



Fr. Warren Kinne pictured

I'm going to be in China again this Christmas. I hope we see Fr Warren Kinne the Columban priest who helped set up **You Dao**, a charitable work supporting migrant communities in Shanghai. These are disparate communities comprised of those from rural districts who have come to the city for a more prosperous life. Chinese TV is extremely glossy and reflects a level of middle-class living that in fact very few in the cities enjoy; in that sense, the TV promotes a consumer fantasy in which the hardships of life revolve around which moisturizer and how glossy your hair is and everyone seems to live in these huge apartments. They do exist but I've never met anyone who lives in one. For someone living in the country, to see life in the city on TV as everyone would have done, is a vision of Shangri-la; at least I can imagine it seeming that way. Of course everyone would also have heard that "it isn't really like that", all the same, I think the fantasy exerts a fascination and a very human hope; but most often a false hope.

Once in the city, the migrants have no local residency rights. If they are cheated, for instance, if a man works on a building site for a month 12 hours a day or more, he might not be paid; and often he senses that he has little way of redress. The law is still developing in this area and is often not implemented. The migrant basically has to rely on the goodwill of his fellow. China has a very highly sophisticated civility from its language and history and to an extent goodwill can work; but as life becomes more competitive, and commercialized, and everything becomes commodified and "means business", this civil sensibility breaks down and can't survive. Such a break-down has largely been the case in our own Western culture, but we have had Government policy and law making to compensate. Although this intrudes more and more into what was the private sphere.

Think of insurance. A tradesman can't do anything unless he 'has cover'. Think of the community events which have to be cancelled because of the cost of covering accident liability. And so our society spiritually asphyxiates itself with red tape. Without half the red tape people can forge ahead and build on the scale China is doing today, which has to be seen to be believed; although the human cost of this would be absolutely intolerable in our culture. To put money and development and pure self-interest and expediency ahead of particular people is contrary to the Gospel.

It is at this level that **You Dao** is working with migrants, that is, with small groups of particular people, to empower them and help them forward in life; the work is very much in tune with the vibrancy of modern China; but it models values which are there in Confucius, as well as in the Gospel, but which are getting squeezed out. **You Dao** aids a group that faces social difficulties in practical ways. It's a great work.

There are some beautiful slideshows on the website <http://www.youdao.org.hk/> and more information and ways one can support You Dao programs from a distance.

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