

Documentation

Excerpts from Document 26 Regarding the Strengthening of Catholic Church Work in the New Circumstances

Tripod Staff Translation

Document 26 concerning the Catholic Church was reportedly issued by the Secretariat of Party Central on August 17, 1999. Only excerpts of the document, originally 16 pages in length, came to our hands. The entire document so far has been unavailable. There has also been a question on the part of some of the document's authenticity. Most China watchers, however, now uphold the authenticity of the document, since subsequent actions taken by the authorities in China towards the Catholic Church there, e.g., the consecration of bishops without papal approval, the arrest of underground church personnel, and the setting up the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association in places where there was none previously, seem to indicate that such actions are being carried out in accordance with the stipulations of the document. Since many people have seen press reports about the document and have inquired about its contents, we reproduce here a translation of the excerpts that we do have.

I. To emphasize the importance, urgency and complexity of the work:

In this section the document speaks about the principles touched upon in Sino-Vatican relations:

The Vatican is not permitted to interfere in our country's internal affairs... The Vatican still plans to use the adjustment in Sino-Vatican relations to negate our policy of running the church independently, and to reestablish control over our country's Catholic Church...The most urgent duty at present is to greatly strengthen the setting up of the Catholic patriotic organizations, to conscientiously give attention to educating and converting the underground Catholic forces, to maintain social stability, and to guarantee that the leadership of our nation's Catholic Church is firmly in the hands of patriotic forces.

II. To greatly strengthen the establishment of Catholic patriotic organizations

No matter how Sino-Vatican relations may develop in the future the principle of the independent running of our country's Catholic Church must continue to be steadfastly maintained.

(1) We must lead and push Catholic circles, in a spirit of democratically running the church and as a point of focus, to strengthen the building up of Catholic patriotic organizations at all levels.

- ◆ The object of our work is, with the help of a few members of the clergy and the mass of believers, and depending on the Patriotic Association and the Church affairs committee, and through the establishment of a completely democratic church, to resist and defeat the Vatican's plan to use its special religious position to manipulate and control our country's Catholic Church.
- ◆ It is possible that the implementation of the democratic running of the church may give rise to misgivings among some members of the clergy, especially the bishops, and they will most likely be subject to the interference and objections of international Catholic extreme conservative forces.
- ◆ Firmly unite the democratic running of the church and its procedures with supervision over religious affairs. However, one cannot be so hasty as to affect the unity and stability of the Catholic Church, nor so tied down by traditional conservative ideas, that one does nothing.
- ◆ Adjust and make perfect the functions of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Bishops Conference. The fundamental function of the Patriotic Association is: to help the government to implement the policy of religious freedom, to implement the policy of the independent running of the church, in conjunction with the Bishops Conference to supervise church affairs, to carry out the democratic administration of the church, to positively develop activities of self-support, social service and relations with foreign bodies, and to organize believers to participate in the building up of socialist modernization.
- ◆ The basic function of the Bishops Conference is: to govern church affairs according to the principle of independence and in a democratic spirit, conforming to the concrete realities of our

country, to study and explain the doctrines and morals “to be believed and to be practiced,” and to represent the Chinese Catholic Church at international events.

- ◆ The Chinese Catholic Representatives Assembly is the highest authoritative structure in the Chinese Catholic Church. The Representatives Assembly elects the leaders of the “one association one conference,” deliberates the work report and stipulates and amends the constitutions.
 - ◆ Party Central’s United Front Department and the State’s Religious Affairs Bureau must guide the “one association and one conference” in perfecting its constitutional structure. At the present time they must firmly grasp and stipulate the rules for the work of the Patriotic Association and the regulations for supervising dioceses. The leadership group of the one association one conference must be adjusted and strengthened. Intellectuals from among the Catholic believers must be chosen to undertake the work of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and clergy must be assigned to work at the Bishops Conference.
 - ◆ The functions and work structures of the “two organizations” at the provincial, municipal, and self-administrative region levels must undergo mutual adjustment. Gradually set up in each diocese a democratic supervisory structure in accordance with *The Regulations for the Registration and Supervision of Social Organizations* and other concerned stipulations. In cities and counties where Catholic Church work and duties are comparatively more important, establish the Patriotic Association and other forms of organizations for democratic supervision. Prepare and form a good leadership group, which can play a real role.
- (2) Carry out well united front work among Catholic patriotic persons, and really help the patriotic organizations to solve their concrete problems.
- ◆ Use effective measures in different circumstances to solve the problems of the political position and the livelihood of the responsible persons in the patriotic religious organizations at the national and provincial levels.
 - ◆ Let old responsible persons in the patriotic organizations play a role in helping to select a core of politically reliable persons to

