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EDITORIAL

Editorial

Dr. Hugo Vanheeswijck,
VF General Secretary

Dear friend of the Verbiest Foundation,

In our last issue of December 2023, we reported in detail about the visit of the delegation of Chinese bishops, which we were lucky enough to receive in September of last year. One of the reasons why this summer edition of the Courier reaches you later than normal, is that we wanted to publish a follow up of that visit. From June 7 to June 14, Cardinal Joseph De Kesel, chairman of Verbiest Foundation (VF), travelled to China to visit the Catholic Church, accompanied by Fr. Charles Phukuta cicm, Superior General of the Congregation of Scheut (CICM), Mgr. Herman Cosijns, former secretary of the Belgian Bishops' Conference and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm, founder and board member of VF. This visit, organized by VF, can be seen as a result of the ongoing dialogue, and is a next step in the ongoing exchange between Verbiest Foundation in Leuven and the Church in China. The message that was spread during this visit can be summarized with the following words of Cardinal De Kesel: "What is the relationship between faith and



Cardinal De Kesel concelebrating in Beijing Northern Cathedral with Bishop Li Shan, Archbishop of Beijing

society, between the Church and the world? I'd like to stress the separation between Church and State. The Church has no political power. It's not up to her to govern people. This is the responsibility of the civil authorities only. But if there is separation between Church and State, there is no separation between faith and society. Christians do not belong to a sect that distances itself from society. On the contrary: the Christian is and remains a responsible citizen, committed to a just and humane society, in solidarity with all people of good will."

Another fruit of our attitude of "keeping the lines open", is the official restart of our formation session. We were very happy to receive, from April 8th to May 10th, again a group of 22 priests, from 14 Chinese dioceses, and two religious sisters, serving in Europe, for an ongoing pastoral formation sessions. This Spring Session was again organized after the interruption by the pandemic, at the explicit request of the Chinese bishops, with the approval of Cardinal De Kesel. Fr. Matthew Gong gives an overview of how the session went, illustrated with many pictures.

Keeping a close eye on the development of the Church in China, we include in this Courier a report on the three new bishop ordinations that took place in the beginning of this year in China. After an overview of the facts, we have a deeper look at the significance of this event for the dialogue between China and the Vatican, with a clear analysis of Michel Chambon.

At the occasion of the centenary of the 1924 *Concilium Sinense* in Shanghai, the Pontifical Urbaniana University organized on May 21, 2024, an international convention. It was remembered how Archbishop Costantini tirelessly worked, despite difficulties, delays, and resistance, to ensure that the Gospel of Christ took root in Chinese soil and was compatible with local society and culture. Bishops and priests from China were encouraged at that time to assume leadership of local communities, marking a decisive turning point in the history of the Catholic Church in China. Verbiest Foundation sees the speeches that were given by Bishop Shen Bin, Bishop of Shanghai (in Chinese), and Cardinal Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, during the May 2024 convention as historic. Never before - since Mao Zedong broke with the Vatican in the 1950s - have two highest-ranking representatives of the Vatican and the Church in China expressed their positions in such a formal way. The mere fact that they were able to do so, and even publicly at such an international meeting, is an achievement that would never have happened without Pope Francis' agreement with China in 2018. In this Courier, we publish a historical introduction of the 1924 Synod, as well as highlights from the speeches given by Pope Francis, Cardinal Parolin and Bishop Shen Bin. The Verbiest Foundation is also seeking how it can contribute to dialogue with China. Our planned conference on 'Faith and Religion in a Secular Society' is one example on how we hope to do this.

Our research and publication program is growing every day: two new additions to the Leuven Chinese Studies series were already published this year, the Chinese translation of the book of the Cardinal was welcomed, and another remarkable publication will be finalized soon, detailing the history of the 252 cicm fathers who passed away in China. Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx describes in his article how their option to go to China, their own choice to live and work among the Chinese people, and their sacrifice still carries an strong message for us today. A message of friendship, of love, and yes, also of hope for the future. Falling back on his own experience, this article testifies about the bound of love that exists between China and the West.

At the time of our last Courier, we could only hint at our 2024 conference. I am delighted that in this Courier we can shed more light on the preparations of this event that has been keeping us very busy the past months. Therefore, we have opened this Courier with an article written by Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx on the importance, and historical continuation, of the dialogue between Church and Society. Fr. Jeroom describes how from the perspective of a China missionary, the book of Cardinal De Kesel on "Faith and Religion in a Secular Society" fits our dialogue with Beijing perfectly. This book will be the basis of the International Conference that will take place on 3, 4, 5 and 6 September 2024 in the buildings of the University of Leuven. In order to describe both the subject as well as the aim of this conference, I quote the words of Thomas Halik, who writes in the preface of his book 'The Afternoon of Christianity' the following: "In history, God is revealed in the faith, love, and hope of people, even people on the margins of the churches and beyond their visible boundaries. The search for God 'in all things' and in all historical situations frees our life from monological self-absorption and transforms it into dialogical openness."

We close this Courier with a report on Chinese New Year, which we celebrated earlier this year in the Chinese College. Sr. Gaby gives us an insight in the typical Chinese customs, and also points out how Catholics celebrate it in China these days. That the Church in China is, despite everything, still growing, is proven by another article from Sr. Gaby's hand. How do Chinese Catholics experience the period of Lent? This, but more concretely: *how do newly baptized Catholics experience their journey towards Baptism*? Is the closing topic of this Courier.

Dear reader, we hope it becomes clear that we aim at a continuous dialogue, on the basis of equality and mutual respect. This crucial attitude sets us on the path of a bright future, which we will keep on reporting.

Church and society

The theme of our 15th Verbiest International Conference, in September 2024, offered by Cardinal Jozef De Kesel's book.

Jeroom J. Heyndrickx cicm

"*Church and Society*" was one of the main topics discussed for three years by Vatican II. Secularization was then already growing, and the Church felt isolated in society. In his opening address to the Council, Pope John XXIII set the tone by saying that the Church needed some fresh air. *Aggiornamento* was a keyword generally used by the council fathers. The Church – from then on called "*the People of God*" – needed to catch up to the time. In many of its documents, the Council suggested that the way to catch up was to "*dialogue with society*". That theme was repeated and reached its climax when at the very end, the Second Vatican Council approved "*Gaudium et Spes*" (Joy and Hope) in 1965. In it the Council called on the People of God to dialogue with all different philosophies of life, different religions, and with atheism. The peak of the climax was the encyclical "*Ecclesiam Suam*" written that same year by Pope Paul VI discussing explicitly the theme of dialogue which since then has made its entrance in Church history. Efforts by the Church to practice dialogue – and promoting *Freedom of Religion* – has changed the image of the Church in society considerably; but perhaps not quite as much as many had hoped for.

In 2021, sixty years after the Council, Cardinal Jozef De Kesel published his book "*Faith and Religion in a secularized society*". By that time societies in Europe, in fact worldwide, had become fully secularized: indifferent, even opposed to, religion and faith. As shepherd of his flock the cardinal openly wonders in his book about the question that confuses the minds and hearts of all faithful*: how shall we cope with such a prejudiced, even aggressive attitude against our faith and religion?* Should we not openly disagree with secularization, reject it, enter in confrontation with those who promote it? Many of us have fond memories of the old-time Church and wonder why don't we try to revive that? But is that realistic? Is that the right answer to the problem? Moreover, opposing secularization as well as reviving the old ways of the Church would that not even isolate the Church in society more than it is already?

To all these questions Cardinal De Kesel gives a very clear answer: no confrontation but dialogue with secularized society! It is our society. We participated in making it grow and develop. We should not reject it, but accept it as our own society which we wish to develop and in which we want to live. Instead of confronting society, we need to develop a culture of dialogue and encounter with society. That is the core of the cardinal' s message to Catholic faithful today. His thin book carries a huge challenge for the Church's pastoral and evangelization in decades to come. But to realize all this, we must develop a new attitude in our approach to evangelization; and that will be a real challenge.

First of all we must learn what it means to dialogue. Some faithful think that one who dialogues with atheists is on the way to giving up his faith. The opposite is true. We request freedom of religion, freedom to witness our faith openly in today's society. We refuse faith and religion to be banned and isolated in the private life of people. But our first step in dialogue, is to listen to our partners in dialogue. Perhaps we do not fully understand what they mean. We want to do away with possible prejudice and better understand them. The same may be true for them – we hope that they listen to us too to clarify their own prejudice – but that decision is not in our own hands. It is up to them to respond.

And what about evangelization? While we dialogue with secularized society do we still spread the gospel? We obviously want to evangelize. We do not repeat today, as we did in the past, that *we want everybody in our country to become Catholic.* That sounds aggressive and provokes aggressive responses. Moreover, it is not realistic and lacks respect for the freedom



Pope John XXIII during the opening address (picture courtesy of National Catholic Register)



Cardinal J. De Kesel



of those who opt not to believe. Dialogue requests a listening attitude in mutual respect but that does not prevent us from actively seeking those in society who are interested in religion and faith. We want to contact the many who do in fact have faith but dare no more admit it openly within the aggressive attitude of society in general. We contact them and invite them to our meetings where we talk about faith. Whenever the *People of God* succeeds in adopting the above described attitude openly, that would be the beginning of a new era in Church history: a Church with a new pastoral attitude adapted to our secularized society.

In 2021 I read the book of Cardinal De Kesel with the eyes of a China missionary, member of Verbiest Foundation, in dialogue with Chinese countries and communities with Chinese cultural background, including the People's Republic of China. I immediately felt that the content of the book on "Faith and Religion" fits our dialogue with the PRChina on religion perfectly. Not that communists will agree with its content. They will not. But they can agree with the attitude of dialogue; and that's why Verbiest Foundation (VF) decided to have the book translated into Chinese and obtain the copyright to publish it in both traditional and simplified characters. The book now exists in French, Dutch, English, Italian and Chinese.

But there is more. VF decided also to make "Church and Society" into the theme of its 15th International Verbiest Conference which is scheduled to take place on September 3 to 6, 2024. In its previous 14 international conferences, VF has only discussed papers on the history of the Catholic Church in China. The VF direction decided that from now on VF, a foundation in dialogue with China, will in the future discuss also topics related to the theme "Church and Society". Cardinal De Kesel, Chairman of our VF Board, initiates with his book a meaningful historic enriching in the VF academic program.

