

Documentation**Speech of Ye Xiaowen, Head of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council, at the Sixth National Congress of Catholic Representatives**

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Translated by Norman Walling, S.J.

Dear Friends and Representatives,

Today, Catholic friends from all over the nation gather together to participate in the Sixth National Congress of Catholic Representatives in China. On behalf of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council, I would like to express my congratulations to you. My sincere regards also go to all the patriotic religious and Catholics who have been upholding the principle of independence, self-autonomy and self-administration while sharing prosperity and adversity with our socialist country under the banner of patriotism in the past 40 years. Besides, I would like to use this opportunity to express my heartfelt condolences at the death of Bishop Zong Huaide, the late president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC).

The year 1997 was extremely important and special for Chinese history. We experienced the death of Comrade Deng Xiaoping, the smooth handover of Hong Kong, the completion of the Fifteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, as well as the successful visit of Chairman Jiang Zemin to the United States. Raising the banner of Comrade Deng's great theory and gathering intensively around Comrade Jiang as the center of the Party, the whole nation works together toward a great success. Our country's economy has delivered 'high growth, low inflation,' as the major economic sectors have basically achieved the objectives projected by the macro-control system. There has been an ongoing improvement of people's material and cultural life. The construction of socialist spiritual civilization has also been further developed, enabling socialist democracy and the legal establishment to be

strengthened. The good start of the Ninth Five-Year Plan thus is being consolidated and developed. The national economy is prospering, with a stable society, all nationalities united, and social administration in harmony. In 1997, our country's foreign affairs attained important achievements. Our international status and power of influence have been raised. International critics generally consider China as playing an increasingly important role in promoting worldwide as well as regional peace, stability and development.

At present, the Chinese nation is undergoing a vigorous phase of promoting reform and a critical period of vitalizing development. Those who love the country and look for a better life should be willing to shoulder the grand historic responsibility, regardless of their nationalities and religions, and should brave all the hardship and progress together with one heart and one mind. It is under this critical historic period and vital background that the Sixth National Congress of Catholic Representatives is held this year. We are at a special moment in history and bear a heavy responsibility.

Since the Fifth National Congress of Catholic Representatives held five years ago, the CCPA, BCCCC, and other patriotic organizations of all levels have been helping the Party and the government to implement the policy of freedom of religious belief. Under the new situation of deepening reform and expanded liberation, they have been insisting on the principle of independence, autonomy and self-administration. There has been outstanding success in promoting the development of church affairs and external friendships, and in resisting foreign powers from using religion as a means to infiltrate in China. The religious sector's normal activities and its legal rights within the law have been protected. Illegal activities falsely using the Catholic Church's name have been effectively banned. Catholics in China work hard to establish the material and spiritual civilizations of socialism. Their sincere contributions have made them pioneer models. The influence of the Chinese Catholic Church in the world is also expanding.

This meeting is to study how to continue to raise the banner of patriotism under the new situation, to firmly and resolutely follow the principle of independence, autonomy and self-administration, and to better run Catholic affairs in China. It will also elect a new national Catholic 'One Association, One Conference' [CCPA-BCCCC], and decide on how the Chinese Catholic Church will be

together with the people of China, and enter the new century under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

The following are my suggestions to friends of the Catholic Church:

1. Continue to uphold the banner of patriotism and follow the principle of independence, autonomy and self-administration firmly and resolutely.

Patriotism has always been a banner of our unity and struggle. The Chinese nation has a tradition of pursuing freedom and progress, protecting national dignity and sovereignty, and never giving in to invaders. Comrade Deng once said, "China's business should be managed according to the situation in China and rely on the efforts of Chinese people. We stand for independence, autonomy and self-reliance in the past, present and future. People in China value friendship and co-operation with other countries, but they value even more the independence and autonomy which they have attained through a long struggle. China will never become a dependency of any foreign country, and China should not be expected to swallow the fruit which may destroy the country's interest." What sort of banner are Chinese Catholics holding and what kind of image are they projecting? As early as the 1950s, a group of intellectuals of the Catholic Church in China made up their minds firmly and correctly. Under the country's historical current of independence and national liberation, they held up the banner of patriotism with no regret after deep reflection on the history of the Catholic Church in China. They promoted patriotism and anti-imperialist movements within the Catholic Church, walking the path toward independence, autonomy and self-administration, totally erasing their image as a foreign religion and uniting with people in China to contribute their efforts to the socialist country, bringing the Church in China to the right way of independence, autonomy and self-administration. In the resolutions of their First National Congress, these Catholic representatives solemnly declared, "For the good of our country and the future of the Church, the Catholic Church in China has to change its colonial and semi-colonial status brought about by imperialism in the old Chinese era and implement independence and autonomy through having the Chinese priests and Catholics themselves manage the Church." During the last few decades, the Chinese Catholic Church has been holding high the great banner of patriotism. The

