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EDITORIAL

Rome's China policy is the work of four popes. Pope Francis deserves our full support

Jerome Heyndrickx cicm

When Pope Francis reached an agreement with China in 2018 – temporarily, for two years – we openly and fully supported it with the Verbiest Foundation Leuven. We still do, even now that it is being renewed for the third time; this time even for four years because, while disappointingly few bishops were ordained in those first years in mutual agreement between Rome and Beijing, things are now moving forward. Episcopal ordinations are currently being held and planned in some major dioceses in China, and that was the key-point of the agreement. Everyone knows that the Church in China is doing much less well now, than it was doing 20-30 years ago. But Pope Francis believes that following the road of confrontation - as some Church leaders want to oblige him - would hurt the Church in China even more. We believe that Pope Francis deserves much more support from within the Church for his China policy than he does now. His closest advisors – Cardinal Parolin, Archbishop Claudio Celli – visited China years ago and are able to understand the needs of the Church in China from within China. That is the only safe way. The Vatican is better informed about China than many are willing to accept.



Pope Paul VI

One can only understand Pope Francis' China policy if one looks at it against the background of Vatican II and from the China policy of his predecessors starting with Pope Paul VI. He was the historic promoter of dialogue with China. In his encyclical "Ecclesiam Suam" he promoted as early as 1965 one of the main messages of Vatican II: *The Church must enter into dialogue also with the secularized world.* Paul VI not only wrote that, but already in 1970, long before the surprise China visit of President Nixon and Kissinger, he traveled as a pilgrim through Asia to break the barriers against cooperation that then existed in relation to China. He absolutely wanted to end his long historic visit across Asia with a brief

stopover in Hong Kong, which was then still a colony of Great Britain. The world at that time was still generally hostile towards China. Suspicion grew in Asia, when it became known that Paul VI came with a written message addressed to the People's Republic of China. But once he arrived in Hong Kong, he was urged by Great Britain but also by nearby Taiwan, to remove his message of friendship towards China. As concelebrant, I was standing ten meters away from the Pope during Mass when, visibly disappointed, he read the only sentence remaining of his message to China agonizingly slowly and loudly... "greetings to all the Chinese wherever they may be..." He had been silenced, and he made that very clear.

But Paul VI did not leave it at that. He promptly traveled back to Rome, and only a month later he visited the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) of the United Nations in Rome. In his speech, the Pope praised the FAO for its remarkable contributions to the world, but surprisingly also expressed his regret that *the world's largest, most populous country (China) was not yet represented in the United Nations*. That pioneering message of a Catholic Pope knocking Nixon in the rush to break the restraints against China has been forgotten. The audience at the FAO at that time even included the representative of Taiwan, the country with which the Vatican had (and still has) diplomatic relations and which itself was enemy number 1 of the China for which Paul VI advocated.

Pope John Paul II's contribution to promoting dialogue with China is as remarkable as Paul VI's but also little or even not known. Everyone remembers the role Pope John Paul II



Pope John Paul II

played in the struggle against Communism in Poland and throughout Europe in the 1970-80's. But few remember the speech of the then young Pope John Paul II in 1982 at a commemoration of Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci SJ, the forerunner of dialogue with China. Barely a few years after the death of Mao Zedong, the persecutor of the Church, the "anti-Communist" John Paul II said in a public address: *"We must make the best of every occasion to enter into dialogue with the leaders of China and to transcend all the misunderstandings of the past and establish a relationship of friendship"*.

When Scheut established Verbiest Foundation in the early 1980's with the goal of promoting dialogue with China, I heard personally – and quite directive – from Pope J-Paul II the following advice: *"Go to China, talk to the bishops, priests and faithful there and ask them what we should do because we have no insights in all of this"* And then he added *"And if at all possible, speak to the civil authorities. We should especially also hear their opinion."* I experienced for years how eager the pope was to hear my reports after every China visit, and to encourage dialogue when others around him did not (yet).

Pope Benedict XVI even set up a special commission with

experts from Hong Kong, from Taiwan, from various missionary congregations and especially from the Vatican. His intention was also to seek paths towards dialogue with China. But his main achievement was without a doubt the publication of a *Pastoral Letter to the Church in China*. Although the text of the letter had been written between 2004-05 by a team led by Pope John Paul II, it was thanks to Pope Benedict XVI that in June 2007 the text got published. It is arguably the most important document of the Church that has formally recommended open dialogue with China.



Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Francis' China agreement can be seen as the highlight of a policy that started with Pope Paul VI, patiently sustained by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, even in times of open conflict, reaching its peak with Pope Francis' agreement. But the agreement still has a long way to go before it will bear full fruit. First and foremost, many within the Church – especially those struggling to digest Vatican II – still need time to catch up with the Pope. China also needs time. The fact that it is dialoging however, is already a success.

As members of the Church in Belgium, we can be proud to have supported these efforts from Rome from the very beginning. CICM established the Verbiest Foundation in 1982-83 and sponsored it for 22 years, after which Cardinal Danneels took over and went on two historic pilgrimages to China, in service of dialogue. As recently as June 2024, Cardinal De Kesel and Fr. Charles Phukuta, CICM Superior General did the same with their very successful China trip and a visit to the former CICM missions in Inner Mongolia.

Promoting dialogue with China is a difficult undertaking, because we have to overcome misunderstandings and prejudices that arose during past centuries and were mainly related to politics, but also involved the position of Church. Like his predecessors, Pope Francis sees this clearly. By disseminating objective information about this, growing dialogue between the Church and China, the Verbiest Foundation wants to contribute to generating understanding and support for Pope Francis' China policy. In this way, the Foundation continues the China apostolate of the CICM fathers and their Founder Theophile Verbist.



Pope Francis receives a gift from the participants to the 2024 Spring Session of Verbiest Foundation

Vatican and China renew, extend agreement on naming bishops

October 22, Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

The Vatican and the Chinese government are renewing their agreement on the appointment of bishops and extending it from a two-year to a four-year term, both sides announced. Lin Jian, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, told reporters in Beijing Oct. 22, "Through friendly consultations, the two sides have decided to extend the agreement for another four years," reported The Standard, a newspaper based in Hong Kong. "The two sides will maintain talks with a constructive spirit and continue to promote the improvement of China-Vatican relations," the Chinese spokesman said.

A few hours later, the Vatican issued a statement saying: "In light of the consensus reached for an effective application of the Provisional Agreement regarding the Appointment of Bishops, after appropriate consultation and assessment, the Holy See and the People's Republic of China have agreed to extend further its validity for four years from the present date. The Vatican Party remains dedicated to furthering the respectful and constructive dialogue with the Chinese Party, in view of the further development of bilateral relations for the benefit of the Catholic Church in China and the Chinese people as a whole," the Vatican statement said.

In 2018, the Vatican and the government of China signed an agreement outlining procedures for ensuring that Catholic bishops elected by the Catholic community in China are approved by the pope before their ordinations or installations. The provisional agreement, which has never been published,



Pope Francis

was renewed for two years in 2020 and 2022. When the Vatican first signed the agreement, Pope Francis also lifted the excommunications or irregular status of seven bishops who had been ordained with government approval, but not the Vatican's consent. It marked the first time in decades that all the Catholic bishops in China were in full communion with the pope.

In mid-September Pope Francis had told reporters flying with him from Singapore, "I am content with the dialogue with China. The results are good. Also, on the nomination of bishops, the work is going forward with goodwill."

However, the Vatican has complained at least twice in the past six years when China named or transferred bishops in apparent violation of the accord.

A few days before the Vatican and China announced the renewal of the agreement, Vatican News published the speeches the two bishops from mainland China gave at the Synod of Bishops and noted that it was only after the agreement was signed in 2018 that any bishops from the mainland could participate in a synod at the Vatican.

One of the two Chinese synod delegates, Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu of Funing-Mindong, was among the seven clerics readmitted "to full ecclesial communion" with the signing of the Vatican-China agreement in 2018. He and four other priests were ordained bishops without Vatican approval in 2000.

15th International Verbiest Conference on Faith and Religion in a Secularized Society

The 15th International Verbiest Conference took place from 3 to 6 September 2024 and discussed the topic "Faith and Religion in a Secularized Society" according to the book of H. Emin. Card. De Kesel. Speakers from East and West were invited to report on how they see and experience that issue in their own social and cultural background. Since Verbiest Foundation focuses its attention on dialogue with China it translated and published the book in Chinese and invited one bishop from China and one China missionary to present a paper on the topic. The following are summaries of papers presented by speakers with different backgrounds. Verbiest Foundation and Verbiest Institute KU Leuven were particularly pleased and honored by the message of H.E. Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher of the Vatican Secretariat of State Section for Relations with States and International Organizations. He submitted a keynote address.