Preparation for the conference in September is going on. Expert scholars from East and West have been contacted and received a copy of the book. Those who registered to present a paper are invited to each address one topic discussed in the book "Faith and Religion" and respond to it from the socio-political and cultural background of their own society and country. So far 25 scholars from East and West have accepted to be present either physically or online and present a paper. Speakers who registered so far are from Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Australia, USA, India, China (10 speakers), Hong Kong (4 speakers), Singapore, Philippines, a.o.

Some of the 25 registered speakers are:
Cardinal Jozef De Kesel (Malines), VF Board chairman.
Dom Bernardus Peeters OSB, General Abbot of the Trappist Abbeys
Prof. Fr. Thomas Halík (Charles University, Prague)
Mgr. Jan Hendriks (Haarlem-Amsterdam,) & **Dr. Hugo Vanheeswijck** (VF General Secretary)
Fr. Charles Phukuta CICM Sup. Gen. (Vice Chairman of the VF Board)
Prof. Sr. Helen Alford & **Prof. Fr. Michal Paluch** (Anglicum University, Rome)
Archbp.Th.Menamparampil (India)
Prof. He Guanghu (Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)
Prof. Erik Borgman (Tilburg University, The Netherlands)
Prof. Peter De Mey (Theology Faculty, KU Leuven)



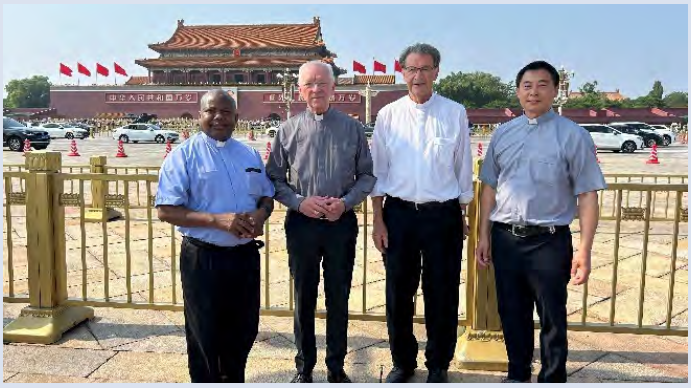
Dr. Hugo Vanheeswijck offers Mgr. Hendriks a copy of the Chinese translation of the book of Cardinal De Kesel

"*Church and Society*", a central theme of Vatican II, is also a priority topic of Pope Francis. The book "Faith and Religion" draws the attention of all Catholic faithful and priests to this topic right when they discuss *Synodality* at the Synod in presence of the Pope and bishops. Verbiest Foundation Leuven is grateful to its chairman of the VF Board, Cardinal De Kesel, for offering us this new challenge to promote in our Church more dialogue with our modern society. We trust that our 15th Verbiest Conference will make a significant contribution in that line.

Cardinal De Kesel visits the Church in China

The Redaction

On Friday 7 June, Cardinal De Kesel left for China with a delegation on a visit organized by the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation in Leuven. The Cardinal was already invited for a visit in 2020, but it could not take place then because of the corona pandemic. After the pandemic, the Chinese bishops again took the initiative and invited him, as president of the Verbiest Foundation, to visit the Church in China. The Cardinal was accompanied by Fr. Charles Phukuta cicm, Superior General of the Congregation of Scheut (CICM), Mgr. Herman Cosijns, former secretary of the Belgian Bishops' Conference and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm, founder and board member of the Verbiest Foundation. Fr. Matthew Gong and Sr. Gaby Yang, colleagues from the Verbiest Foundation, completed the delegation.



Fr. Charles Phukuta cicm, Cardinal Joseph De Kesel, Mgr. Herman Cosijns and Fr. Matthew Gong at Tiananmen Square



The delegation at the Bishops conference in Beijing



Meeting at the Bishops conference in Beijing



Mgr. Cosijns, Cardinal De Kesel and Bishop Joseph Guo Jincai of Chengde diocese, vice-president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association



Cardinal De Kesel offering his book at the Beijing diocese, with next to him Archbishop Joseph Li Shan

In Beijing, the Cardinal and his delegation visited the *"Bishops Conference"*. There, they continued the conversation about the joint exchange program that includes pastoral cooperation, academic research with KU Leuven and cultural exchange. That program was already restarted in April this year, when a group of 22 parish priests attended a session on Sacred Scripture, pastoral and social teaching, organized, in Chinese, by the Verbiest Foundation in Leuven. The session ended with a pilgrimage to Rome, where they were received by the Pope.

On Sunday 9 June, a Eucharistic Mass was celebrated at Beijing Cathedral with Bishop Li Shan, Bishop of Beijing. Concelebrating Mass no longer poses a problem now that all bishops in China have been recognized by Pope Francis. However, the "Bishops' Conference" has not yet been recognized (as long as unofficial - underground - bishops cannot be members of it either).



Fr. Phukuta during mass in Beijing cathedral

The Cardinal also gave a lecture at the National Seminary on his book *"Faith and Religion in a Secularised Society"*. That book was recently translated and published in Chinese by the Verbiest Foundation, and is the common thread throughout its 15th International Conference, which will take place in Leuven this September. Speakers from East and West, including a Chinese bishop and other Chinese speakers, have already confirmed their participation. Thus, the Foundation continues its dialogue with China, which it has started since its foundation in 1982.



Cardinal De Kesel being welcomed at the National Seminary



Lecture of Cardinal De Kesel at the National Seminary



The delegation with seminarians of the National Seminary



The Cardinal visited the former missions of the congregation of CICM in Inner Mongolia: Suiyuan (Hohhot) and Wumeng (Jining), where concelebrations also took place each time.

The delegation visits the tomb of Mgr. Hubert Otto cicm and Fr. Louis Van Dyck cicm in Suiyuan (Hohhot)



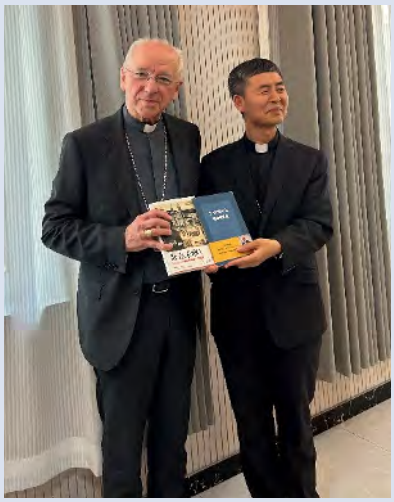
Warm welcome by the Catholics in Suiyuan (Hohhot)



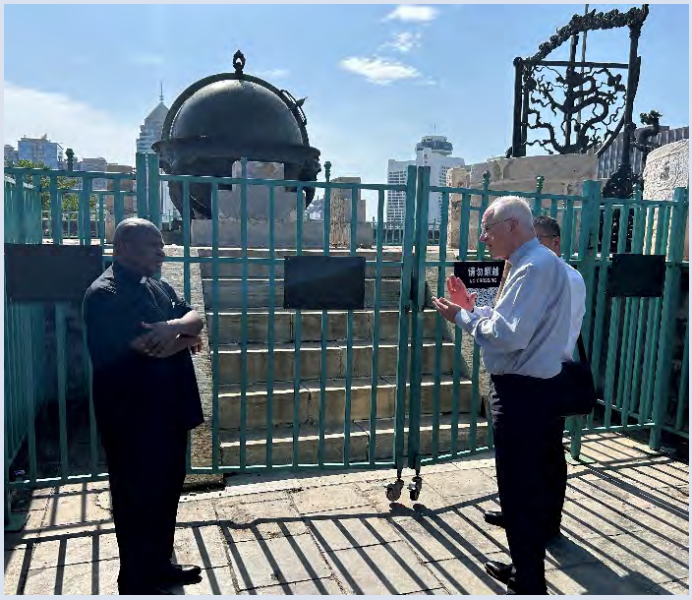
In Hohhot with Bp. Meng Qinglu



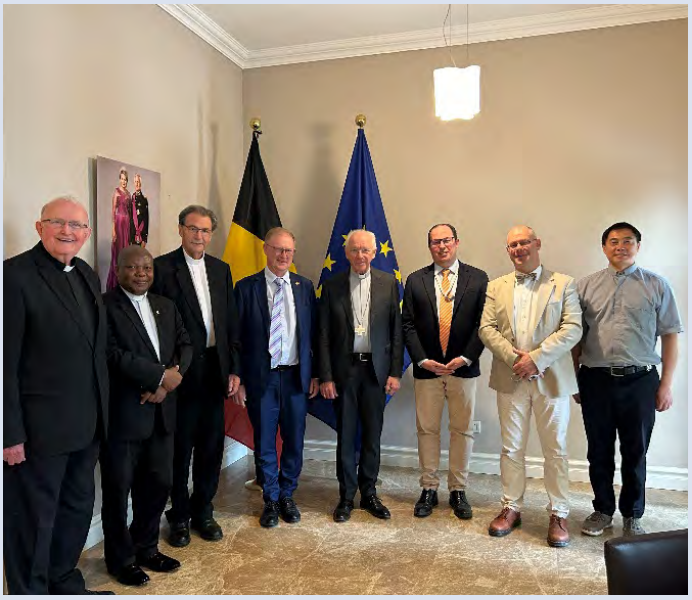
Welcome in Wumeng (Jining)



Cardinal De Kesel presents his book to Bp. Yao Shun in Wumeng (Jining)



Visiting the old observatory in Beijing with the astronomical instruments of Ferdinand Verbiest sj



The staff of the Belgian Embassy in Beijing also welcomed the delegation



At the entrance of Zhalan cemetery



The delegation at the tomb of Ferdinand Verbiest sj





On 13 June, the delegation was received by the Party's "United Front" where they met with delegates from all officially recognized religions in China

Verbiest Foundation restarted the pastoral exchange sessions with China

Fr. Matthew Gong Zhixi

The sixth ongoing pastoral formation session of the Verbiest Foundation (VF).

