

## *Chinese Leaders True Face Revealed*

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*Translated by Purple Kwong*

**O**n March 10, 2008, during the Third Plenary Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress in Beijing, Mr. Ye Xiaowen, Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, in an interview with the *Nanfang Weekend* newspaper made a strong statement about the Catholic Church, which has rarely been seen in recent years. His words were shocking to readers abroad. The complete interview was published in the March 13<sup>th</sup> edition of *Nanfang Weekend*. The interview was also available on the Internet.

When reporters asked Ye Xiaowen his opinion of the 2007 Pope's pastoral letter to the Catholics of China, Ye first of all criticized the Vatican and the canonization of the Chinese saints in 2000. He said, "The conflict between the Vatican and China has lasted for over half a century. As early as the time of Liberation, it incited the Catholics of China to oppose the Communist Party and the socialist New China. It made the Catholics choose between the Party and the Church — opting for the Church and denying the Party, or opting for the Party and denying the Church. In 1983, the Catholic Church expressed the wish to have direct contact with us. Three years later, we began to have a number of contacts. The Vatican knows that although we are willing to improve our relations, we are steadfast in the principle of the independent and autonomous running of the Church, and of the self-election and self-consecration of bishops. In 2000, they ignored our objections and organized a 'canonization of saints' on our National Day. They canonized those missionaries, who in the past were executed by the

peasants.” Ye Xiaowen used a lot of offensive words when criticizing the saints, but the author will not repeat them here, lest the saints be disrespected once again.

Ye Xiaowen continued his criticism: “The Vatican uses dual tactics against us, with generally three purposes in mind. Firstly, it wants to reinforce the ‘Church hierarchy’ that has lasted for two thousand years. The Catholic Church is the only religion in the world today with a structured hierarchy and a centralized authority. If the Chinese Catholic Church also comes under its leadership, it naturally means that the ‘Church hierarchy’ will continue to maintain its authority. It wishes to regain control of the Chinese Catholic Church, and to appoint bishops, thus denying China’s independent and autonomous administration of the Church. Today, Cuba comes under its control, and Vietnam too. Among the socialist countries China is the only country that does not listen to it. Secondly, it regards opening the door of China to be of the utmost importance in its “new millennium development strategy” of spreading the Catholic faith. Thirdly, due to the incompatibility of ideologies, the Vatican hates socialism. It wants to be the vanguard against communism, to gain for itself political assets, and to preserve its status as ‘the center of the world,’ a position gradually eroding through marginalization.”

The first two points are simply Ye Xiaowen’s personal assumptions. This is his personal opinion, and we need not care too much about it. However, the third point is a totally unfounded accusation, filled with the Cold War mentality of the 1960s. It is sad to see that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century such a view still prevails among some Chinese officials.

Referring to the Holy Father’s letter, Ye Xiaowen said, “Although the letter seems to show that the Vatican has taken a positive attitude by canceling some of its past instructions to the Chinese Catholic Church, by abolishing all the special privileges given to underground bishops, and by expressing the desire to carry out constructive dialogue with China, the letter is still

generally negative, and has even gone backwards in some respects. It is just like what a longtime Church in China observer said about the papal letter: 'The issuing of the pastoral letter shows that the Pope has taken the road of confrontation with Beijing.' The pastoral letter has created new divisions and confusion within the Church in China. It has incited the Chinese Catholics to stand absolutely on the side of the Pope, and once again forces them to choose between the Party and the Church. More dangerously the letter openly refutes the Patriotic Association, the Bishops' Conference, and the principle of the independent and autonomous administration of the Church. The previous Pope said that between the Vatican and the Chinese Catholics 'there is a religious bond that does not harm the unity of the Chinese people, even in the slightest way. Nor does it diminish in any way the independence and sovereignty of China.' In comparison, the present Pope seems to be going backwards."

In conclusion, Mr. Ye said: "To uphold the principle of independence is of the greatest benefit to the people. The Vatican recognizes the false political authority of Taiwan. It does not recognize the one and only legitimate government of the Peoples' Republic of China. If someone wants to circumvent the government and personally have relations with the Vatican, this may seem to come from purely religious sentiments. Actually it shows that there is something lacking in the brain of such a person, namely a national outlook, which every Chinese citizen should have."