Message from Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher

Dear brothers bishops,
Dear brothers and sisters,

I am particularly pleased to welcome you on the occasion of this International Conference on “*Church and Society*,” which brings you together these days at the University of Louvain. I thank the organizers of this meeting for the invitation to make some brief reflections on this subject.

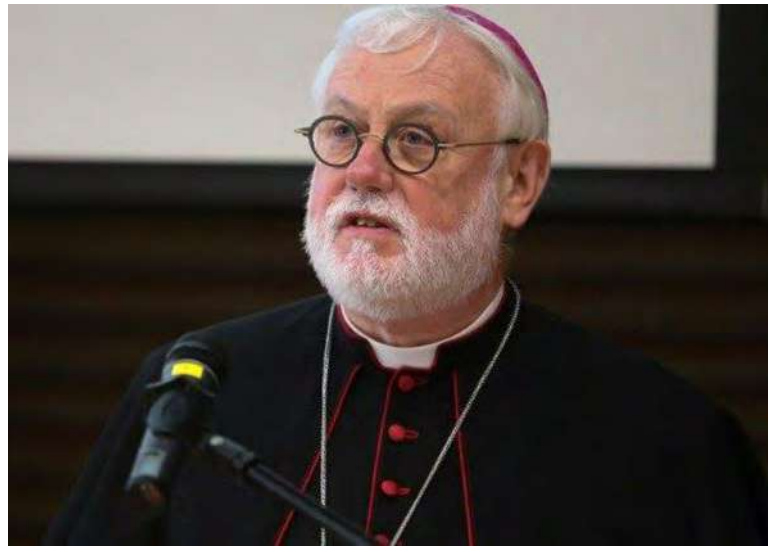
The coming days revolve around some of the hottest issues in the contemporary church landscape: secularization, the relationship between the faith community and the broader society, evangelization and inculturation. As we reflect on these issues, we can hardly help but recall the valuable guidance offered by Pope Paul VI in one of the first documents of his pontificate, the Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*.

Then, as now, the debate about the Church and its relationship to the world was based on the observation that the two are two independent realities, which, however, “*does not mean that we are completely separated from the world. Nor does it mean that we are indifferent, fearful or contemptuous of it. Indeed, when the Church sets herself apart from humanity, she does so not to oppose it, but to draw closer to it. [...] The Church finds in her own salvation an argument for showing greater care and love for those who are near, or to whom she herself can go, in order to let everyone share equally in the blessing of salvation*” (Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, 63).

The Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* was the first Vatican document to give a theological interpretation to category “dialogue”: “*The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which she lives. She has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make*” (*Ibid.*, 65). I believe that the reflections presented in this document give a clear picture of the important task entrusted to Christ’s disciples even today, in a special accord with the teaching of Pope Francis, who has made dialogue one of the cornerstones of his teaching.

Dialogue, as conceived by Paul VI, is “*a recognized method of apostolate [...] a way of making spiritual contact*” (*Ibid.*, 81). But such dialogue must contain certain characteristics, to ensure that the Revealed Truth is presented in an appropriate form and fully understood. Dialogue must therefore be careful and gentle, but also clear and trusting in the efficacy of the Word of God on the one hand and in the good intention of the interlocutor on the other. Breathing new life into the exchange between the Church and the world, in a new effort of empathy and trust, Paul VI, however, also issued a warning: “*The desire to come together as brothers must not tempt us to water down or erase the Truth. Our dialogue must not weaken our attachment to our faith. Our apostolate must not compromise vaguely on the principles that guide the profession of Christian faith both in theory and in practice.*” (*Ibid.*, 88).

I firmly believe that the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* makes an important contribution to many of the issues that this inter-



Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher, photo via VaticanNews

national conference will address. Dialogue, as defined by Paul VI, is indeed a framework that can be fruitfully applied to the relationship between the Church and secular society, while it is also an essential tool for shaping intra-Church relations, and for the fruitful integration of different sensibilities. In this sense, dialogue with China, with its rich cultural tradition and contemporary expression of it, through the Catholic community living and working there, constitutes a very fruitful and promising field of application.

Following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Pope Francis underlines the need to bring closer together the Church and the world, societies, and different identities. The image that emerges is that of a missionary Church that enters the ways of the world, without opposition or exclusion, to humbly provide them with the proclamation of the Gospel. A Church that recommits itself to Christ in fidelity and conversion, to be given to the world as a sign of hope and a source of joy.

I offer this to you this image as my wish for all of you participating in this International Conference, hoping that your work may be fruitful, with the Lord’s blessing on you all.

With a contemplative gaze. Looking at the secular society through the eyes of a monk.