VF organized its sixth ongoing pastoral formation session (*Spring Session*) at the Chinese College in Leuven from April 8 to May 10, 2024. 22 priests from 14 dioceses in China and two nuns serving in Europe participated in the session.

From 2015 until 2020, VF organized yearly spring- and summer sessions for Chinese priests, nuns, religious and lay people. This ongoing formation program provides with activities in pastoral ministry, Catholic catechesis, adult catechesis classes, Catholic social ethics, homiletics, character growth, spirituality, Bible-studies, as well as a pilgrimage and visits. The courses are very practical in the everyday parish work, but they are not so commonly, or even not, taught during the priest's seminary formation. Unfortunately the program was interrupted since 2020 due to the pandemic. However, in 2023, when the situation allowed it again, VF immediately began to re-activate these ongoing formation programs. This was done at the explicit request of the Chinese bishops, with the full approval of His. Emin. Cardinal Joseph De Kesel, Chairman of Verbiest Foundation. Thanks to the efforts of VF colleagues, it was finally possible to organize a 5-week session again this year, including courses in Bible-study, pastoral spirituality, Catholic social ethics, catechesis of communication, adult catechesis, and a one week pilgrimage to Rome.

During the first week, Franciscan Father Lin Sichuan ofm from Taiwan, associate professor of Fu Jen Catholic University, taught a course on Jesus''Parting Words' in the Gospel of John. He combined a new biblical vision with his pastoral experience in his parish. The participants considered his course and vivid explanations to be very useful for their own ministry. The subjects, such as prayer and group communion, provided these parish priests with guidance and valuable pastoral experiences.

In the second week the Jesuit Father Antonio Ren, doctor in theology at the *Université Catholique de Louvain* (UCL) and researcher at the Catholic Studies Center of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, taught classes on Pastoral Spirituality. He focused on universal (not limited to the clergy!) pastoral duties, principles and methods of spiritual practice through reflection, discussion, sharing, practice, and prayer. Starting point for all of this has to be the current situation in which the Church, but also society is in. Fr. Ren introduced important Catholic teachings, theological principles, pastoral care, and new paradigms of evangelization. The participants were introduced to a new method of parish evangelization, with an analogy to the growth of cells. The church community, that facilitates the "hospitality space of encounter", becomes an example of a "scripture-reading evangelization cell", from which more and more cells keep multiplying.

The third week brought courses from VF's own Father Matthew Gong, who introduced Catholic social ethics. This is a topic which is rarely addressed in seminary formation. Father Gong introduced the history, development, and basic principles of the Catholic Social Doctrine of the Church, as well as important topics such as family, environment, and work, to make participants understand the importance of social ethics in pastoral parish care. Fr. Gong emphasized also the



Session participants with Fr. Charles Phukuta cicm, Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm, Fr. Peter Koh cicm and Dr. Hugo Vanheeswijck



Lesson from Fr. Lin Sichuan ofm



Lesson from Fr. Antonio Ren sj

relationship between social service and evangelization.

Sister Yang Gaby, also from VF, focussed on "Catechesis in the field of communication" during the last week of the session. She introduced the catechetical model of Jesuit Father André Fossion. André Fossion summarizes various models of catechesis: the mission model, the catechesis model, the anthropological model and the historical prophet model, and analysed the evolutionary trajectory and logic of these models, as well as the movement of contemporary catechesis which possessed consensus and the contradictions and conflict tensions within it. In addition, Sister Gaby also introduced the adult catechumenate community, and discussed how to gather with the catechumenates, and how to pursue and share their faith journey together, so as to generate participation, interaction, and that the community can achieve a lively faith, connected with everyday life.

VF also organized a week-long pilgrimage to Rome, during which the participants visited the four basilicas and the historical sites of ancient Rome. The group made visits to the Chinese parish in Rome, the community of Sant' Egidio, the Propaganda Fide, and celebrated Mass together with Archbishop Claudio Celli in the Basilica of Saint Peter's. They also undertook a pilgrimage to Saint Francis' hometown of Assisi. The culmination point was Pope Francis' public audience in the Paul VI Hall on Wednesday, May 1. All were deeply moved by the opportunity to meet this kind-hearted Pope.

During the weekends, various visits were arranged, to make the participants more acquainted with the history, culture, and Catholic activities of Belgium and neighbouring countries. In Leuven they visited the university and celebrated mass in St. Damians church. In Germany they were welcomed by Fr. Martin Welling svd, director of the China

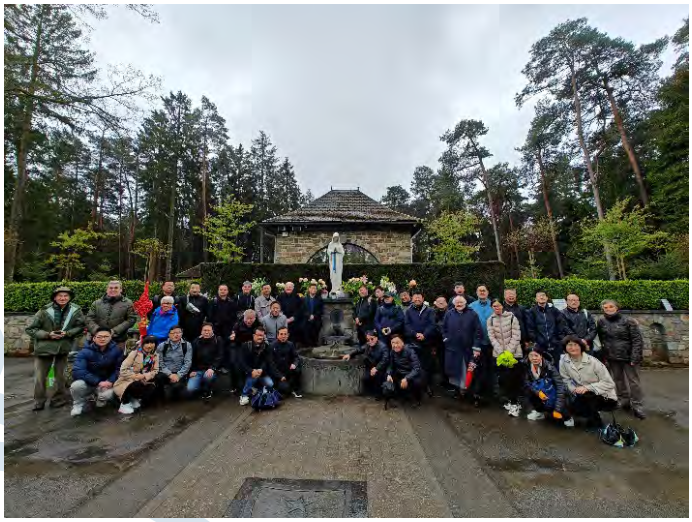


The participants with Archbishop Celli in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome

Zentrum, who guided them in the Cathedral in Cologne. They visited the mother house of CICM in Brussels to learn about the missionary history of the CICM in China. Participants also visited the Sant' Egidio community in Antwerp where they were warmly welcomed, making them to personally experience the spirit of Christ - serving the poor; on Ascension Day, the participants visited Bruges, the "Venice of the North", and witnessed the Holy Blood Procession. This grand procession, which began at the end of the 13th century, is one of the largest religious celebrations in Belgium, attracting countless tourists and believers every year to watch and worship. Chinese parish priests who rarely have the opportunity to go to Europe were shocked to



Meeting with Pope Francis



Pilgrimage to Banneux



Pilgrimage to Banneux

witness this grand procession with their own eyes.

On May 10, the five-week session came to a successful conclusion at the graduation ceremony. Father Jeroom Heyndrickx, founder of VF, issued certifications to each of the participants. Dr. Hugo Vanheeswijck, General Secretary of VF, sent a letter of congratulations to them. The group returns to China with a rich harvest and blessings, to their respective pastoral posts, and continue their work with a new spirit. The successful launch of this program also marked the official restart of the VF's service activities for the Chinese church after the pandemic.



Concelebration in Scheut, Brussels, with Fr. Charles Phukuta and Fr. Martin Mvibudulu



The Foundation received beautiful souvenirs from China



In Cologne, the group was received by Fr. Martin Welling svd



Concelebration in the crypt of Fr. Damien in Leuven



Father Jeroom introduces the participants to the spirituality of Theophile Verbist, founder of CICM

Three new bishops have been appointed in China

The redaction

Three Chinese bishops were ordained with the approval of both Pope Francis and the Chinese government. We wish to introduce our readers to the new shepherds, with info from Vatican News. Afterwards, we publish part of an interview with Michael Chambon, who gives his view on the current situation.

Three new bishops have been appointed in China

(info van Vatican News)

Wang Yuesheng: Bishop of Zhengzhou

Father Taddeo Wang Yuesheng has been consecrated as the new Bishop of Zhengzhou, Henan province, on January 25, 2024. Pope Francis made the episcopal appointment on December 16, 2023. According to the Holy See Press Office, Father Wang Yuesheng was born in Zhumadian (Henan) on February 27, 1966, and studied philosophy and theology at the Central South Seminary (1987-1993). He was ordained a priest in Hankou on October 17, 1993, and served as parish priest in Zhenghou. Since December 2011, he has been the parish priest in the Huiji District of Zhengzhou.



Zhengzhou diocese

Agenzia Fides recalls that after the resumption of ecclesiastical life that began in the late 1970s, the diocese of Zhengzhou did not have any bishops, but only Diocesan Administrators. Since the 1980s, several churches have been restored or built anew. Ecclesiastical life continued to beat, but without regaining the intensity that seemed evident in the 1950s. At that time, out of a population of four million inhabitants, there were more than twenty thousand baptized Catholics. Today, with a population more than doubled, the number of Catholics ranges from ten thousand to twenty thousand baptized, according to estimates from various sources.

Sun Wenjun: Bishop of Weifang

Father Anthony Sun Wenjun has been consecrated Bishop of the Diocese of Weifang, China on January 29, 2024. Pope Francis appointed him on 20 April 2023. Bishop Anthony Sun Wenjun was born on November 1, 1970. He studied at the seminary of Sheshan, in Shanghai, from 1989 to 1994. He was ordained a priest in 1995 in the parish of Xishiku in Beijing. He subsequently provided pastoral service in Shandong from 2005 to 2007. Between 2007 and 2008 he pursued his personal formation in Ireland. Upon his return to Weifang, he continued his ministry there.



Weifang diocese

The new diocese of Weifang, replacing the Apostolic Prefecture of Yiduxian, was erected on the same day Bishop Sun Wenjun was appointed by the Pope, on April 20, 2023. Weifang diocese has its episcopal see in the Cathedral Church of Christ the King, located in Qingzhou, city of Weifang. The territory of the diocese of Weifang conforms to that of the principal city of Weifang, with around 6000 Catholics, served by ten priests and six religious sisters.

Wu Yishun: Bishop of Minbei (Shaowu)

Fr. Peter Wu Yishun has been consecrated as the new Bishop of Minbei (Shaowu) in the Chinese province of Fujian. on January 31, 2024, His episcopal consecration took place in the church of Chengguan in the district of Jianyang in the city of Nanping. Pope Francis appointed him on December 16, 2023.



