

Documentation***Chinese Clergy Who Have Returned from Study Abroad Hold Seminar in Xi'an***

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Translated by Peter Barry, M.M.

From June 24-29 1998, thirteen priests and seminarians who had studied in the United States, Germany, Belgium and the Philippines gathered in Xi'an to participate in the seminar organized by the national 'One Association, One Conference.' Among the speakers were Bishop Liu Yuanren, president of the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference, and Mr. Liu Bainian, vice-chairman and secretary-general of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, who reflected on the spirit of the Sixth National Catholic Representatives Assembly (held in January 1998). He also gave a report on the work and achievements of the 'One Association One Conference' since the Fifth Catholic Representatives Assembly (1992). The opening ceremony was chaired by Father Ma Yinglin, secretary-general of the Bishops Conference. Concerned leaders, such as Wang Xiaoyan, Zhang Xi'anmin and Zhao Zhonghai, from Party Central's United Front Department and the State's Religious Affairs Bureau also attended.

Bishop Liu addresses the returnees

Bishop Liu pointed out that the purpose of the meeting was to hear about the situations of the clergy while they were studying abroad, and about their study and work situation after their return. This would be done in view of making a summary of their experiences., Bishop Liu also asked for suggestions regarding the sending of students abroad in the future and for improvements in seminary education work. Bishop Liu encouraged everyone to fulfill the hopes of Church and government leaders, to take up the Church's historical mission, and to positively devote themselves to all the works of the Church. The participants were urged to foster an attitude

of loyalty to their vocations, to the faith, to the motherland and to the church, as well as a spirit of unselfish sacrifice and enterprise to serve the Church and society.

Vice-chairman Liu addresses the returnees

When Vice-chairman Liu was conveying the spirit of the Sixth Catholic Representatives Assembly, he enumerated the accomplishments and changes that have taken place in the Chinese Catholic Church in recent years. He gave a perceptive analysis of existing problems, as well as the goals for future work. He also sincerely encouraged the participants to fulfill everyone's hopes, by continuing their studies, working hard, and bringing about even greater accomplishments

Evaluating the experience

The positive attitude of the participants made for a seminar filled with enthusiasm. All exerted themselves to the utmost, and strove to achieve some practical results.

Everyone acknowledged that:

1. The overseas study program has proven that the policy of periodically sending students abroad for further study is a correct one; that to a certain degree the policy has alleviated the critical situation of finding successors to teach theology in our Chinese Catholic Church, that the program has helped the Church make up for lost time and brought many advantages. Therefore, this work should be continued and strengthened.
2. The students who went abroad were not afraid of any hardships, but they courageously overcame all kinds of difficulties like language, livelihood, studies, political testing, and they displayed remarkable patriotism and a sincere work ethic. In words and actions they upheld the dignity of our country and the image of the Chinese Church; and they propagated our position and helped resolve misunderstandings.
3. Most of the overseas students studied seriously and assiduously, their results were outstanding and they won the praise of Church personnel in the countries where they were studying; they

brought glory to China and to the Chinese Church. They returned home upon completion of their studies, and repaid the kindness shown them by the motherland and offered themselves in service to the Church in China, which is worthy of our admiration.

4. While overseas, the students came to understand each country's church, social system, culture and existing problems; their experience raised their patriotic consciousness and their confidence to run an independent and autonomous Chinese Church.
5. All the recommendations and opinions expressed by the participants regarding sending students abroad in the future, their supervision overseas, and work and study arrangements after their return, proved helpful for improving and expanding this work.
6. When they were sharing their feelings about life abroad, all the participants expressed heartfelt thanks to the bishops, rectors and spiritual directors of their host countries for their concern and assistance, and to the clergy and Catholics of China for their encouragement and support. They are determined to use the knowledge they obtained to pay back the motherland and the Church.

In summation, Vice-Chairman Liu Bainian expressed the hope that the returned students would not squander God's choice of them nor disappoint the hopes of their diocesan bishops and government leaders. They should also not waste the hard work and aspirations of their overseas professors and friends. Rather they should make persistent efforts to strengthen their spiritual lives, to deal successfully with all kinds of relationships, to wholeheartedly become involved in and support the work of the Church and the patriotic organizations, to give good example to young priests, to teach well, and to continuously strive to raise the standard of their theological knowledge and the quality of their professional ability and political thought, to start research work in Chinese theology in order to guide the mass of clergy and Catholics to follow the road of adaptation to society, and to make use of their knowledge and wisdom energetically to develop the Chinese Church.

Chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association Bishop Fu Tieshan and Bishop Li Du'an of the Xi'an Diocese also visited and addressed the seminar participants.

Since June 27 was the first anniversary of the death of Bishop Zong Huaide, the previous chairperson of the 'One Association, One Conference,' both the returned clergy and the persons responsible for the 'One Association, One Conference' went to the Xi'an cathedral and concelebrated a memorial Mass, for this well-respected bishop, with Bishop Li Du'an as main celebrant. They prayed that Bishop Zong would intercede for the Chinese Church, so that they would continue to carry out his last will and testament of conscientiously running the Church well.

After the conclusion of the conference and with the arrangement of the 'Two Organizations' of Shaanxi Province, everyone visited the Shaanxi College of Theology and Philosophy, the Xi'an Diocese, and the Sisters' convent, and held an exchange with the persons there. Afterwards they toured the old city of Xi'an, the terracotta warriors of the Qin Dynasty, the Stele Museum and the History Museum. The participants experienced once again the magnificent culture of the Chinese people and the greatness of its civilization and history. This increased their fervent love of the motherland and strengthened their faith and their sense of mission to vigorously renew the Chinese Church.

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Young priests gather in Xi'an to share their experiences of studying abroad.