Dom Bernardus Peeters osb

You have asked me to talk about my view of the Church and the world as a contemplative monk. You are taking quite a risk, because I am someone who has withdrawn himself from the world for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven really the most appropriate person to say something meaningful about faith and religion in a secular society? My first reaction was to flee like the Desert Fathers, the first Christian monks and nuns of the third and fourth centuries. But these same Desert Fathers taught me that, for the sake of God's name, I must both flee from people and also embrace those close to me for the sake of His name.¹

Living in that tension, between the love of God and the love of the neighbor, I nevertheless accepted your invitation, because I am convinced that our times need a different way of looking at and approaching faith and religion in a secular society, leading to an inspiration that inspires trust and hope: a contemplative gaze. For the Pope, this contemplative gaze is seeing God in everything and everyone. For this, one needs 'a gaze of faith'. This contemplative view, how remarkable, does not make us more heavenly but rather more human!

This contemplative gaze, that combines love and fraternity, is only possible by taking distance (*fuga mundi*), seeing God in everything and glorifying Him in everything. In my view on the need for a distance from the world (separation of the world), I have always been guided by the ideas of the Italian-German theologian Romano Guardini (1883-1968). Separation, then, is not simply distancing but always remaining in the tension of this paradox.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI asked a number of contemplative monks, including Thomas Merton, to write a message from the contemplatives to the participants of the first Synod of Bishops. Merton did not like that the Pope apparently expected answers or a special message from contemplatives because he did not consider himself better, higher or wiser than anyone else. Merton therefore calls all people 'my brother' as he realises that, even in his solitude, he shares in both the joy and pain, in the answers and questions of the people of his time. He is aware that the contemplative is different and has a different mission but everyone is for Merton: 'the place that



Dom Bernardus Peeters osb at the 15th international Verbiest Conference

God has chosen for his presence, for his appearance in the world, his epiphany.' This is Merton's contemplative gaze which, I hope, is also my gaze.

1. Contemplative love (Merton's Louisville experience)

In his book 'Faith and Religion in a Secular Society' Jozef Cardinal De Kesel says: 'We all know from experience: it is love, connection and solidarity that make life worth living.'² By all, he means everyone in this secular society. So we all have a shared understanding of love. Perhaps people differ on the measure of love. Besides this difference in measure, there is also the link between love and truth that many in a secular culture fail to make.

Love is, for many, purely an emotion and

it can be very subjective. From a religious perspective, however, there is a link between love and truth. Looking at love with a contemplative gaze means seeking this truth in love, or love in truth.

2. The contemplative fraternity (The brothers of Tibherine, the martyrs of hospitality)

Let us get into a second boat, that of contemplative fraternal love. The contemplative gaze seeks God in every human being, creating that contemplative brotherhood where, Merton said, the gate of heaven opens above every human being. No one could have guessed in 1996 that the gate of heaven would suddenly open in a small Trappist community in the Atlas Mountains in Algeria: The monastic community of Tibherine.

In 1971, a young man named Christian de Chergé arrived in Tibherine. During his military service, his life had been saved by his Algerian friend Mohammed. Christian now wanted to give his life to God on Algerian soil and thus give something back to the Algerian people. Together with the brothers of Tibherine, he wanted to be a sign on the mountain, for Christians and Muslims alike. One articulated their lives in that beautiful phrase: "to be prayers among prayers". Instead of turning their backs on the local people, they built a culture of friendship and brotherhood through prayer and work. When

1 Arsenius 34.

2 Kardinaal Jozef de Kesel, *Geloof en Godsdienst in een seculiere samenleving*. Antwerpen, 2021, p. 61.

the local mosque burned down, the brothers offered the back part of their church as a temporary mosque. They founded the Ribat al salaam, the Bound of Peace, a group of Christians and Muslims that met once a month at the monastery to pray together, be silent together and discuss a particular theme from each one's own tradition.

This contemplative brotherhood is best expressed through Christian de Chergé's mystical experience of 21 September 1975 in which a joint prayer between him and a Muslim turns into prayer.

Conclusion

If we want to be able to look at Church and world with a new, believing perspective, we will have to dare to distance ourselves from our everyday world. Distance that is necessary to be able to look at the Church and the world with the eyes and from the place of Christ. The difficulty of this contemplative gaze is not that distance but the fact that we have to live in the tension between both. It is not just about our love of God or our love of neighbor. It is about both. Standing in these two boats at the same time seems an almost impossible task.