Bishop Wu Yishun was born in Fujian on December 7, 1964, and studied philosophy and theology at the Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai. He was ordained a priest in 1992, in the Xiamen diocese. Then he was sent to Minbei, he served as a director in the parish of NanPing, also in charge of the Apostolic Prefecture of Shaowu and Jianou.

In what follows, Michel Chambon, theologian and cultural anthropologist who has conducted years of research in China, will elaborate more about Minbei diocese, and will give his assessment of the current status of the Sino-Vatican relations. (interview from UCANews, February 1, 2024 – full text available online via ucanews.com).



Bishop Peter Wu Yishun, his priests and lay Catholics celebrating the Chrism Mass in Jianou on March 27, 2024 (Photo: Michel Chambon) via UCANews

Father Peter Wu Yishun was installed bishop of Minbei on Jan. 31. What is the significance of his consecration for Catholics in the diocese?

Father Wu is a wonderful man and a wise pastor. I have known him for years and I am familiar with the prefecture of Minbei as I have conducted fieldwork there since 2013. In the eyes of Chinese authorities, the Minbei diocese covers the administrative prefecture of Minbei. It was created by merging parts of three ecclesial territories in the northern part of Fujian province, a mountainous region that is undergoing rapid development. Father Wu has been a priest for over 25 years. He is a very low-key, humble yet active and caring pastor. He is also friendly and has a good sense of humor. He has good pastoral experience at home and traveled abroad several times. I have seen all kinds of priests in China — some being ambitious, depressed, alcoholic, or spending too much time with Chinese officials. He is none of this. But the region is a tricky place for Catholics. It is the birthplace of the Chinese rite country. The nearby Mindong diocese, where Father Wu comes from, had an excommunicated bishop for years. Catholics in Minbei have long been divided between underground and official communities. Over the years, Father Wu has been able to gain the trust of underground Catholics. It was not an easy task.

It was clear for years that he should become the bishop of Minbei and it has come true now. His selection is good news. It will have positive impacts on the life of the Church on the ground. Yet, it is not clear why the Holy See appointed him as bishop of Shaowu, an Apostolic prefecture of the region that the Chinese authorities do not recognize anymore. In the Chinese statement, Bishop Wu is the bishop of Minbei — a territory much larger than Shaowu alone. Father Wu was ordained in Jianyang, the new capital of Minbei prefecture, showing the desire of the government to establish him as head of Minbei diocese. Furthermore, the Vatican did not create the diocese of Minbei, as it did the day before with the new bishop of Weifeng. In Fujian, it seems that some Sino-Vatican disagreements remain unsolved.

This development offers hope but also challenges. The CCP remains extremely anxious about social control. Catholics won't be an exception. We will have to see how things evolve in the long term. For now, this is real progress, and we can only hope and pray that things will continue to improve.

The China-Vatican provisional agreement, renewed in 2020 and 2022, is due for renewal again in October. Despite the strong criticism against it, the agreement seems to be working. What do you think?

Since the agreement was signed in 2018, nine bishops were ordained with mutual consent, three of them this week. The Vatican also recognized at least six "illegitimate" bishops previously appointed by the state without a papal mandate. And slowly, the map of Chinese dioceses is clarified. The agreement is making things move forward. Despite many remaining questions, it is progress. And every two years, it has to be evaluated and formally renewed. But we know the agreement in itself is not enough. Many other parameters can interfere. For almost two years, the agreement did not deliver significant progress. As Cardinal Parolin (Vatican's Secretary of State) said, it is not an ideal agreement. In the current Chinese context, it's the least bad agreement we can have. In September 2024, the Holy See will have to decide again what to do with this agreement. So, it was essential to have some kind of concrete output in the upcoming months. In a context where numerous anti-China voices criticize Pope Francis openly for his China approach, it would have been very difficult for the Holy See to renew or develop the agreement further if nothing improved.

Although relations are improving, the Vatican is also silent about the Chinese government's rights violations and religious persecution, including of Christians and underground Catholics. Is the Vatican making too many concessions to improve relations with China?

In general, the Vatican is cautious before pointing fingers at a specific nation, big or small. We know that in the competition between the US and China, any word against China can be interpreted in all kinds of directions. So, I do understand the extreme caution the Vatican takes. However, I understand the depth of your question. China is trying its best to take as much advantage as possible of every situation before it. In some sense, this is fair game. Yet in 2018, (with the agreement with the Vatican) China for the first time acknowledged publicly that a foreign power, the pope, has a word to say about a religious matter in China. That never happened before. Despite this complicated context and tense political atmosphere, the Holy See has been able to negotiate with China and earn some kind of trust and relaxation from the CCP. This is positive.

Everything is not solved and numerous questions remain. But it's still progress. This is unprecedented that China is willing to listen to local bishops in China and the Vatican before making any episcopal appointments. Pointing fingers and going for some sort of a holy war against a specific regime have rarely produced the best results. In Vietnam, Japan, or Korea, we had hundreds, thousands of martyrs. Do we want that in China? Unfortunately, we know how China treats some religious minorities, perceiving some ethnic groups as a danger to the state and national cohesion. Do we want to tell Chinese Catholics to go for a full fight with the CCP? I think this would be very unwise, un-evangelical, and unproductive. If Europeans, Americans and Japanese are so concerned about religious freedom in China, they should be the ones removing their ambassadors from Beijing and transferring them to Taipei. Today, the ambassador of the pope is in Taipei, not in Beijing. The Vatican is deploying its own diplomacy, giving great attention to all parties and refusing any anti-China agenda. The West should not lecture the Holy See on China.

100th anniversary of the '*Concilium Sinense*'

The redaction[1]

A bit of history

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the *Concilium Sinense*, the first Council of the Catholic Church in China. This historic event, which took place in the Cathedral of St. Ignatius of Loyola in Shanghai in 1924, marked a milestone in the apostolic mission and in the process of development of the local Church in China, underlining the importance of a native Church led by native bishops and priests.



First Council of the Catholic Church in China at the Cathedral in Xu-jia-hui, Shanghai from May 14 to June 12, 1924

The *Concilium* was convened in the context of Pope Benedict XV's apostolic letter "*Maximum Illud*" and was born as an attempt to deeply root the Christian faith in the Chinese social and cultural fabric. In fact, the Pope urged in his 1919 letter, the recognition that faith in Christ was not alien to any nation and that being a Christian did not imply submission to foreign powers. The Shanghai Council aligned itself with this view, promoting Chinese ecclesiastical autonomy and combating colonial influences on ecclesiastical practices. During the Council crucial decisions were made for the growth of an indigenous clergy. Bishops and priests from the Asian country were encouraged to assume leadership of local communities, marking a decisive turning point in the history of the Catholic Church in China. The conciliar provisions were thus intended to counteract the colonial mentality and to foster the formation of an ecclesial identity proper to that territorial context. This also included the promotion of diocesan synods, meetings between religious and laity, and support for the creation of lay-led associations.

The centennial congress

At the occasion of this birthday, the Pontifical Urbaniana University organized on May 21, 2024, the international convention "100 years of the Concilium Sinense: between history and the present". The international congress was not only a historical celebration, but also an opportunity to reflect on the actuality of that synodal experience. The event was attended by the Bishop of Shanghai, Joseph Shen Bin, Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, and Cardinal Luis Antonio G. Tagle, proprefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, who delivered the closing address. Chinese academics and researchers were also invited, including Professor Zheng Xiaoyun, president of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Professor Liu Guopeng, a researcher at the same organization.



Bishop Shen Bin and Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Verbiest Courier wishes to present in what follows part of the reflection of Salvatore Cernuzio, published via Vatican News. We end with a hope-giving message from Pope Francis, with which the conference was opened.

Cardinal Parolin on China: Obedience to the Pope enlivens love for country



Archbishop Celso Costantini

"The Pope is the spiritual leader of all Catholics in the world, regardless of their nationality; but this obedience to the Pope not only does not harm the love each person should have for their own country, but rather purifies and enlivens it." These words, spoken by Archbishop Celso Costantini, the first Apostolic Delegate to China, over a hundred years ago, are highly relevant today. The late Archbishop clarified that "such communion is the best guarantee of a faith shielded from external political interests and firmly anchored in local culture and society." Archbishop Costantini tirelessly worked, despite difficulties, delays, and resistance, to ensure that the Gospel of Christ took root in Chinese soil and was compatible with local society and culture. Archbishop Costantini also organized and promoted the *Concilium Sinense*, the first and so far the only Synod of the Catholic Church in China.

Good believers, good citizens

It was an "academic, not celebratory" conference, as Rector Vincenzo Buonomo described it in his introduction, preceded by a video message from Pope Francis. It was not a "historical reconstruction" of the event, but a reflection on how the synodal event itself serves as "a basis and reference for the inculturation that the Christian message brings, which can guarantee the presence of excellent believers and at the same time excellent citizens." This was the concept Pope Francis emphasized in his greeting to the Chinese people during the concluding Mass of his trip to Mongolia, and which Cardinal Parolin reiterated in his speech. He recalled how Archbishop Costantini wrote unequivocal words about this more than a century ago. "The Pope wants Chinese Catholics to love their country and be the best among citizens. The Pope loves all nations, like God, whose representative he

1 *With material gathered from: Giovanni Tridenti, Omnes, May 17 (introduction); Salvatore Cernuzio, Vatican News, May 21 (speech Cardinal Parolin) and Agenzia Fides, June 5.*

is; he loves China, your noble and great nation, and does not place it below any other."

The value of the Concilium Sinense today

Looking back at history, Cardinal Parolin highlighted that although the Council of Shanghai was a "particular council;" it held "a broader ecclesial significance." The Chinese assembly was "a model for many other mission countries that, following its example, would prepare to celebrate their own national synods in the following years." According to Cardinal Parolin, the remembrance of what happened holds "great value" even for the present time of the Church, which, at Pope Francis's invitation, is engaged in reflection on synodality, calling the People of God "to be responsible and protagonists in the life of the Church." This was the same experience that the Synod Fathers had from May 15 to June 12 in Shanghai. "We resemble modest workers building a cathedral," noted Archbishop Costantini. "The design is given by the architect, but each one brings his own brick to the great construction. For us, the architect is the Pope. The workers pass, but the cathedral remains."

