

**Statement by
USCCB Associate
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to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China
July 24, 2003**

“Will Religion Flourish under China’s New Leadership?”

Statement of the US Catholic China Bureau

Charles D. Lovejoy, Jr.

USCCB Associate

Let me first thank the Commission for this opportunity afforded the US Catholic China Bureau to offer some brief comments on the issue of religious freedom in China today with special reference to the Catholic Church.

Since the late eighties, there has been a tremendous upsurge of activity both on the institutional and community levels in the Christian churches in China. The Catholic Church, while continuing to struggle with solutions to its own internal problems of division, caused in the main by external political pressures, has grown fourfold since 1949, even by conservative estimates.

Despite strict oversight of religious believers of all traditions – which varies in implementation from region to region, and from time to time - the statistics for the Chinese Catholic Church are indicative of the courageous efforts of Chinese Catholics to restore, renew, and develop their Church, both as an institution and as a community of Faith. A recent edition of Maryknoll Magazine, for example, featured a short article on a vibrant Catholic community at Taiyuan in Shanxi Province that had just completed a stunning new church of traditional Chinese design. Submitted with this statement as Attachment A is a statistical profile which attests to the vibrancy of the Catholic Church in China today.

Recently, the State Administration for Religious Affairs [SARA] issued three draft documents to “solicit opinions,” with these ostensibly stated purposes as follows:

1. ***Method of Management of Catholic Dioceses in China:*** “formulated for the purpose of spreading the Gospel, to put into practice Christ’s redemptive love and to adapt to the needs of the times and requirements of social development.”
2. ***Rules for the Work of the Patriotic Association of Chinese Catholics:*** “to completely bring into play the functions of the CPA on the national and local levels, and to promote the standardization and systematization of the CPA.”
3. ***Method of Work of the Unitary Assembly of the Patriotic Association of Chinese Catholics and of the Chinese Catholic Episcopal Conference:*** “formulated ... to make more complete and to intensify the Chinese Catholic independent enterprise ... in accordance with the democratic principles of administering the church, namely, collective leadership, democratic supervision, mutual consultation and joint decision.”

However, these regulations actually reflect a general tightening up and, in effect, renewed efforts to strictly enforce existing religious policy and regulations regarding registration of places of worship. Another major

objective appears to be pressuring unregistered leadership and communities to join with the registered communities of Catholics in each diocese.

The 3rd document in making reference to “the Chinese Catholic independent enterprise” raises some concerns – if the term ‘independent’ is to be interpreted as cutting the China Catholic Church off from communion with the Universal Church. If it is intended to mean an authentic autonomy vis-à-vis both external and internal (i.e., domestic) intrusion into the affairs of the Church we would applaud it as a goal.

While reconciliation and unity among Chinese Catholics and with the universal Church is a long-desired goal, when this is done by coercion or force, let alone with violence in any given situation, it is very reprehensible and unacceptable to all partners in the dialogue.

The Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN), has reported numerous instances of such use of force and coercion increasingly in the past year or two – especially selected dioceses in Hebei, Fujian, and Zhejiang Provinces. UCAN, reported the arrest on June 16, of Rev. LU Xiaozhou, a priest in Wenzhou Diocese, associated with an unregistered Catholic Church, as he was enroute to visit the sick at the city hospital. He was then transferred to the custody of the local Religious Affairs Bureau. Frequently, such detentions are reported to be used to force people to sign agreements to join the Catholic Patriotic Association.

It is always difficult, to cite specific instances of repression, which occur more frequently in more remote areas in China; or even to validate reports in the secular/religious media of such instances of force, coercion or violence against those who, for legitimate reasons of conscience, find themselves unable to comply with official and religious regulation and policies. These situations are usually very volatile and ambiguous; and often, local security authorities claim another pretext for action, than strictly religious grounds; for example, violations of building codes; or unapproved contacts with certain people or groups. In this regard, China continues to deny that it persecutes religious groups as such; and stands by the ‘religious freedoms’ guaranteed in Article 36 of its Constitution.

I wish to nuance these remarks by admitting here that USCCB does not have the resources or staff to closely monitor these developments on the ground. We defer in these matters to reputable sources like *Amnesty International* or *Human Rights Watch/Asia* and so forth. We never rely on media reports which we find frequently unreliable. Secondly, our priority and programs are dedicated to enabling the Church in China and its leadership to restore, renew and develop as a truly authentic Local Roman Catholic Church – in full communion with the Universal Catholic Church [cf. *USCCB mission statement – submitted as Attachment B*].