It is a balancing act in which one must repeatedly find one's balance. To find that balance, silence - standing still - is important. That is no easy task, by the way, on the choppy waters of our time!

From christianizing China to dialogue with China and its people

Jerome Heyndrickx cicm

Introduction

The secularized society is here to stay. The change is irreversible. What do we do?

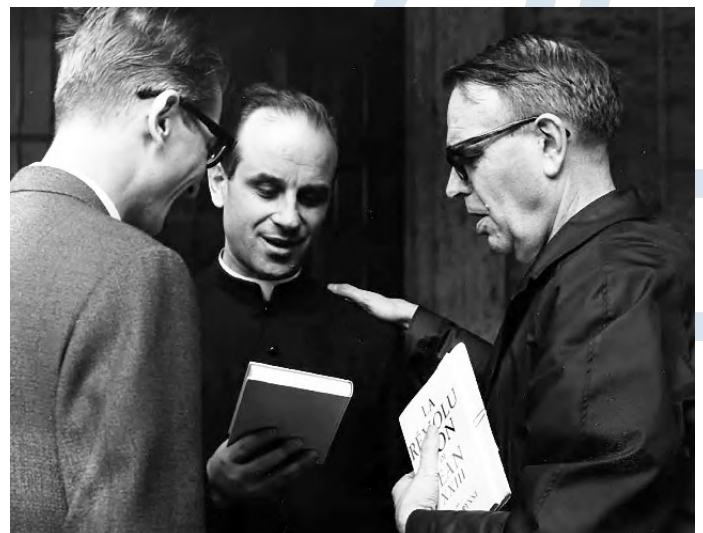
I will explain how, in my 65 years as a China missionary, I learned to dialogue with the secularized society in China, because dialogue itself is the first step on the road of evangelization. I see this as a growth in maturity and an updating of my missionary vocation.

In 1957 I went to China (Taiwan) as a CICM missionary with the intention to preach the gospel, hoping to baptize many Chinese and to contribute to our goal of *Christianizing China*. Already in the 1950's, we China missionaries felt the need to reformulate our goal and update it from *Christianizing China* to *Dialogue with China* making it conform to the needs of our time while remaining faithful to our missionary goal of evangelization. *Dialogue itself is a first step on the road of evangelization*. I see *dialogue* today as the basic attitude and goal of China missionaries for generations to come.

Part 1

In 1983 CICM decided to establish Verbiest Foundation (VF) to promote dialogue with China. But China was for long considered the opponent, if not the enemy of the Church. How do you dialogue in mutual respect with your enemy? For 40 years that became the challenge of VF.

I had to learn it and I experienced that period as painful growth to maturity of my vocation as a China missionary. Firstly, I had to liberate myself from a deep-rooted Catholic mentality, a heritage received from the Church as a child and adolescent, seen as precious, holy even, but questioned by

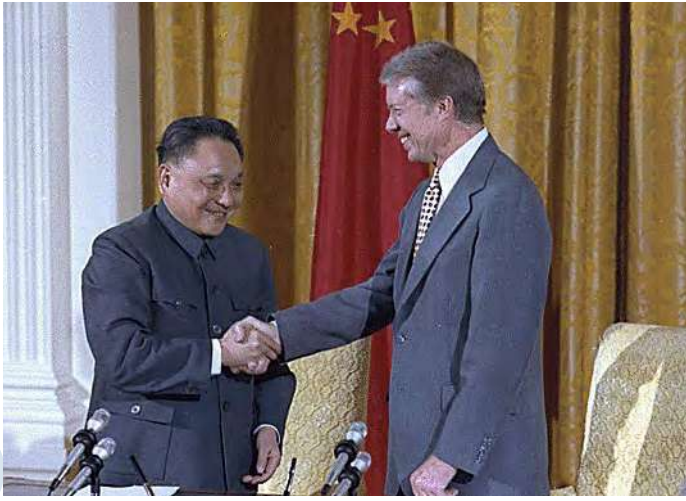


M.D. Chenu (right) during Vatican II

the time. Secondly, I had to learn to accept China, as a partner in dialogue. I had a long distance to cover.

As 8-9-year-olds we considered ourselves "proud soldiers" of the Eucharistic Crusade, singing "Hail Christ our King, our army storms towards you with the cross in our hand 'till we finally win victory". That spirituality of conquering the world for Christ grew even stronger in us as young adolescent students who had sworn an oath to remain faithful. That's probably what motivated me to enter CICM (Scheut) in 1950 to become a China missionary.