From "Foreign Missions" to a "Missionary Church"

The Cardinal expressed these thoughts in a context marked by positive aspects but also imbalances, both due to the "almost exclusive presence of foreign clergy" and "a certain attachment of some missionary circles to the patronage established by the Great Western Powers and the pastoral methods determined by it." In this context, Archbishop Costantini set out his missionary and diplomatic "strategy," inspired by Pope Benedict XV's Maximum Illud, which led him to the "conviction" that he should hold a general synod of the Church in China. "Costantini's saw the urgency of moving from the concept of 'foreign missions' to that of 'missionary Church'", Cardinal Parolin emphasized. Therefore, it was necessary to advance the work of indigenizing the clergy. With this intent, "he supported the ordination of the first six Chinese bishops in 1926, and with the same purpose, he founded the Congregation of the Disciples of the Lord the following year." He also lucidly promoted Chinese artistic and architectural forms, "through which the inculturation of the Catholic faith could further materialize." There was no shortage of criticism and a real media campaign against him, Cardinal Parolin recalled. But "he always reacted to criticism with foresight."

The renewal of the agreement

Archbishop Costantini's legacy reaches our time, which has been marked since 2018 by a strengthening of reciprocal relations between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China through the provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops. It is an agreement that "we are all interested in renewing and also developing some points," said Cardinal Parolin on the sidelines of the conference. At the same time, the Cardinal expressed his hope of having "a stable presence in China." "Even if initially it might not take the form of a pontifical representation or an apostolic nunciature, it could still increase and deepen our contacts. This is our goal."

An inculturated Church

These words were spoken by Cardinal Parolin alongside the Bishop of Shanghai, Giuseppe Shen Bin. "We will continue to build the Church in China into a holy and Catholic Church that conforms to God's will, accepts the excellent traditional cultural heritage of China, and is welcomed by Chinese society today," said the bishop. The Chinese bishop said that, "the development of the Church in China must be faithful to the Gospel of Christ," and therefore to the "traditional Catholic faith." In 1949, the year of the founding of new China, the Church "always remained faithful to its Catholic faith, while striving to constantly adapt to the new political system." At that time, "the religious freedom policy implemented by the Chinese government had no interest in changing the Catholic faith but hoped that clergy and faithful Catholics would defend the interests of the Chinese people and free themselves from the control of foreign powers."

The problems of the past

Bishop Shen Bin recalled that the then Secretary-General of the State Council, Xi Zhongxun (1913-2002), assured that the Chinese government did not oppose the country's Catholics having religious contacts with the Vatican, but these, he said, "were allowed only on the condition that they did not go against the interests of the Chinese people, did not violate China's sovereignty, and that the Vatican changed its hostile policy towards China." The Bishop of Shanghai also recalled past problems between the Church and the State in China, partly due to "the strong sense of European cultural superiority" of some missionaries, who "even intended to use the Christian religion to change Chinese society and culture." This was "inevitably opposed and even detested by many Chinese" and "hindered a greater spread of the Gospel of love among the Chinese people."



Painting of the ceremony where Pope Pius XI con-secrated the six new Chinese bishops on October 28, 1926 (VF publication archives)

Message from Pope Francis to the international convention 100 years of the Concilium Sinense

(...)

Trusting only in the grace of Christ Himself, and in His attraction, the participants of the first Concilium Sinense looked to the future. And their future is our present.

The Church's journey through history has been through unforeseen paths, even through times of patience and trial. The Lord in China has safeguarded the faith of God's people along the way. And the faith of God's people has been the compass that has shown the way throughout this time, before and after the Council of Shanghai, until today.

Chinese Catholics, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, walk in the present time. In the context in which they live, they also bear witness to their faith through works of mercy and charity, and in their witness they give a real contribution to the harmony of social coexistence, to the building of the common home. Those who follow Jesus love peace, and find themselves together with all those who work for peace, in a time in which we see inhuman forces at work that seem to want to accelerate the end of the world.

252 CICM tombs in North China

They tell a message to all of us.

By Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm

252 CICM missionaries died in China. They lay buried in tombs spread over the whole of North China. These tombs tell an important message for people in China and in the West. I intend to explain this message, but before I do, I must tell you the background history of these tombs. Without that background you will not understand their message.

Each of these CICM missionaries freely opted to go to China at age 25. They settled down in North China where they spent their whole life; many of them did not even return home once to see their families. Many came to Northern China in the 19th century from Belgium and the Netherlands as Catholic missionaries, members of CICM a Catholic missionary congregation which brought the Christian gospel to Chinese people. They also wished to improve the life situation of people in North China and worked in Xiwanzi (Chongli Xian), a mountain village at 60 km N-E of Zhangjiakou which was then part of Inner Mongolia. Later they also worked in Rehe, Gansu, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Ningxia, and Datong, in fact almost in the whole of North China over about 4000 km. North China was at that time still undeveloped and poor. There were no roads. They had to travel on horseback, donkey, or camel. The land of the farmers was not fertile; there were no schools for the children, no doctors to care for the sick. The missionaries knew all this in advance, but it did not scare them away from going to China.





Mgr. Carlo Van Melckebeke cicm in front of the tombstone of Mgr. Hubert Otto cicm, which was originally located in the backyard of Suiyuan Catholic Hospital

Over a period of 90 years – from 1865 to 1955 -- a total of 679 CICM missionaries shared the life of poor farming people in the small country villages of Northern China. 252 of them died and are buried there. Some of them died as martyrs; 88 of them died of typhus some even one or two years after their arrival. They accepted that as part of their life situation in China. This is a truly remarkable story. But a drama happened in the 1950's, after the People's Republic had been established (1949). All foreign missionaries were accused of serving Western imperialistic powers and were expelled from China. That shocked the missionaries. They were convinced that this accusation was unjust, and they pleaded not guilty. But they were forced to leave their second home where they had lived for decades, sadly leaving also



Tombs of cicm fathers J. Essens, A. Verstraeten and J. Claeys in Yin Jiang Yaozi

their Chinese Catholic friends whom they considered as their family.

Back in Europe the missionaries felt homesick for China which had become their first country. But they felt consoled that during those ninety years they had trained 250 Chinese priests to take over from them the care for the churches in North China. Turning over their work to Chinese priests had been their goal from the beginning. They considered this a success. Four of those Chinese priests were ordained bishops and took over the direction of the dioceses of Jining (Wumeng), Chifeng, Xiwanzi (Chongli) and Suiyuan (Hohhot). They had also developed Poro Balgasu (Cheng Chuan) in Ordos, the first and only existing Mission of Catholic Mongolian people. When Chinese bishops took over the direction of a diocese, they received money and properties – land and houses – which they needed to support autonomously the priests and their work in their diocese.

The missionaries felt especially proud that they had helped the poor farmers to improve their life situation. They considered this as their response to Chinese civil authorities proving that they did not come as imperialistic invaders but as friends of the Chinese people. Their development work included the following:


Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm praying with, a.o., cicm superior general Charles Phukuta at the tombs of cicm confreres in Xiwanzi (2018)

- CICM built an irrigation system with hundreds of kilometers of canals -- bigger and smaller – more than 700 km long. Using the water of the Yellow River they irrigated tens of thousands of hectares of farming land making it fertile to produce food for the people: grain, vegetables, fruit. They imported new seeds of vegetables and grain from abroad.
- Statistics show that by 1935 the Church directed 1000 primary and secondary schools for tens of thousands of children, boys, and girls and one Normal School to train qualified teachers.
- In 1921 the missionaries built in Hohhot (Suiyuan) the Catholic Hospital (公教医院) including a nurses' school. It was the best equipped hospital in an area of 600 km. Four hundred Chinese and foreign personnel worked in small clinics in the country site all over North China to care for the sick in the villages, sending those who needed special care to the centrally located Catholic Hospital (公教医院). After 1949 that hospital developed into the present Inner Mongolia Medical School.
- They built walls around 236 villages to protect the farmers from the robbers who came to steal their harvest every year in September.
- In the Verbist Academy in Beijing several missionaries engaged in academic research on language, history, and other sciences. Together with Fujen University in Beijing they produced a vaccine against Typhus which saved the lives of thousands of people and of many missionaries.

This international cooperation in service of the people of China developed among the missionaries and their Catholic faithful a sense of pride, of deep mutual appreciation and friendship. No politics entered in that relation. But after 1949 the missionaries were suddenly considered as enemies of the State. This shocked not only the missionaries but also the local Catholic faithful. They all felt that the accusation was unjust. Chinese authorities answered that *the Unequal Treaty Agreement (1860) had forced China to allow missionaries to come to China. They came as imperialists*.

Ever since 1949 China and the missionaries have been in an endless quarrel on this issue: missionaries insisted that they only did humanitarian and charitable work in China while the Chinese State insisted that missionaries were imperialistic invaders. That quarrel blocked any attempt to improve the relationship which both sides needed to prepare a friendly relation in the future. They needed to cross beyond the confrontation of the past. But that required communication and dialogue. That's precisely the message of the tombs of the missionaries and the message of the Chinese faithful of that time. They tell all of us: *don't lock yourself up in the past! Pass beyond that confusion! Communicate! Dialogue!* That's the message of these 252 tombs of CICM missionaries in China.

All we need to do to understand that message well is look at the initiatives taken in recent years by China itself and by the West to promote communication and dialogue as basis for moving beyond the dramas of the past. Already in 1965, the Church, by its Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope)* called on all Catholics to communicate and develop understanding and friendship with all philosophies of life and all religions in society. In 1978 Deng Xiaoping launched the *Open Policy of China* promoting dialogue, exchange, and cooperation with all countries. For much too long China had been locked up in its own philosophy. It wanted to move away from that past by seeking new contacts. Pope John XXIII seeking fresh air for the Church and Deng Xiaoping opening China to the world, these were two historical breakthroughs in East-West relations. The message of the tombs supports this.