As noted in our statement to this Committee last year, “*USCCB seeks to promote full exercise of human rights and religious freedom of all religious believers in China; and takes as its special mandate the provision of services and programs to empower Chinese Catholics to be able to assume and exercise their religious rights and freedoms, as such rights of citizenship, guaranteed in the Constitution, are implemented in every sector and at every level of Chinese society.*”

At the CECC hearing on this issue last year, the statement submitted to this Committee by *Thomas Quigley* of the *US Catholic Bishop's Conference* highlighted major recent initiatives by the Holy See to improve relations with China, including the *Ricci Symposia of 2001* at which Pope John Paul II expressed his hope that the Church would contribute towards China's social progress; and graciously offered an apology for “*errors and limits of the past*” in the pursuit of Christian Mission in China.

The Holy See continues to pursue its dialogue with the Chinese government in several quarters; and continues efforts for reconciliation and unity in the Church in China. For example, it is seeking to identify bishop-candidates [to succeed elderly bishops, both official/unofficial] who will be acceptable to all segments of the Catholic Church in China, and merit recognition of their rightful ecclesial role by the

authorities of SARA. Hopefully, this initiative by the Catholic Church authorities may lead to deeper reconciliation; and to the removal of one of the proximate causes for these severe "crackdowns" and abrogation of the rights of believers, guaranteed by the aforementioned Constitutional provisions.

With regard to the policies and programs of the China's new leadership, it is too early to determine what direction these may take. Transition is usually a time of uncertainty and the three recent Draft documents on Church Regulations mentioned above may simply reflect an inherent tendency toward restriction during such periods of transition.

We believe therefore that options pursued by the US Government should be in context of a policy of consistency, justice and honesty in dealing with China in the political, social/religious and economic arenas. The Chinese government respects, and works best when confronted with, principled, well-articulated and consistent positions that also respect basic Chinese values and are based on commonly accepted international principles.

We also strongly urge continued support for the wide range of general academic and social exchanges that have emerged over the past ten years. We note with some encouragement the increased interest in Christianity in academic circles and the fact that US Christian universities now sponsor programs, though secular in nature, collaborating with major Chinese universities.

Historically, China did not develop the tradition of Civil Society, let alone a democratic political ethos. Therefore, education and gradual fostering of social consciousness among the people must go first towards these noble ends. Understanding of the positive role of religion in society should increase as the general understanding of the nature of a civic society increases in China.

Modernization and globalization pose serious challenges to the faith and practice of their religious beliefs and convictions for Catholics in China. Ironically, this continued political pressure on bishops, priests, religious sisters and lay leaders in effect hinders them from properly dealing with challenges of contemporary Chinese society, as it undergoes rapid transformation in the economic and social fields. As our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II has repeatedly stated, Chinese Catholics, faithful to their Church and loyal to their nation, as patriotic citizens, can make a great contribution to strengthen the ethical and moral fiber of the Chinese Nation – so it may play its rightful role in the Family of Nations – in quest of world peace and justice for all peoples.

We are convinced that encounters between the American and Chinese people demand respect for China's culture and social mores, which are different from those of the West. In such encounters, it is always helpful to acknowledge one's own shortcomings, especially when challenging others. One should also try to avoid confrontation; and making harsh judgments that unduly simplify complex realities; and even unjustly disparage different, but equally legitimate options. As such, USCCB would urge the committee, and through it, the present administration of the USA government, to seek to identify and encourage those leaders in the PRC who are working to bring about positive change in a manner that will preserve social stability and well-being. We should join our collaborative efforts to realize the development of a Civil Society, able to positively exploit the best of modernity for the Chinese people.

This is the approach USCCB strives to take in working with the catholic communities and their leadership in China, to assist them to prepare for a role in the New China, and indeed to engage in programs to bring it about. By way of illustration, I would refer you to the theme of our *20th National Catholic China Conference, "The Role of Religion in China's Emerging Civil Society,"* to be held this coming November. Information is available on our website at www.usccb.net and on the attachments submitted with this intervention.

We thank the commission and its members for this opportunity to comment on the general situation of religious freedoms in China, and in particular, the prospects for the flourishing of religion under the new leadership. We applaud its continued efforts to promote understanding of the critical issues facing the Roman Catholic Church and indeed all the religious traditions in China today.