remarkable success they achieved under the principle of independence, autonomy and self-administration of the Church is recognized by the government and the Party and is welcomed by people throughout the nation. At the 40th anniversary celebration of the CCPA, Comrade Qian Qichen said, "The 40-year history of the CCPA has proved that the Catholic Church would never enjoy its present status within the new socialist China and earn the respect, understanding and support from the international intellectuals if the country were not sovereign and independent."

There are, however, always some people who want to try in every possible way to slander, shake and change our firm adherence to the principles of independence, autonomy and self-administration. We are facing new challenges and tests. The Catholic Church has been on this path for 40 years. "Forty year makes one the wiser." Friends of the Catholic Church definitely treasure the fruit of the struggle in the past few decades, and they continue to inherit and spread the glorious tradition of the Catholic Church's patriotism, casting off vacillation, hesitation and worries, and meeting these new challenges and trials. As Comrade Jiang Zemin says, "Our system of reform has been eradicating the manipulation and control of imperialism within the Catholic and Protestant Churches and implementing the principles of independence, autonomy and self-administration, and to cast off feudalistic exploitation and suppression among the Buddhists and the Moslems. These are absolutely right and necessary as the religious sector is adapting itself to the new situation, the new responsibilities of the socialist and modernized structures, and to go forward, but not backward." We trust that on this basis, the Catholic Church in China can progress, and not retrograde, in harmony with the socialist society.

The independent, autonomous and self-administered Church is one that makes its own decision and is self-governed in Church affairs, which includes election and consecration of bishops. It will not be controlled by foreign forces, including, of course, the Vatican. This is based on the Article 36 of China's Constitution that "religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination". All religions in China, including the Catholic faith, have to insist and follow this basic law. Meanwhile, there is no difference between China and other countries in the Catholic faith, doctrines and practices, such as praying for the Pope. Regarding Sino-Vatican relations, Comrade Qian Qichen has reiterated the

Chinese government's principle and standpoint at the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the CCPA. Sino-Vatican relations are an international relation in the first place and only when the relationship between these two countries has improved will any discussion on religious matters be possible. Catholics in China will continue to uphold the banner of patriotism and stand firm on the principles of independence, autonomy and self-administration, as well as on the election and consecration of bishops regardless of whether Sino-Vatican relationships improve or not. We will not change. It is impossible for us to change these principles and stance. Official representatives should make this clear to all religious and laity.

2. Try to make great efforts in adapting to the socialist society and be active in contributing to the stability and development of the country.

Comrade Jiang Zemin stresses that religious work should implement the Party's religious policy thoroughly and correctly, strengthen the management of religious affairs based on the law and be active in guiding the adaptation of religion to the socialist society. Comrade Li Ruihuan reaffirmed in a meeting with religious community leaders in February last year that adaptation between religion and the socialist society basically means that every religion has to protect the law, the interests of the people, and the unity of the country. The most important and essential implication of the term 'mutual adaptation' is that religion should follow the current national law, regulations and directives. The law preserves religious freedom and protects the legal rights of the religious sector. At the same time, however, religious activities should also be held under the constraints of the law, and work according to the national directives without conflicting with the law and regulations. All these will affect whether religion can be in harmony with other areas of the society and whether it can contribute to the society and its people as is to be desired. The Fifteenth National Congress of the People's Republic of China has provided a cross-century action plan for the whole nation. All trades and professions have to apply the spirit of the congress to integrate ideology and action, to be conscious of obeying and serving in an overall situation based on economic construction, and to create a good environment and condition for it. They also have the responsibility to maintain social stability and eliminate all possible elements that may cause instability. Catholics in China should unite