become involved in the leadership group of the Patriotic Association at the provincial level...

- ◆ Pay close attention to the election and ordination of bishops and to the adjustment of dioceses." "Bishops above the age of 75 must as soon as possible prepare a coadjutor or an auxiliary bishop....There must be a sense of urgency, and strict attention must be paid to this, in order to avoid hidden dangers in our future work."
- ◆ Organize in a planned way training classes for bishops, bishop-candidates, young clergy and cadres for the Patriotic Association. In a focussed manner solve all the thought problems of Catholic Church personnel. Raise their political awareness.

III. Firmly grasp the importance of educating and converting underground Catholic forces.

The normalization of China-Vatican relations offers a beneficial opportunity to solve the problem of the underground Catholic forces. If we can use this opportunity...to win the majority of the underground Catholic forces over to our side, to convert them, then a key link in Party Central's strategic plan will be realized. If we do not pay attention to this matter...and are used by the Vatican, then we will be put into a passive position. Therefore it is necessary...to implement special measures and to make careful arrangements to guarantee that the work is accomplished, so that we will maintain the initiative.

(1) The work plan for educating the Catholic underground forces:

- ◆ The great majority of them, due to a question of faith, do not agree with the policy of the independent running of the Catholic Church. Only a small minority of them use religious matters to create disturbances and to oppose the government.

The plan is:

- ◆ Positively struggle, treating each case differently, to convert the majority and to isolate the minority....making the leading authority in our country's Catholic Church to be always in the hands of the patriotic forces.
- ◆ Distinguish the different circumstances of each underground bishop and priest, and deal with them accordingly.

- ◆ Make suitable arrangements for those who have converted. Protect against a reversal of their position. ...Control the negative conditions of fear of difficulty and war-weariness...and protect against any mass action. Lower the political standards, and use a simple procedure “to incorporate everyone” into our own forces. Be aware that after the underground Catholic leaders come above ground, they do not take all the positions in the patriotic organizations to control leadership in the church, and use their legal position to oppose us. Deal with any illegal and criminal activities with determination in accordance with the law.

(2) Distinguish different circumstances and do well the work of conversion

- ◆ The most important standards to determine whether a conversion has taken place are observance of the national constitution and laws, acceptance of the government’s supervision, a guarantee that one will never again engage in unlawful activities, and acceptance of the leadership of the patriotic organizations.
- ◆ Before the establishment of Sino-Vatican relations, regarding those underground bishops who satisfy the conditions for conversion, the “one association one conference” structures should promptly carry out the concerned procedures, acknowledge their identity and make suitable arrangements for them. Regarding those who are willing to accept government supervision, but are not yet willing to accept the leadership of the Patriotic Association, they must become important objects for conversion education. Attention must be given to doing this work well.
- ◆ Regarding underground Catholic priests who fulfill the conditions for conversion, the provincial two committees should make suitable arrangements.
- ◆ Regarding those bishops who have not yet fulfilled the conditions for conversion, at the same time as continuing stronger conversion education, use measures of strict control to prevent them from suddenly ordaining underground Catholic clergy.
- ◆ After the establishment of Sino-Vatican diplomatic relations, deal quickly with those bishops and priests of the underground Catholic Church who have not yet been converted.

- ◆ The “one association one conference” will publish an announcement that within a definite period of time they (the underground bishops and priests) will register and be recorded with the two provincial associations. A focussed examination of each one will be carried out in accordance with the principle of a policy for each person. Each will be dealt with according to his/her behavior.