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Attachment A: The Catholic Church in China Profile

Attachment B: The US Catholic China Bureau/Mission Statement

Attachment A

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA

Since the early eighties, the People's Republic of China has continued to initiate contacts and respond to overtures of the international community in political, social, cultural, economic and other sectors, including the religious arena. Many segments of U.S. society are re-engaged with China and the Chinese people, as they meet the challenges of modernization in the Third Christian Millennium.

Since the late eighties, the tremendous upsurge of activity on both the institutional and community levels in the Christian churches has been an amazing and inspiring discovery for many. Since the Chinese Catholic Church was cut off from relationships with the Universal Church for more than thirty years, accurate, reliable information was not easily available. The Catholic Church--while continuing to struggle with solutions to its own internal problems of divisions [caused by external political pressures]--has grown fourfold since 1949, even by conservative estimates. In the past 20 years, it has experienced a phenomenal interest in religious vocations to priesthood and religious life. Widespread interest in Christianity in intellectual circles is manifested by establishment of Religious Studies Departments in many major universities in China.

Despite strict oversight of religious believers of all traditions – implementation of which varies from region to region, and from time to time - the statistics for the Chinese Catholic Church for 2002 are indicative of the courageous efforts of Chinese Catholics to restore, renew, and develop their Church, both as an institution and as a community of Faith.

A Profile of the Roman Catholic Church in China

Catholics	12,000,000
Dioceses	138
Churches	5,000+
Bishops	117
Priests	2,650

Sisters	4,900
Seminaries	34
Seminarians	1,670
Novitiates	40
Sisters in Formation	1,800

[Figures are for both the registered and the unregistered catholic communities - Tripod Dec. 2002]

In the tradition of the long missionary relationship between Chinese and American Catholics, it is important for the U.S. Church to be sensitive to these developments and seize the opportunity of this new moment in history to work together as Sister-Churches to witness and to serve the Gospel in 21st Century China.

If you would like to assist the Church in China, please contact:

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Attachment B



United States Catholic China Bureau

Mission Statement:

The U.S. Catholic China Bureau exists to foster communication and friendship with the people of China through sharing the values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Founded in 1989, with the encouragement of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Bureau is sponsored by a cross-section of Roman Catholic organizations and individuals in the United States who share its purposes and goals.

General Purposes:

- to promote understanding among American Catholics about the Catholic Church and the situation of the Catholic communities in China.
- to engage the American Catholics in a new missionary partnership with the Catholics in China.

Goals:

- to promote the development in China of a fully indigenized Local Church with adequate leadership and resources for the pastoral service of the Chinese people.
- to foster reconciliation and unity of the Chinese Catholic Church within the universal Church and under the Apostolic See.
- to foster mutually beneficial relationships between Catholics in the sister-churches of China and the USA.
- to enable the American Christians to encounter and understand the experience of Christians in China in the second half of the 20th century so as to deepen and strengthen our own faith commitment and the missionary dynamism.
- to collaborate ecumenically, and with other religious, educational and cultural programs and organizations consonant with the purposes and goals of USCCB.
- to promote the full exercise of human rights and religious freedoms for people in China.

Major Activities:

- publication of the *China Church Quarterly* distributed on a subscriber basis.
- organization of the *National Catholic China Conference* annually.
- sponsorship of *Religious Study Tours* to the PRC.
- recruitment and screening of qualified persons from the U.S. Church to give Christian witness and service in tertiary educational institutions in China.
- providing lectures, seminars and workshops on topics of interest to persons in the U.S. regarding religion and Christianity in China.
- resourcing the religious news services and secular media with accurate and documented information on religious issues in China; the history and contemporary developments of Christianity in China; and news and information about the Catholic Church in China.
- providing consultation and referrals on other China-related programs and activities of religious and non-profit organizations.
- channeling material resources and provision of services which address expressed needs of Catholics in China

The Bureau is incorporated as a non-profit, tax exempt organization in the State of New Jersey. It maintains an office on the campus of Seton Hall University. Contributions to the Bureau are deductible for federal income tax purposes.

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20th National Catholic China Conference
 November 14-16, 2003
 Global Conference Center, Maryknoll, New York

“The Role of Religion in China’s Emerging Civil Society”

Keynote Papers, Panel, Focused Discussion Groups, Liturgy and Prayer, Resources Exhibit, and Chinese Cultural Evening

Resource Team includes Chinese and American scholars and those with experience of the Church in China.

All-inclusive cost: \$350.00

Contact information: www.usccb.net or e-mail chinabur@shu.edu