I benefited personally from these two historical evolutions. Motivated by Vatican II and appointed for this by CICM in Taiwan I established in



Today, Mgr. Otto's stèle is conserved in the walls of Hohhot church

1982 Verbiest Foundation, a non-profit corporation with as its main goal to develop dialogue and cooperation with the Church in China and with Chinese academic institutes. The foundation sponsors Verbiest Institute at the Leuven Catholic University. That was CICM's positive response to China's Open Policy. It allowed me, as director to visit academic institutes and churches in the whole of Northern China. I felt privileged to meet with Catholic faithful, priests and bishops and learned how deep their relation of friendship was with our old CICM confreres. Being finally able to be inside China fulfilled the dream I had as a young boy of 16 when I already decided to join the missionaries in Northern China. I visited Hohhot, Ningxia, Gansu, Rehe, the diocese where CICM confreres had been active. Their names and faces passed through my memory when Chinese Catholics told me stories about their life and work.


Tomb of Bp. Bermyn cicm in the cemetery of the "24"-mission

I became aware that this was for me the beginning of a new phase in my missionary life. As missionary I was no longer allowed to preach the gospel. China and the Church in China did not need me for that. But I discovered that only by dialoguing with brothers and sisters of the Church, listening to their pains and doubts, learning how they were coping with life in their totally new Chinese Society and giving them my honest feedback which they anxiously wanted to hear, I fulfilled my new vocation as China missionary. Chinese faithful from their side anxiously sought confirmation as they tried to find a new way to live Christian faith in a new modern society. It all called for a new missionary attitude and approach for missionaries but also for Christians in China: listening, exchanging, developing a new attitude to the local Church in its New China. I had to learn it from the local faithful and bishops and then convey it to friends and Church superiors abroad for both inside and outside of China there was a lot of ignorance. Human misunderstandings and prejudices developed among Christians in China and abroad. We lived in a time which called for creative missionary planning and openness. I discovered that I had to learn it and that few in the Church were ready for it.

I also met with non-Christian colleagues in academic institutes in China. We happily agreed on common projects for academic research on Church history. We did not mind having different opinions on the content of some issues. That's part of academic research and of seeking encounter in our new world. It did not prevent us from becoming friends. Even civil authorities, all members of the Communist Party were my partners in dialogue. They explained to me their atheistic philosophy and spoke clear, sometimes blunt, language voicing why they saw missionaries as imperialists. I did not hesitate to repost and voice my different view, my disappointments and those of the Church on what happened in the past. This was open and frank dialogue, not quarreling. It did not prevent me from conveying my love and respect for the Chinese people and their ancient culture. We all admitted that there are values in the cultures of both East and West which we can share to enrich eachother. We were seeking the common ground to allow cooperation and exchange to happen. Over the years mutual respect grew. There was space for friendship, encounters took place.


Card. Danneels blesses the tomb of a cicm missionary on the cemetery of the "Tiger Valley" in 2008

The 1980-90's were years of intensive visitations and rich encounters in China. All this allowed me to discover a new way of living my vocation as a missionary. My first task was learning to know the New China. There was no place (time) for proclaiming the gospel (yet). This was a time for listening, for patiently trying to pass beyond the traumas of the past. It called for mutual understanding, which could only happen through communication in a relation of dialogue, the only attitude fitting in our present secularized society. That attitude is new. To learn it we must let go of some of our traditional ways in evangelization, and this new way is not less meaningful or less important than the ones of our predecessors China missionaries. In the future, only that new attitude will be accepted.

It was in those years that I stood so many times in front of the tombs of some of these missionaries in North China. From our CICM history books I only knew their names. What moved me deeply was to stand in front of their tombs after hearing the Chinese faithful expressing their deep appreciation for what they did. I saw CICM tombs in Xixiang (Gansu), in Xiwanzi, In Ningxia, Chaoyang (Rehe) a.o.. I silently prayed and painfully remembered the misunderstandings that made them suffer. In 2008 in Laohugou (Tiger Valley, Rehe), in a liturgy on the cemetery together with the local faithful Cardinal Danneels bless-

ed the tombs of missionaries who were buried there 150 years before. That simple ceremony expressed the same feeling of deep respect. Some of these graves had been desecrated during the Cultural Revolution by the Red Guards who opened the tombs, threw the bones in the fire or in the river. But when the guards were gone Catholic faithful came and, deeply hurt by what happened, secretly gathered the bones they still could find and silently restored the violated tombs. Only thanks to them the tombs of their and our friends are still with us today.



Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm praying at the tomb of Fr. Antoon Renson cicm in 2002

Two such experiences in Ningxia moved me most deeply in 2002. Visiting Shaanbei Diocese I passed in Xiangyang and unexpectedly found the tomb of Antoon Renson CICM who had died in the prison of Dingbian in 1952. I had read the moving story on his life and dead in prison written by Remie Van Hyfte CICM his companion in the same prison. Fr. Renson had a bad character. He could get very angry but his faithful knew the good man so well. They venerated him like a saint. They visited his tomb and took some sand with them back home as relic. His family in Belgium had learned that he died in prison but never learned where he was buried. They even wondered whether his tomb still existed. When I was back in Belgium, I informed them that I visited the tomb and prayed for him there. As proof I gave them the picture of myself at the tomb which a kind policeman who accompanied me had taken.

In Xiaoqiaopan (Ningxia) that same year I visited the tomb of the heroic religious sister Maria Shi. In 1947 Fr. Feeraert CICM died in her arms. She found him bleeding to death after, in the middle of the night, soldiers had forced him to open the big gate of his mission in Nalinhe (Shaanbei). As soon as the old Fr. Feeraert opened the big gate, they shot him death. Sister Shi and some Christians came running after they heard the noise. They found him bleeding to death and buried their priest in Nalinhe. But during the Cultural Revolution *Red Guards* were destroying churches and tombs of missionaries in the whole region. Sr. Maria wanted to prevent this happening to the tomb of their beloved priest. She secretly unearthed the bones of Fr. Feeraert, put them in a plastic sac and travelled eighty kilometers – partly on foot partly sitting on oxcart with the plastic sac on her back – moving the bones to Xiaoqiaopan. There she buried the bones in a new tomb. I visited and prayed at that tomb of Fr. Feeraert and then, only 50 meter away I stood deeply moved, silently crying, and praying at the tomb of the great Chinese saintly heroine Sr. Maria Shi.



Tomb of Fr. Joseph Feeraert cicm.

The tombs of the missionaries as well as those of the faithful of their time all send us a common message. I felt that those interested in the history of CICM in China should also learn that message. I could not end this chapter better than with a poem, written in Chinese by one of the CICM missionaries who worked in Northern China. I learned about the poem in 1961 in Taiwan from one older China missionary who only remembered a few words, but I jotted down what he remembered because I sensed that the spirit expressed in this poem is historical. It represents the true feelings of persons who lived through one of the most dramatic and controversial years in Chinese history: the feelings of those missionaries and of Chinese faithful of their time. These are also our feelings today and the feelings of the friends reading this history of *CICM tombs with a Message*.



Tombs of CICM missionaries near the wall of Xiaoqiaopan

China, I love you, I really do.
Your beauty moves my body and soul.
Your yellow earth its grains of sand
Are in my blood and feed my body.
The Yellow River quenched my soul's thirst.
Your endless grasslands put my heart at peace[1].

By Ferdinand Leyns cicm & Ye Le Mu

1 *Albert Van Lierde CICM [栗鹏举] had been in house arrest and tortured in Verbist Academy in Beijing. I lived and worked with him from 1959 to 1964 in the Holy Spirit Minor Seminary in Taichung (Taiwan). In 1961 Albert told me about this poem written in Chinese by Ferdinand Leyns [蓝衡师] CICM his colleague at the CICM Verbist Academy in Beijing. The poem conveys the love for China expressed by missionaries, even after they were expelled from China and despite the prejudice of some against them and the suffering they had endured.*

Chinese Lunar New Year celebration

Gaby Yang Aikun



Celebrating Chinese New Year in the Chinese College

This is my reflection on the meaning of some ways that Chinese people celebrate the Lunar New Year in China. China has a large population and vast territory, and there are a variety of "customs". For example, on the first day of the Lunar New Year, families in the north of China eat dumplings, because the shape of dumplings is like gold bullion, and eating dumplings symbolizes the "bringing of good treasure" to the family. In Hubei province, families eat *Tang Yuan* (汤圆), because the shape of *Tang Yuan* is round, a symbol of unity (团圆). In Hunan province, families eat rice cake (年糕) to symbolize how the coming years will be better and better.

The Lunar New Year begins with the first of a hundred festivals. Spring is considered to be the first of the four seasons. In the traditional sense, the Spring Festival runs from the 8th day of the 12th lunar month, or the 23rd or 24th day of the 12th lunar month, to the 15th day of the 1st lunar month. The peak of the Spring Festival is New Year's Eve, which is the first day of the first lunar month.

The Chinese Spring Festival has a long history. It has its origin in early human, primitive beliefs and nature worship, which included waiting for the start of the year to make sacrifices. The development of these ancient practices became a rich historical and cultural heritage of the Chinese people. Over time, this developed into several relatively fixed activities and customs. For example, buying New Year's goods, sweeping the dust, posting "The Year of Red", eating New Year's Eve dinners, the New Year's Eve watching for the New Year to come, playing gongs and drums during festivals on the street, playing music in front of the flag, and lighting lanterns.

The activities of the Lunar New Year include praying for the New Year, praying for a good harvest, and worshiping the deities of the wind, rain, fire, sun and kitchen, avoiding evil spirits, and disasters. People pray to meet practical needs.

Putting up "The Year of Red"

The term "The Year of Red" is a collective term, referring to spring couplets, door gods, New Year's paintings, words for blessings (福), horizontal scrolls, and window grills, all red celebratory elements representing happiness. The red color of the New Year is a traditional Chinese New Year's custom, which reflects the beliefs of people, adds to the festive atmosphere, and carries people's good wishes for a new life in the New Year.

Giving Red Envelopes

Elders, or parents, normally give red envelopes (红包), with lucky money to the children, wishing them health, growth, and happiness in the coming year. In recent years, friends also give red envelopes via WeChat using a smartphone.

