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In Beijing, the "patriotic" formation of Mindong priests. "Is this still the Catholic Church?"

by Deng Wenlong

Members of the Party and the United Front, university professors and patriotic bishops have transformed formerly "underground" priests into perfect "state officials". A report by the Patriotic Association.

Rome (AsiaNews) - "Is this still the Catholic Church?": This is the reaction of a young Chinese man to the text we publish below today in full translation, concerning the "formation courses" held in Beijing for the priests of the diocese of Mindong (Fujian) who joined the Patriotic Association. As already reported Mindong - which was to be the "pilot project" for the Sino-Vatican agreement - was given a new ordinary bishop, Msgr. Zhan Silu (formerly excommunicated, reconciled by the pope) while the underground bishop Msgr. Guo Xijin agreed to be demoted to auxiliary bishop at the request of the pontiff. **Despite this, he was never officially recognised by the government because Beijing requires him to formerly adhere to an "independent" Church.** Many priests - mostly from the underground branch - have not agreed to sign. However, a few dozen have. From July 21 to 27, the Party, together with Msgr. Zhan Silu organized an "internship" in Beijing for these men, where Party members, professors, and United Front cadres introduced them to the work of priests who have to carry forward socialism, sinicize the Church, love their country first and then religion, to develop "an independent, autonomous and democratic Church".

Below is a translation from the Chinese original of the report of those days, drafted by a member of the Patriotic Association of Fujian, Deng Wenlong. In perfect "political" style, the author lists Party leaders, projects prepared for priests, visits to Ma Yinglin and Guo Jincai (both formerly-excommunicated, reconciled by the Pope). What is most striking is that the Gospel is mentioned only once, the word "Jesus", never. As many experts have highlighted in recent months, the Party and the United Front are transforming the official Catholic Church into a State Church and the priests into "officials". Some say that this also happened in Italy, France and Austria. This may be so, yet in those cases it was about one, if not two centuries ago. Does China does not claim to be a very modern and avant-garde state? (B.C.)

Between July 21 and 27, a formation course on the work of the Catholic Church of Fujian (Ningde) was held at the Central Institute of Socialism. This course was organized by the Central Institute of Socialism, in collaboration with the United Front of Fujian Province. Party Member of the Central Institute of Socialism and vice-chancellor Yuan Sha, deputy director of the United Front of Fujian Province Wen Xiongyu, the standing committee of the Ningde Municipal Committee and director of the United Front Lin Hong respectively took part in the opening and closing ceremonies of the course. They encouraged course participants to learn about their position, role and mission, give importance to this valuable formation opportunity, actively study and participate in improving their general qualities, and under the guidance of the fundamental values of socialism, foster love for the homeland and religion by continuing to follow the path of the sinicization of religion, a path that is in conformity with socialist society, and finally to actively participate in the development of an independent, autonomous and democratic Church.

33 priests from various parishes in the diocese of Mindong and over 20 religious affairs officials from Ningde took part in this formation course. The organizer invited several professors from Beijing University, PLA National Defense University and the Socialist Central Institute, respectively. They gave insightful presentations on socialism with Chinese characteristics in Xi Jinping's new era, Chinese traditions and culture, the sinicization of religion, current situations in China and abroad, the work of the Catholic Church, policies and religious doctrine, history and culture of religion. During their free time, participants were also able to visit the Academy of Theology and Philosophy of the Catholic Church in China, the Patriotic Association and the Episcopal Conference, receiving a hospitable welcome from Bishop Ma Yinglin, president of the Chinese Episcopal Conference and of Bishop Guo Jincai, vice-president and general secretary of the Chinese Episcopal Conference. The lessons and the activities of the course developed around the theme "guiding the Catholic Church to follow a path conforming to socialist society", the teaching methods were very rich and received wide applause from participants; they integrated the lessons given by the expert-professors with the interaction between professors and students.

The formation course is a platform that integrates theory with practice, thus obtaining a clearly positive result. At the end of the course, the bishop of the diocese of Mindong Zhan Silu, vice-president of the Chinese Episcopal Conference, director of the Patriotic Association of the Fujian province and responsible for the present course spoke of the three results obtained with the course: first, the students clearly understood the future direction of development for the mission and values that a Christian must have: that is, pursue the path of sinicization with determination. Secondly, the participants clearly understood the responsibilities to which they are called, as priests and protagonists of social progress who, during the process of sinicization of Catholicism, must fulfill their functions by contributing to the unity and harmony of the Catholic Church in China. Thirdly, they have clearly understood the historical mission conferred on them by the present age, namely to maintain unity, love the homeland and religion: this is therefore the divine mission that the present age confers to every Christian.

"I sincerely hope that you will return to your parishes bearing the fruit of these studies, sharing it with the faithful and sowing it so that your parish can develop in a healthy and perpetual way". To all the religious participants, Bishop Zhan Silu said: "In accordance with the teachings of the Gospel, we will fulfill our duties, build our trust, study and put into practice the spirit transmitted by national and provincial conferences on religious work, we will deepen the content of Catholic doctrine in order to foster social harmony, progress and a positive culture, to carry out the sinicization of religion with determination, we will continue to follow a path that conforms to socialist society. We must contribute to the creation of a new reality in the diocese of Mindong and in the Catholic Church of Fujian, and in the name of the diocese of Mindong, we must also make our contribution to the development of the Holy Church in China.



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