and cooperate with the whole country in the political sphere, and manifest the basic elements of the Catholic doctrines and dogma to serve the socialist society. They should also guide and unite all Catholics to participate actively in constructing the two civilizations, encouraging them to become 'light' and 'salt' through their words and deeds. They have to work hard and enthusiastically in their own situations, avoid poverty, conduct religious activities within the limits of the law and policy, and resist intervention in religious internal affairs by opposing forces from abroad that wish to use religion for purposes of infiltration.

Here, I would like to talk briefly about the underground force in the Catholic Church. The underground force refers to the bishops consecrated secretly by the Holy See in Rome, the priests ordained by these bishops and the core members controlled by them. Most of the members of the underground disagree with the independent, autonomous and self-administered Church for they are influenced by opposing forces using issues of religious belief to make anti-Chinese propaganda. These people need on-going patient and detailed conversion education to let them understand that the path toward socialism is mandatory for people in China, an independent, autonomous and self-administered Church is the choice of Catholics, and "to love one's country as well as one's religion is also God's commandment." Together with the Catholic laity and clergy of the nation, they should follow the historical trend and the path of patriotism and of loving one's religion. A handful of members from the underground sector, however, intentionally use religion to stir up trouble, create disturbances, incite animosity, destroy social order, oppose the government and become enemies of the people. Their real faces should be revealed to differentiate them from other Catholics and they should not be allowed to destroy the reputation of the Catholic Church in China. As regards their criminal behavior, the judicial department will definitely act according to the law. The United Nation's declaration on eliminating all forms of intolerance and discrimination regarding religion or religious beliefs also suggests that religious freedom be confined to "the necessary boundary required by the law to protect public security, social order, hygiene or morality, or other people's fundamental rights and freedoms." No country will tolerate any kind of criminal behavior using the banner of religion to harm the nation, its people and the religion.

3. Reinforce the patriotic organizations' self-construction and further bring out their function as bridges and links.

The CCPA's self-construction is decisive to the development of Catholic Church affairs in China. It requires the following four aspects to strengthen itself:

(i) Strengthen the Association's structure

The Association's structure should adhere to the principles of independence, autonomy and self-administration. It should be beneficial to Catholics' participation in the management as well as in experiencing the democratic features of the Catholic Church in China. The fundamental duties of the patriotic groups at all levels are to assist the Party and the government in implementing the policy of religious freedom, managing religious affairs within the bounds of the law, and raising patriotic and socialistic consciousness among the religions and the laity. Such groups also have to represent the legal rights of the Catholic Church, organize normal religious activities, conduct education, and be active in developing social services and international relationships. They should enable the "One Association, One Conference" of the Catholic Church to become authentic religious communities with power of influence and act as bridges and links to the Party and the government in striving to unite and to educate the Catholics.

Not long ago we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the CCPA, created by Catholics at the time they launched the anti-imperialism patriotic movement, aiming to implement the principles of independence, autonomy and self-administration. The CCPA saw the involvement of the Catholic laity in Church management and democracy in religious affairs with Chinese characteristics. It played a critical role in the historic transition of the Catholic Church in China in the 1980s by helping the Party and the government to implement religious policy after the Cultural Revolution, and has also contributed to the restoration, building and development of the Church. The CCPA has always been the bridge linking the Party and government with the Catholic community. Its nature and function so far have made it irreplaceable by religious administrative organizations. Under the new situation, the CCPA must be further strengthened, and not weakened or eliminated. It has to be progressive, more united and supportive and cooperative with religious administrative groups. On important matters concerning the Catholic Church, "One Association, One Conference" have to study

and make decisions together. All government religious affairs departments should support the CCPA's developmental work and address seriously the problems faced by the CCPA.