New Year's Eve Celebration with the Worship of Heaven and Ancestral Commemoration (敬天祭祖)

The celebration starts with the worship of Heaven, and prayers for rain and a good harvest. Offering Sacrifice to Heaven was part of nature worship in ancient China, and later developed into the worship of the highest god of "Heaven" (上天). Respecting Heaven has ancient roots in China. Paying homage to Ancestors is a traditional Chinese custom, a symbol of perpetuating the existing ancestors' lives. Through the commemoration of ancestors, future generations are connected by blood with all ancestors in history, which has the significance of passing on the new fire from generation to generation. Usually at home, the head of a family leads all members of his family to gather in front of the ancestor's tablet to offer incense, wine, fruits, and flowers. Then, they all bow down three times. This comes from Confucius's teaching (大孝尊天,以祖配天), "solemn piety is offered to Heaven, ancestors belong to heaven."







The New Year's Day celebration

On the day of the New Year, firecrackers and fireworks light up the sky. Chinese New Year morning the first firecrackers call people to open the door, to replace the old year and welcome the new year. People get up early, put on their new clothes, and go out to congratulate their elders first, then offer congratulations (恭喜发财) to friends and relatives, wishing a prosperous new year.
During the following days, many Chinese go to the cemetery, to burn paper or fake money, and put some wine or fruits in front of their departed loved ones' tombs. In the Qingming Festival, the Chinese go to the cemetery once more. In the past 20 years, the Catholics in my province also go to the cemetery, but they only pray for their departed loved ones and put some holy water around the tombs. In the Qingming Festival, all Catholics go to the cemetery to pray again.

The Catholic New Year Celebration

Catholics also follow the traditional customs of the New Year celebration. But they include the celebration of a mass of thanksgiving for the past year, and another mass for blessings, happiness and health in the coming year. Usually after the homily, the priest includes in the liturgy worship of the Lord of Heaven and veneration of ancestors. Worship of the Lord of Heaven means worshiping the Creator, it express the key idea of the Chinese culture, to respect the law of Lord, eventually make unity between Lord and man.
The liturgical texts combine Catholic tradition with ancestor veneration, which includes a statement of objectives and general principles, detailing a Catholic style of the ancestral tablets, specifics for the Church rite and the home ritual, a reading from the Book of Ecclesiasticus 44, 1-15 or other suitable reading. The Chinese ancestral tablet symbolizes family communion between the living and the dead. References to table fellowship and veneration of the ancestors in the Eucharistic celebration suggest integrating the ancient cultural practices in China in the liturgy.
After the mass, each family goes home to have a rich meal. Eating together is the peak of the New Year celebration for all Chinese. Sitting at a round table exchanging greetings, reconciling with each other, and drawing strength from one another is a time of renewal and transformation for Chinese people.

Chinese New Year in the Vatican

(bron: romereports.com, foto: CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Dancing dragons filled the Apostolic Palace in one of Pope Francis' meetings.
Members of the National Federation Italy-China performed a traditional dance to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the organization and to mark Chinese New Year, which 2024 is the Year of the Dragon.
Even the Pope got involved and added some color to the two decorative dragons. Pope Francis used the performances to challenge the group to not be afraid to take risks in their mission of fostering bilateral dialogue: "*Acrobats, as we know, specialize in daring exercises and performances, let us call them "high-risk." Seeing this acrobatic dance, I want you all to know how to always take risks on the path of dialogue, becoming "acrobats of peace and fraternity."*



Lent in China: a gospel inspired answer to the cry of the poor, building up to Easter

Gaby Yang Aikun



Chinese Catholics have many traditional ways of living their faith life during Lent. Most maintain the practice of fasting, and praying the Stations of the Cross every Friday. There are no wedding masses during Lent. After Mass on Ash Wednesday, there is an Anointing of the Sick for elderly people. A more recent development is that many parishes prepare catechumens for baptism, sponsor spiritual retreats, provide opportunities for adoration, and pray the rosary online or in person.

In anticipation of Lent, the bishop of each diocese writes a pastoral letter, inviting Catholics to undergo mortification, fasting, prayer, repentance and, above all, provide care for those in their local community who are suffering, especially those who are hungry in spirit. The bishops strongly emphasize the theme of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation 'Laudate Deum'

"I ask everyone to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful because that commitment has to do with our personal dignity and highest values. At the same time, I cannot deny that it is necessary to be honest and recognize that the most effective solutions will not come from individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international levels. (*Laudate Deum, no 69*)

Chinese Catholics are becoming more and more aware that the practice of Lent includes a Gospel-inspired response to the cry for the poor and to the earth. The actions they take are concrete ways of serving others and contributing to the earth being conserved for present and future generations. Some examples:

Cry of the Earth

Reducing rubbish, recycling water, bringing your own shopping bags to shop, using reusable chopsticks, using public transportation, avoiding big restaurant meals that waste food, refusing to buy unnecessary things, using less pesticides in vegetable farming, and resisting consumerism.

Cry of the Poor

To help the poor, Catholics strive to provide free medical services to the elderly and disabled, and make an effort to donate scholarships to students from poor families. On Palm Sunday, charity sales are being organized.

Volunteer groups are set up to assist students from economically challenged families to obtain a degree in higher education. In the field of a health care, a consultation team gives free medical consulta-





tion to people who need it, and many Catholics volunteer in nursing homes to chat with the elderly, or give a manicure, haircut and bring them outside to enjoy the sun, even going on pilgrimages to mountains or shrines. Primary and secondary school students are invited to sing and dance for the elderly, while others clean the homes of lonely elderly, accompanied by priests and sisters.

With the rapid economic development in China, the basic material needs and desires of people have been met better than 20 or 30 years ago. But Chinese people still feel an empty spot within themselves that has not been filled. Therefore, more and more people in China are eager for a spiritual life and long to find God. Some have converted to Catholicism, each for its own reason. Emma, for example, is mother of two children in Beijing. Her oldest son had not graduated from college, and the younger daughter was in middle school when her husband passed away. The family faced tremendous life changes; the two children were dependent on their mother. They lost their financial resources and spiritual support, they felt helpless.

They were introduced to the pastoral ministers of the Catholic Church who warmly welcomed them. After a brief introduction to the Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). the family decided to participate. They got along with the catechists. The faithful reached out to them providing much-needed money, suitable accommodations, a job for the boy, and arranged studies for the girl. The practical actions of the faithful helped this family feel part of the faithful on their way to becoming Catholic.

Some people suffer from severe physical or mental illness. They live in poor material conditions and are often desperate and helpless. The Catholic faithful provide encouragement and practical help to pro-



The elect in the North Cathedral of Beijing

vide a spiritual home, so they do not give up efforts to find a permanent spiritual home, for example:

Joseph was a young teacher in a high school, who was suddenly diagnosed with cancer. This brought him to the lowest point of his life. He sought treatment and peace of mind. He went to Beijing for medical care. During breaks from his treatment, he came to the Catholic Church seeking spiritual help. He was introduced to the RCIA process; he participated with enthusiasm. His faith grew quickly, and eventually he became a Catholic.

Joseph's situation, especially in recent years, has become more common. After baptism, some receive great healing, while others die in peace.

In summary, people who come to or are introduced to the Catholic Churches come from various situations, as will be illustrated in what follows. Some enter the RCIA process and, if called, become catechumens on the journey to accept Christ in the Catholic faith. The journey of the RCIA process in the Beijing Diocese is roughly divided into the following categories:



RCIA group: catechumens with sponsor

1. Attraction of the Church.
2. Personal seeking.
3. Recommendations from other people.
4. Memory Awakenings.
5. Catholic faithful support and help catechumens encounter Christ.



158 catechumens were baptized this year in the North Cathedral in Beijing

After this overview of activities and initiatives, we want to let the newly baptized speak for themselves. Their stories are moving, and unique:

The feeling of Baptism, by Christopher-cui

I grew up in a faith-free cultural environment where religion was seen as superstition, and was raised as an atheist. During my postgraduate study I traveled to Shanghai and walked into the St. Ignatius Catholic Church where my first encounter with religion took place. The wonderful music of the children's singing class deeply moved me, while the parishioners' explanation of the history of the church strengthened my admiration for Catholicism. As Jesus said: "We do not choose God, God chooses us". Since then I became increasingly interested in Catholic history and Bible reading.

By accident, I saw and advertisement for the RCIA class in the North Cathedral in Beijing, and I did not hesitate to sign up. The first course was on a hot summer day with many people attending, and I felt irresistible joy in my heart. I was moved by the enthusiasm of my companions, who were all of the same age as my grandparents, but still served everyone tirelessly. The higher the position people have in the Catholic Church, the more they fulfill their role as servant. This is in contrast with how it goes in contemporary society, and it makes me admire Catholic teaching even more. From the hot summer to the severe cold in winter, the priests tirelessly continued teaching and answering the puzzling thoughts of the catechumens.

Finally, Easter's day of Baptism arrived, and I could officially join the Church family. When Father Pei Dong administered the Baptism to me, the charming fragrance of olive oil emitted, and I could no longer restrain my joy. My eyes were full of tears. Thank God. The Lord chose me, and I will use my life to prove that God's choice is correct.

One of the characters in W. Somerset Maugham's novel, *The Razor's Edge*, named Elliott, was a devout Catholic, who converted from Episcopalism, and spent all his wealth on the construction of a Church. I hope to be someone like Elliott, who gave everything for faith. When I was a child, I climbed the roof of a 6-story slope and played mischievously without any protective measures. The consequences were unimaginable if I had made only the slightest mistake. Another time, the corner of my eye was pierced by small branch. Had it gone a little to the left, I would have been a one-eyed dragon now. Later on, I had an accident driving a motorcycle, and luckily came out with only a scratch. There are countless moments where I didn't notice how God pulled me back from hell, just like Jesus was resurrected after three days. Maybe I have resurrected countless times. Every time I participate in Sunday Mass, it feels like a rebirth, cleaning up the filth and sins of the week, finding peace and tranquility in my heart, and returning to the right track that God has laid for us. The journey of faith is long and arduous. I am willing to keep praying, praying and praying, not to let us fall into temptation, but save us from evil. Amen!