- i Conforming to the conditions of the conversion, the two associations will announce separately that the “one association one conference” acknowledge the identity of each bishop. In order to prevent them from continuing to consolidate and develop the influence they enjoy in their own area, the ‘one association one conference’ should arrange for them to stay in another place.
- ii For old and weak bishops who can no longer engage in pastoral activities, they should be assigned to an old folks home in their own district.
- iii For those who have opposed the government for a long time, and even after resuming their work have still refused to cooperate with the government, no matter whether the Vatican recognizes them, we will not recognize them... Screening for priests from the underground who have not yet converted should be carried out through collective education in each province, self-administered region, and city. Arrangements must be made to send them to a seminary determined by the “one association one conference” for training for at least one year. For those priests who have met the requirements, acknowledge their priestly identity and assign them to a church to carry out religious activities; for those priests who do not meet the requirements, do not recognize their priestly identity, and do not allow them to act as clerics.

Regarding those underground bishops and priests whose priestly identity we do not recognize, strengthen education for them and strictly control them. Assign personnel to them who will remain with them until the task is completed. As for those who stir up trouble and become involved in unlawful activities, turn them over to the public security apparatus to be dealt with according to the law.

- ◆ Regarding the church buildings and activities centers controlled by the underground Catholic forces, put them in order and rectify them. Register them in conformity with the law and bring them under normal supervision.
- ◆ Regarding structures which were originally illegal, if they are really required for the religious life of the masses...then supply the necessary procedures; as for other illegal structures...deal with them in an appropriate manner...
- ◆ As for seminaries and novitiates run by the underground Catholic forces, announce that they are now disbanded. Send seminarians and Sisters whose behavior is good to seminaries and convents to continue their studies. For those whose behavior is not good, send them back home.

IV. Choose strong methods to preserve social stability

- ◆ Place great emphasis on the work of maintaining social stability during the period of the normalization of Sino-Vatican relations. Make a thorough estimation of the factors which could give rise to disturbances. Study, arrange, and anticipate them early on.
- ◆ After the establishment of diplomatic relations, maintain a high degree of vigilance regarding Rome's plot to use its legal position to interfere in and to control our country's Catholic Church.
- ◆ In those areas where the influence of the underground Catholic forces is comparatively great, carry out well the work of guidance and education of the believing masses, in order to prevent the appearance of religious fervor.
- ◆ Resolutely put a stop to the underground Catholic forces taking advantage of the situation to organize large scale gatherings, to carry out such activities as demonstrations and marches...
- ◆ Cases which have already been decided since the nation came into being, and those which have been legally settled in a general way in recent years, should not be overturned.
- ◆ During the normalization of relations between China and the Vatican, guard against the appearance of a fervor for erecting church buildings.

- ◆ Do not allow the illegally constructed churches of the underground Catholic forces, which have already been demolished, to be rebuilt.

V. Strengthen the leadership of the Party and government over Catholic Church work:

Cadres of the responsible departments should deeply penetrate the grassroots and enter among the masses. Each should work well with the Catholic clergy, and in a hands on manner, carry out well their work with the believing masses.

- (1) Strengthen the establishment of Party organizations at the village level.
- (2) Propagate the Party's religious policy, and concerned rules and regulations.
- (3) Implement the State Council's regulations for the supervision of places of religious activities....in places with more problems, especially where Catholic underground forces control the main venues, carry out a rectification.
- (4) Villages should set up democratic supervisory organizations under the leadership of Party branch cadres.
- (5) Help the church to set up a completely democratic supervisory organization, with its related constitutional structure, and select well the person responsible for the church center...
 - ◆ From a long-range point of view, the handling of Catholic Church questions should gradually enter legal channels, so that more of them can be administered by the government's Religious Affairs Bureau in accordance with the law.
 - ◆ Dioceses should be examined and registered with the highest level provincial departments; every other Catholic organization and church building can be registered at the local level.
 - ◆ Concerned departments at Party Central and national government level should establish a joint conference system to direct Catholic Church work, in order to strengthen coordination in the work.