Ye Xiaowen was not fair in his comments on the papal letter, since he was imposing his personal opinion onto the contents of the letter. Both popes referred to in his commentary respect China equally. Mr. Ye was only using the conventional communist tactic of divide and conquer, that is, of drawing one party to your side while eliminating the other. Nevertheless, behind this policy we can see the mentality of the government officials. It is important to note that this is the first time a high-level government official has publicly commented on Pope

Benedict's letter, and perhaps this represents a trend of thought amongst all of them.

In fact, the Party has been recently discussing the role of religion in society. On December 18, 2007, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China conducted a "collective education session," presided over by the General Secretary, Hu Jintao. The focus was "to have a correct understanding and an overall knowledge of the new conditions and new questions facing religious work." Party members were urged "to positively and actively do religious work well, promote harmonious relationships with religions, work hard to unite persons in religious circles and the believers closely around the Party and the government; to work together to build up a fairly prosperous society and to facilitate socialist modernization." At the session, Hu Jintao pointed out that, "To understand and handle religious matters properly and to do religious work well are closely related to the overall task of the Party and the nation, and are related to the harmony and stability of society.... For the long-term implementation of policy, our Party insists on integrating the Marxist religious view with our nation's actual situation, and to confirm the basic principle and basic direction of our Party on religious matters. Under the new historical conditions, we have to insist on the standpoint, view, and methodology of Marxism, and should have a thorough understanding of the complex situation of the interrelationship between religion and politics, economics, culture, and ethnic factors. We should have a thorough understanding of the unique place religious factors have in the internal conflicts among the people. We should also work hard to investigate and grasp the tempo of religion itself; and continuously improve the standard of religious work."

Chairman Hu Jintao realized that the success of religious work is closely related to the harmony and stability of society, so he demanded that cadres always be on their guard, which can be a good thing. However, regardless of the various understandings of

“religious work” by different parties, it is Hu Jintao’s repeated emphasis “on integrating Marxist religious views with our nation’s actual situation,” which causes one to be concerned. In today’s 21<sup>st</sup> century, China no longer insists on a Marxist economic viewpoint when exploring economic issues, nor does she insist on a Marxist productivity viewpoint when exploring productivity development. Why then on religious matters only does she promote a Marxist viewpoint?

What is more disturbing is that Hu Jintao insisted upon “the standpoint, view, and methodology of Marxism” in his talk. We should note that Hu mentioned not only “standpoint and view,” but also “the methodology with which Marxism treats religion.” This inevitably makes us recall the horrible paths that religions in China went through in the last fifty years. The most unique element of “the Marxist viewpoint on religion” is that religion must one day disappear. The only question is whether to let religion disappear quietly, or to exterminate it in bloodshed.

Perhaps an important member of a pertinent department drafted Hu’s speech, and the General Secretary only read it out. Nevertheless, its significance, and what it represents, cannot be ignored.

In October 2007, the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Chinese Communist Party passed an amendment to the Party Constitution, which read: “In all aspects carry out the Party’s basic policy on religious work, and unite believers to contribute to the economic development of society.” At that time overseas commentators wrote columns on this, considering it to be a sign that the Chinese Communist Party was taking religion seriously. When in February 2008 Ye Xiaowen met the media during his visit to the United States, he said, “From ‘different sources’ they have learned that the Vatican has cut off diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and that establishing relations with China ‘was not a difficult issue.’ As for the appointment of bishops, ‘this can be discussed.’” (*Ming Pao*, February 22, 2008). At that time many friends from the media sought this author’s opinion. I dared not to be optimistic.

It seems that at present, some high-ranking officials of the Chinese government are disseminating similar messages through different channels. So there is no need to be too optimistic, nor to have too many expectations. The general direction of the Chinese Communist Party is to let religion die out. As long as this direction does not change, any meager benefits along the way are not very important. Of course, for us people who have religious faith, we have another view regarding the future of religion; which is not the same as the atheists. One of the biggest gifts that religion gives to the world is to always have hope. For we Christians, the Resurrection of the Lord gives us this hope.