

Commentary from A Chinese Priest in France

We can have a paradoxical reaction towards these new laws and duties. On the one hand, while not denying the value of these laws for the good of the Church in China, we can call certain points into question: first of all, their legitimacy. In whose name, by whom and for which Church are these laws being set up? I think it is difficult to give a clear answer to that question.

On the other hand, we must consider the situation of the Church in China. My own experience qualifies me to say something about the need of a specific law for the dioceses. Many priests, let alone bishops, do not have a clear idea of what they must or must not do. They often have problems relative to ordinations, authority, and finances because their roles are not well defined by a common law, which is specific and guaranteed by legitimate authority.

Must we say yes or no to these proposed laws and duties? Ordinarily, everyone, or nearly everyone, should be in accord with the established law in order for it to function officially. Unfortunately, half of the Catholics in China will not be in accord, since they were not told beforehand that the law was being established. By referring to Canon Law, they think that the validity of these new laws must [not] be put into question. In China we often say, "If the name is not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable; when what is said does not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success" (*Analects of Confucius*, Book XIII: On Wise Rulers).

Personally, I think that these laws and duties are going in the right direction for the affairs of China's dioceses. What deals with the participation of the Catholic Patriotic Association in China must be accepted with prudence. Yet, the Church is at the spiritual service of the Chinese people. We are not afraid of being recognized by the government. However, I hope that the Patriotic Association will not intervene directly in diocesan affairs. We can, of course, listen to their counsel.

This law has nothing to do with underground Catholics, in the juridical sense. Nevertheless, they must know that those laws are there

for the good of the whole Church in China, and not to be in opposition to the Universal Church. We must respect them in the love of a merciful God. Since the situation of the Church in China so difficult, I think that setting up these laws is already a positive thing. May the cross of Jesus Christ gather all of us into the arms of the heavenly Father.

Conclusion: This law is not perfect, and it cannot be since it lacks the participation of a large number of Chinese Christians. Everything cannot be done all at once. A law in favor of the people of God comes about only gradually. We need to be pragmatic rather than critical.

Comment of a participant at the March 21-22, 2003 meeting

“Nowadays some people do not have sufficient understanding of the concept of the democratic running of the church. They think it will cause the Chinese Church to become completely separate from the Church of Rome. Actually what it means is that the Chinese Church is politically and economically independent, and is democratically managed. Regarding our faith, we respect and maintain our unity in faith with the Church of Rome.”

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