But a significant change took place already when I studied theology in the CICM seminary in Leuven during the 1950's, the years immediately preceding Vatican II. The theology we were taught was inspired by scholars as M. Dominique Chenu



Deng Xiaoping meeting US president Jimmy Carter



International China Meeting in Leuven (1974) with Carlo Van Melckebeke cism, Dries Van Coillie cism, Jan Kerkhofs sj and many others

op (1895 – 1990), Yves Congar op (1904 – 1995) and more even by Gerard Philips (1899 – 1972) and Albert Dondeyne (1901 – 1985). They opened our young minds to questions about “Faith and the World”, “Truth and Freedom”. It widened my closed vision of faith and motivated me to learn more about the religious faith of Chinese and Asian people: Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism. I read the books on Buddhism of prof. Poussain de la Vallée of Ghent university and was impressed with what I learned. I was deeply moved reading “The religion of God” by Debendranath Tagore (1817 – 1905), the father of Rabindranath Tagore. So close to my own faith, I thought. It enriched my faith rather than diminishing it, but my traditional Catholic mentality remained. All through my first seven-year term as missionary in Taiwan since 1957, the Chinese homilies I preached and my teaching to catechumens remained marked by my old goal of Christianizing China.

Two events allowed me to gradually discover a new missionary perspective for China: Vatican II in the 1960's and the Open Policy of the People's Republic in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping.

I discovered Vatican II from 1964 to 1966 when I studied Pastoral Theology in the *Institut Catholique de Paris*. It was a 2-year long daily intensive confrontation with basic issues of Vatican II thinking: *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Ad Gentes*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Ecclesiam Suam* etc. It basically changed my teaching in the Formation Program of Church Ministers in the Pastoral Center which we established in Taipei. It created true space in me, and made me respect other faiths and cultures with an open mind. Vatican II ended my old goal of making China into a Christian country.

A second event opened the road towards dialogue with China for me. In 1978, after the death of Mao Zedong, his successor Deng Xiaoping launched China's Open Policy. China suddenly surprised the world by opening its borders for exchange with all other countries and ideologies. Deng Xiaoping showed a new face of China, friendly to the world, the opposite of the violent aggression of the Cultural Revolution under Mao. Atheist China suddenly was no more so unfriendly towards religion. *Freedom of Religious Believe* was officially reintroduced in the Constitution of China (1982). A new hori-

zon opened for China missionaries.

We were not totally unprepared for it. As from the 1960's, throughout the 1970's, long before Deng Xiaoping opened up China to the world, Protestant and Catholic missionaries had been meeting in Hong Kong and in Europe to explore ways of dialogue with China. Protestants were far more open than Catholics. They suggested dialogue and seeking reconciliation. I was privileged to participate in those meetings, first in Hong Kong and later in the historical China Meeting organized in Leuven in September 1974 organized by *Pro Mundi Vita* together with the World Lutheran Federation. These were eye-openers that planted in me the first seeds towards seeking dialogue with the PRCChina.

In 1980 we organized the CICM China Meeting in Hong Kong. 12 CICM China missionaries – old and young – listened for three days to the advice of experienced Catholic and Protestant missionaries. In 1981 I presented to the 9th CICM Chapter in Rome their report in which they suggested to respond positively to the Open Policy of China. The Chapter approved the motion. That led in 1983 to the decision of CICM to establish Verbiest Foundation for the promotion of dialogue with China.

What follows in part 2 is the 40 years VF history. On one side VF received support from the few who supported dialogue, but at the same time it was constantly confronted with criticism and opposition of the many who tried to block dialogue with China.

Part 2

Vatican II and CICM superiors encouraged VF to engage in dialogue with China. But the Church was not ready for it, not in the West and even less in Taiwan and Hong Kong where China was enemy nr 1. To develop openness among Catholic faithful to dialogue with China, conversion of a fixed mentality in the Church was needed. VF experienced that the many who opposed dialogue with China opposed also Vatican II. Help came unexpectedly during an unprepared encounter I had with the Pope in December 1980. I was introduced to

the Pope as a CICM China missionary, engaged in promoting dialogue with the People's Republic of China. I never forget how the Pope, hearing the word PRChina, looked to me and immediately told me: *Father, you are a China missionary speaking Chinese. Please go to China and speak with everybody in the Church and listen to what Christians and their bishops inside China tell us what to do. We need their advice to understand the situation better.* What a surprise to hear Pope John Paul II, with his background, seeking advice on how to understand China better. My doubts would soon be clarified.

