

## *Commentary*

### *Seminar held for the Chinese clergy returned from study abroad.*

---

---

*By Rene Gilbert*

The report on the seminar (see p.59) held for Chinese clergy returned from study abroad once again shows that in present day China politics is inseparable from any public discussion or seminar even those that seemingly do not directly touch upon political matters. The presence of Party members from the United Front Department and the State's Religious Affairs Bureau indicates the government's political concern.

This report shows that a knowledge of terminology and a knack of reading between the lines is necessary for understanding official reports about church activities in China today. The present report is no exception.

The report gives a positive reading on the policy of having sent clerical students abroad to further their studies and sees the need of continuing the policy. It rightly praises these students for their courage in meeting hardships and the good example that they gave to all with whom they came into contact while overseas. No less praise was given for their return to China and their desire to continue serving the Chinese Church.

What draws attention is the catch phrase "maintaining an independent and proper running Chinese Church" used to describe the "patriotism" of these returning seminarians. In his speech, the Vice-chairman of the Catholic Patriotic Association, emphasizes this quality. The problem does not solely concern patriotism or service offered to one's country. It is difficult for the present rulers of China to understand how an organization can profess loyalty to the state while maintaining a devotion to what is in their eyes a "foreign power". The Church is allowed to exist as long as it serves the cause of socialism. This explains why China's rulers, professed atheists,

can allow a religious entity to exist but one that, in their eyes, must be controlled.

The question can be asked: what does a Chinese independent Church mean? Is it one completely autonomous, maintaining only loose relationships with other churches? Or is it, as in the case of other local churches all over the world, independent having its own existence, but at the same time tied with an essential link to the universal body of Christ over which, not a political, but a religious leader rules. Ignatius of Antioch in the post-apostolic years in writing to the Church in Rome, addressed it as presiding in charity over the entire Christian community.

This is a question that faces the present day Church in China. Can present and future Church leaders show by their love and service that they, too, are a community bound by ties of love to the entire Catholic community presided over by its head in Rome? And can they also show that such ties in no way disparage “an attitude of loyalty to their vocations, to the faith, to the motherland and to the Church,” that such ties in no way militate against “a spirit of unselfish sacrifice and enterprise to serve the Church and society?”■

