

2. Practically speaking, religious bodies have a knack for unifying the masses, embodying public sentiment, harmonising relationships and smoothing over contradictions. This can be seen from the many letters and verbal reports received from those who deal with ordinary people by the Patriotic Association. Most have to do with demands that the government restore church property and other conflicts of interest disputes that arise from within work units. When managing these problems, we put the stability of church and society above all other interests. Through our patient approach, we have been able to resolve numerous misunderstandings. We direct them towards the proper channels and instruct them on what measures they may take to reasonably safeguard the rights and interests of the church. This has been helpful in harmonising relationships, easing conflicts, and promoting stability. In this way, religious bodies are able to use their strengths in helpful ways, insuring their work has a solid foundation, accomplishing much and winning support for the church from society.
3. Another strength of religious bodies can be found in their relationship with foreigners. The Chinese church and the Universal Church are one in the name of Christ Jesus, and we also have an extensive history of close relationships. Following the reforms and the opening of our country to the outside world, there has been an unprecedented increase in international exchanges. New friendships and the renewal of former ones are also on the increase among religious bodies. This is an asset for our country. It contributes to the expansion of our

nation's influence overseas, promotes the peaceful reunification of the Motherland, and helps safeguard world peace and stability.

Strengthen self-reliance; promote the quality of life for the whole of society; move to having an influence.

I do not think our job is to jockey for advantageous positions in society. Superiority breeds contempt, not achievement. A person's strength lies not in his words but in what he or she accomplishes. Recognition is not something that we wait for others to bestow upon us, but rather it depends on the guidance and support of the Party and the government, on having respect for self, and the self-confidence that comes with it. Nor must we ever relax our efforts for self-improvement. To make the leap from making a place to having an influence, we must actively seek out the Party and government's guidance in regard to policies concerning religious bodies. We must first form our thinking in leadership training classes for religious personnel, elevate our work style, strengthen our habits for study, foster unity, promote democracy and work to raise up good local leaders. Let us rely on our strengths to arouse public sentiment. With this spirit, we will continue to consolidate our work of loving the church and the nation, be able to overcome all hardships that might lie ahead, enable us to face up better to trials and tribulations, the storms and tempests that beset us from all sides. And having accomplished all this, we can say that we have fulfilled the key task of furthering the nation's economic construction, and at the same time responded to the Party and government's demand that religion and socialism mutually adapt one to the other to form a harmonious whole.

(The above article is taken from the Catholic Church in China magazine)