In October 1982 during a commemoration of Matteo Ricci, Pope John Paul II shared his own vision on "dialogue with China" even more clear, as he stated publicly: *"We should communicate with authorities in China and dialogue to get across all dramatic misunderstandings of the past".* VF could hardly receive a stronger boost.

But opposition against dialogue between the Church and China was very strong in the universal Catholic Church community, in the world, and even inside China! So soon after the Cultural Revolution, promoting dialogue between China and the Holy See – "the imperialistic Vatican" – was unthinkable. To do that, VF needed to find Chinese Church leaders and civil authorities with a vision open to "Seeking the Common Ground". I had to do that before starting VF.

VF needed to look for all the support it could find. If not, it would fail. Seldom in my life did I work as hard as in the years 1981-82 to find support for engaging in dialogue with China. I was introduced to Archbishop Luo Kuang, Taipei, who had then become the chancellor of Fugen Catholic University (Taipei). He was a scholar, a committed shepherd of the Church, a man with vision. He immediately understood the actual and historical importance of the issue "dialogue with China" and

arranged a meeting with experts from Taipei and Hong Kong. All of us were clearly influenced by the ideas of Chinese Protestant and Catholic scholars in Hong Kong and of the Leuven conference. All advised setting up Verbiest Foundation in co-operation with Leuven university, and eventually with Fugen in Taipei, opening the door for exchange and dialogue with China. That was a crucial first step in obtaining support for the VF project.

Communication with Chinese Church leaders and Chinese scholars happened during a China Meeting in Montreal, Canada, in October 1981 and during my first visit to Beijing in May 1982. Sixty Catholic and Protestant bishops, priests and lay faithful, from China and the West, met in October 1981 in Montreal, Canada. The conference explored the same issue calling it "A New Beginning". I was fortunate to be invited by the chairman of the event, the famous progressive Protestant Chinese Anglican Bishop Ding Guangxun of Nanjing. Unique was the presence of so many Chinese from the People's Republic who had lived – suffered – through the Cultural Revolution. Nobody knew Chinese Communism as they knew and experienced it.

I wanted to hear their advice and spent hours talking and sharing in one room together with the Catholic (illicit and official) Bishop Michael Fu of Beijing together with Dr. Zhao Fusan, formerly a Protestant minister, who became director of the *Institute for Study on World Religions* of the Chinese Academy of Social Science. They spoke straightforward language though not aggressive. Throughout their words I sensed their Christian faith, yet the faith of Christians from a society which was new to me: secularized and directed by an atheistic strong authority. I listened more than I spoke, feeling I had to absorb new visions. The words of Dr. Zhao Fusan summarize best the honest advice of a Christian who was in service of the Chinese Communist Party. He said *"Father, the main focus of the Communist Party in China is now aimed at the 4 Modernizations: science, agriculture, technology, economy. Understandably their focus is on science and technology, because China needs that. But as a Christian Chinese citizen I wonder "what happens to man in this process"? You in Belgium, from your Church in Europe, can make a historic Christian contribution in this evolution of Chinese Society. I suggest you come to China, not under the flag of your missionary congregation, but with Leuven University to cooperate and exchange"*. The advice I received in Montreal took away any doubt in me about establishing Verbiest Foundation.

In 1983 the General Government (GG) of CICM founded VF to assist the congregation in promoting dialogue with China. Already in 1985, its activities culminated in the visit of the "1st Chinese Catholic Friendship Delegation" from Beijing, visiting Leuven University and dioceses in Belgium for 13 days. The visitors were official bishops – illicit, not appointed by the Pope – together with the General Secretary of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA). The visit was organized by Verbiest Foundation and the delegation was invited by Rector Piet De Somer of KU Leuven. Cardinal Godfried Daneels invited them for lunch and a friendly exchange. Friendly yes, but it was a difficult dialogue. Friendliness was not much expressed in words, but rather in the absence of the usual mutual criticism of that time. Dialogue was expressed in handshakes, exchange of gifts, sharing a common meal, most of all



Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Luo Kuang

in joint prayer which was even a time of communion. It was the first time ever that “illicit bishops” from the PRC dialogued with an advisor of the Pope. The beginning of a long pilgrimage on the way of dialogue.