Strengthening the leadership is the core means to strengthen the patriotic organizations of the Catholic Church, including the CCPA and the Religious Affairs Administrative committees. Currently, aging and lack of successors are the major problems facing the leadership of the Catholic patriotic groups. By the time of the next congress, the average age of the leadership of the Catholic Church's 'One Association, One Conference' will be 73.6. Therefore, successors will become the top priority in the CCPA's formation endeavor. The successors of the patriotic organizations have to be selected from among young priests and core members of the Church. Emphasis on priest and core member formation is a cross-century strategic project that has to be grasped and done properly. Hopefully, young religious will be serious about their studies and the elderly bishops will pay more attention to the formation of the youth. The voluntary retirement of several respectable leaders of the 'One Association, One Conference,' based on the "leaving at eighty" principle, shows that they have cardinal principles in mind and that they take the overall situation into account. They should be praised for their lofty moral character and concern for the interests of the Church. We hope that through this meeting, the Catholic Church's 'One Association, One Conference' in China will work to strengthen its structures. It is hoped that a collective leadership will be elected under the principle of democratic consultation to guide Catholics throughout the nation to adhere to the principles of the independent, autonomous and self-administered Church, and to further promote the adaptation of the Catholic Church in the socialist society.

(ii) Strengthen the ideological political constructions

There should be more emphasis on ideological political education to promote knowledge of the long history and magnificent civilization of our country among young priests and seminarians. They should be reminded that Chinese people bear the humiliation of being trampled, bullied and oppressed, and thus come to understand the great construction of socialism. By comparing the history of a century ago, they will learn that the Catholic Church in China would have no status in the universal Church and members of the Catholic

Church in China would be discriminated against if the country had never been independent. The destiny of the Catholic Church is linked with the destiny of the country, and so are the immediate interests of all Catholics. Without national dignity, there will be no religious and personal dignity. Loving one's country and one's religious belief is unifying, and we should not make them confront each other. All in all, education in patriotism education must persist to further arouse the Catholics' patriotic enthusiasm, strengthen their national pride and sense of dignity, and confirm the determination of the principles of independence, autonomy and self-administration for the Catholic Church in China.

(iii) *Strengthen seminary work*

The national and provincial CCPA and religious administrative organizations have to intensify their leadership in the seminary; take further steps to improve and reinforce seminary work; promote the educational level and standardized constructions through correct educational direction. Formation of seminarians in both political ideology and spirituality is important. Continuing education and formation should be provided to the young and middle-aged religious so that they will be trained and tempered as auxiliary core members of the patriotic organizations. Those who perform well should be fully employed and given a heavy workload in an attempt to encourage faster growth and to give full play to greater responsibilities.

(iv) *Reinforce unity and cooperation*

Unity is the whole and unity is strength. It is only when the Catholic Church is united that it can overcome the difficulties it encounters and manage the Church in China properly. Leaders of patriotic organizations should get together and unite. Patriotic associations and administrative groups should work closely and support each other. Young religious should respect all elderly religious who are honest and patriotic, and be serious about learning from their prestige. Those elderly religious, on the other hand, should take good care of, foster and promote young religious so as to draw forth the very best from them.

Dear representatives and friends, the Sixth National Congress of Catholic Representatives is a crucial congress in shaping the Catholic Church in China of the 21st Century. With the efforts of

the participants, I believe it will be successful in promoting further unity. The new leadership of the national Catholic 'One Association, One Conference' will surely succeed and propagate the honorable tradition of the Catholics in China, which is patriotic and religious, as well as united and progressive. Under the leadership of the Party Central led by Comrade Jiang Zemin, Catholic priests and laity, and people of all nationalities will in one accord make new contributions in constructing a socialist country with Chinese characteristics and in realizing the vitalization of the Chinese nation.

I wish you a successful meeting and Happy New Year.■

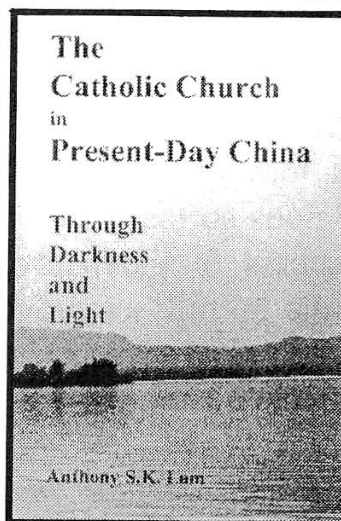
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