My Story of Baptism by Augustine Hu

My name is Augustine Hu, and I was baptized at the North Cathedral in Beijing on Easter 2024. Recently, I kept thinking about why I went to the Church and embraced the Catholic faith, which you must also be curious about. I'd like to share some of my stories and feelings with you. I come from a small village in Shanxi, China, with very conservative traditions. We always feel ashamed to show our love or encouragement to others. My parents barely said 'I love you' or 'You are good' to me when I was a kid, while I was trying my best to get their approval, but without response. This caused me to feel upset, and sometimes even self-doubtful throughout my childhood. There were also some tragedies in my family's history. When he was only 8

years old, my father lost his mother to suicide, because her husband used to abuse her. My own mother was adopted as a baby and has always been treated unfairly. Those experiences took away their sense of security and when they had me, this nasty feeling of unsafety was conveyed to me unconsciously.

I'm also a curious person, but my curiosity had not been satisfied when I was a minor. Not just because of the lack of information, but also because I was forced to follow strict, detailed rules and schedules in my school. Although I'm curious, and had been trying to look for it, there was no chance for me to explore and find out more about the Truth. Luckily, I got an offer from a key university in Beijing through the *Gaokao* (*Nationwide Unified Examination for Admissions to General Universities and Colleges*, ed. note) and moved to Beijing, the huge global city. I started trying new things and accepting new ideas. But I still hadn't found the truth of life, which is deep in my heart.

It was not until the end of 2022 that I felt a great void. During the pandemic I was alone, locked in a rented room. I felt lonely, but I had no one to talk to because I suddenly realized that nobody truly cared about me. I had nothing to do and I was starting to recall my life. All I could think of, was the lack of caring, the lack of security, and the unsatisfied curiosity... I was drowning in those bad memories and negative feelings. I felt time flow through my body meaninglessly, and I couldn't get any help. I began to resent the world, and I even wanted to kill myself to escape, thinking 'life is fake, life is void'

I took these depressing words to the Church, where a new view on life came to me, as I saw some babies being baptized. I was fully attracted to and shocked by the power of life. I was standing there, in the Church, in the Mass, for a few hours. Since then, I have been extraordinarily interested in the Church, and I can't stop reliving the view and the feeling. Shortly after, I was lucky enough invited to participate in the 55th RCIA course at the North Cathedral in Beijing. I vaguely felt a supernatural force pushing me. And I was wondering if it could heal me, which was proven afterwards.

I met a lot of people in the Church, and was attracted by their words and actions. By the actions of the parishioners, I have seen what the good life is and what love is in them. I took some classes from priests and sisters, and some of my confusion was resolved: I received the Word which leads us to eternal life and freedom. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, my journey in the RCIA seemed to proceed naturally. And after a period of waiting, Easter finally arrived. It was a quiet and peaceful evening. I emptied my mind and prepared myself for the moment. I was so excited to be reborn. Afterwards it took me a while to realize that I was a new person, and that all my sins were forgiven. I was moved by this divine power and couldn't help but weep. Until now, I still can't stop reliving the moment when the Holy Water was poured over my forehead and a fatherly voice rang in my ears 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit'… *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here*! (2 Co. 5:17). Since I met Jesus, I have been receiving and giving love. I am currently a member of the North Church Youth Choir and the North Church Angelic Altar Servers, and I'm looking forward to serving the Church as a "singer" and 'acolyte' at Mass shortly, thanks to the training I received. I've not just been a part of the Catholic Church, but a faithful son of Jesus. And I will be the light, the salt for the grace of GOD, forever and ever. Amen

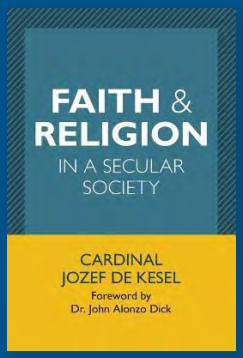




Easter Vigil in the North Cathedral in Beijing

Verbiest Institute KU Leuven for Sino-Mongol studies presents:

15th International Verbiest Conference on 'Church and Society' Sept. 3 – Sept. 6, 2024



Scholars from various countries gather in Leuven to discuss topics taken from Cardinal Joseph De Kesel's book:

"Faith & Religion in a Secular Society"

The ideas of the Cardinal formulated in this publication are the basis for a continuous dialogue between the Church and Society. From both a pastoral as well as an academic angle of vision, experts will try to formulate an answer to the question on how to build a relation between "Church and Society" in our time, seen from one's own specific culture.

3 subtopics are treated:

"Secularisation – Obstacles and opportunities"
"Vatican II – Still a Work to do"
"Option for Dialogue – Relation with the World"

Our panel of experts includes among many others:

Cardinal Joseph De Kesel, Chairman of Verbiest Foundation
Mgr. Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, Archbishop of Reims, France
Mgr. Johannes Hendriks, Bishop of Haarlem-Amsterdam, Netherlands
Mgr. Guo Jincai, Bishop of Chengde, China
Dom Bernardus Peeters, OCSO, Abbot General of the Trappists
Fr. Charles Phukuta, CICM Superior General
Prof. Fr. Tomas Halík, Charles University, Prague

Registration is required.

For the full program of the conference, info and registrations, please contact pieter.ackerman@fvi.kuleuven.be or scan the code

Location: Leuven University - Grote Aula, MTC & Aula Wolfspoort

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation

Mission Statement

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation (VF) is legally established in Leuven, directed by the VF Board, and presided by H. Emin. Card. Jozef De Kesel. During its IXth Chapter (1981), CICM (the Scheut Fathers), after 90 years (1865-1955) of missionary activities in North China looked for a new way to live the *Option for China* written in their Constitutions since 1862 by Founder Theophile Verbist. In 1983 CICM established VF to update its *Option for China*. VF was given the task to develop a new relation of cooperation and exchange with China (the PRC) and Chinese (Zhonghua 中华) communities worldwide. Since then, VF honors the traditional CICM Priority Option for China by promoting dialogue, cooperation, and exchange.

For 23 years VF grew and developed in Taiwan thanks to CICM and to the dedication and essential contributions of lay faithful and Church leaders of Taiwan. In 2006 CICM transferred VF to Verbiest Foundation-Leuven in Belgium where it is now legally registered. In view of its goal and openness to the universal community VF does not consider itself as *belonging* to any country or local Church. It sees itself as an International Catholic Community inspired by the gospel and by Vatican II.

The VF community includes members from East and West: diocesan priests, religious missionaries, non-Christian members as well as lay faithful. Each of the members contributes to the goal of the foundation from his own cultural, social, and historical background. They work in institutes in Leuven (Belgium) and Taipei (Taiwan). The VF Board hopes that it will soon be possible to welcome a VF Board member from the People's Republic of China which is necessary to realize its goal.

VF is open to dialogue with atheism, different philosophies, and religions to foster mutual understanding, brotherhood on a basis of equality and mutual respect while pursuing progress and wellbeing in our modern secularized societies. The VF goal is best expressed in the phrase *Seeking the Common Ground* i.e., we search to discover the issues on which we agree with our partners in dialogue while *showing mutual respect* for the issues on which we do not agree.

VF has developed three activity programs to realize its goal:
1. A Program for Pastoral & Social Exchange and Cooperation,
2. An Academic Research Program
3. A Cultural Exchange Program

In Leuven Verbiest Foundation runs two institutes which are jointly administered. It cooperates with Leuven Catholic University through its Verbiest Institute KUL located in KUL premises. Chinese College Leuven (CCL) is a VF home where colleagues who do research or engage in VF activities accept to live together in a CCL community of Christian Universal Brotherhood.

In Taiwan VF honors and continues the heritage and part of the program inherited from the *Taiwan Pastoral Center (TPC)*. This includes programs for formation of ministers in the pastoral, catechetical and social fields. VF cooperation with Fujen Catholic University is fostered by the *Taipei Verbiest Association for Cultural Exchange*.

What is the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation? What is she doing?

- CICM (Congregation of Missionaries of Scheut) was founded in 1862 by Theofiel Verbist (Antwerp). Between 1865 and 1955 679 missionaries worked in North China: in Inner Mongolia, in Jehol, Datong, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Qinghai. They evangelized, they built schools, hospitals and developed agriculture. Some Scheut missionaries became famous around the world through their research on the Chinese and Mongolian language and culture. Having been banished from China, after 1949 by Mao Zedong, they opened missions in Taiwan, Hong Kong, in Singapore and later in Republic of Mongolia.

- When China opened again to establish collaboration with the West, Scheut created with the Catholic University of Louvain, in 1982, the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, bearing the name of the famous Jesuit missionary eighteenth-century Belgian astronomer, teacher of Emperor Kangxi. His Eminence, Cardinal J. De Kesel (Mechelen) chairs the Foundation.

- The Verbiest Foundation wants to develop a new relationship with the Church of China. Similar to the age old collaboration of missionaries of our countries with China, she wants to stimulate a contemporary collaboration between the Church Belgium and China. This should be based on equality and mutual appreciation.

- The Foundation sponsors the activities of the Institute Verbiest KULeuven (Naamsestraat 63, bus 4018, 3000 Leuven), those of the Chinese College in Leuven (Vlamingenstraat 1) and those of the Institute Verbiest in Taipei. Through these institutes, the Foundation wants to develop research on the history of the Church in China as well as developing there pastoral collaboration with the Church.

- To help the Church in China most effectively, it is better to invest in the training of ministers of the Church. For this purpose, the Foundation offers scholarships for the formation of priests, of nuns and lay people. Note that a formation, insured in China, is preferred. The foundation also aimed at higher institutes in China. Likewise, there are priests, nuns and lay people who are invited to receive special training abroad. After their studies, it is advisable that they return to China to serve their own Church. Colleagues from the Foundation are in touch with bishops and religious communities in China. They make sure that the support is used good and correctly.

- In addition, the Foundation also responds positively to requests for help for (small) development projects in the dioceses of North-West China: Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, etc.

- Financial support can be sent to: Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, Vlamingenstraat 1, 3000 Leuven
IBAN: **BE76 7350 1834 3795** (KBC Bank NV, Mgr Ladeuzeplein 19, 3000 Leuven, Belgium (BIC: KREDBEBB)
If you wish, you can always take up contact with our secretariat via verbiest.inst@kuleuven.be

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