The delegation was also welcomed at the CICM motherhouse in Scheut by the old CICM China missionaries. Some of them had spent 30 - 40 years of their life in China and were then banned, accused as *imperialists*, several of them after spending years in jail. They were confused when they learned about the visit but decided to receive the visitors well. They enquired how their Christians in Inner Mongolia reorganized normal Church life after the Cultural Revolution. The most moving was the moment when all together sang *Pater Noster* and *Salve Regina*. These were moments of dialogue, healing, reconciliation.

VF grew to become an institute that declares itself *open to dialogue with atheism, different philosophies, and religions, to foster mutual understanding on basis of equality and mutual respect, while pursuing progress and wellbeing in our modern secularized societies. VF seeks the Common Ground with China, discovering the issues on which we agree with China as partners in dialogue, while showing mutual respect for the issues on which we do not agree.* This represents the attitude promoted by VF as fit to live in a secularized society.

The option for dialogue of Verbiest Foundation was a constant struggle to obtain backing from friends, while facing open opposition from others. Friends in Taiwan, close friends and cooperators in pastoral renewal for years, stopped all contact with me from the moment I visited PRChina. In their opinion I was *showing sympathy for Communism*.

Civil authorities in China, however, did not appreciate my contacts with non-official (underground) Catholic communities. I was considered an infiltrator, put in house arrest twice and interrogated for dozens of hours. At every visit I had many hours of conversations with official authorities including also the leaders of the CCPA. These were friendly exchanges seeking mutual understanding, *Seeking the Common Ground*. While some important Church leaders outside China openly and rather fiercely criticized this, friends at the Holy See told me privately: *Please continue. You are the only one to do it and with positive results!*



Visit to the CICM motherhouse in 1985

The Holy See itself also took initiatives to promote dialogue. One was the Pastoral Letter to the Bishops, Priests and Faithful of the Catholic Church in China. The letter suggested dialogue with the Church and with civil authorities in China. It may be seen as one of the most important documents of the Vatican-China relations. Pope Benedict established the *Vatican Commission on Matters of the Church in China* of which I was a member. The Pope personally attended one session in each yearly 3-day meeting and witnessed personally that some members of his Commission agreed with dialogue which he recommended, some fiercely opposed.

The main damage to VF was caused in 2004. CICM higher superiors had established Verbiest Foundation for dialogue with China. CICM sponsored and directed it for 20 years, but then, ill-advised by criticism against dialogue, decided to stop sponsoring and directing VF, which meant the end of VF. VF was left on its own, forced to seek another Church entity willing to take over from CICM. VF was in crisis for 20 years trying to survive. VF considers this drama as a time needed to grow towards maturity on the issue of dialogue.

In China I discovered a new missionary content of my vocation. As director of VF I visited academic institutes and churches in the whole of Northern China. The Church in China did not need foreign missionaries anymore for preaching the gospel. But while visiting and travelling I discovered a new missionary content in my China visits.

I dialogued with Chinese faithful, priests and bishops, listening to their doubts and struggle on how to deal with life of faith in their new Chinese socialist, atheist and secularized society. I could only offer tentative and poor feedback, but they felt relieved by it. My old missionary goal of preaching the gospel to *Christianize China* was replaced by “*Confirm your brethren in the Faith*” (Luke 22,33) as missionary in content as the old one. It called for a new missionary attitude: listening, exchanging, developing a new attitude to the autonomous local Church in the New China. By their critical questions to me official Chinese bishops, not appointed by the Pope but by the atheistic China government, and with them Chinese priests and faithful, taught me this new attitude. One can obtain these new missionary insights only by meeting the Church inside China.

Conclusion

VF wants to remain united with, and inspired by, the missionary spirituality of CICM that founded VF. But to survive as an institute it needs to root itself in a Church entity. Only then will VF be able to respond to the request of our time to replace the old goal of “Christianizing China” by “Dialogue with China” without abandoning its priority goal of spreading the gospel.

Today VF calls on the local Churches of the Low Countries to support VF in its efforts to promote dialogue with China in the footsteps of Pope Francis, for without that full support from the Church within our secularized society today, VF will not survive.

Church and society

Cardinal Joseph De Kesel

Distinguished guests, dear friends. In this closing address, I do not want to review everything that was said during this international conference nor draw any conclusions. I just want to clarify a few things at the end of our meeting.

It was not the intention of this colloquium to discuss my book. Starting from what I have written, it was meant to reflect further on the position of Church and Christianity today, in China and the West, on the confrontation with a secular society, on the proclamation of the Gospel, on the universality of the Church's mission and the inculturation, and especially on the relationship of Church and society. Of course, when I wrote my book, I did not have in mind the situation of the Church in China. But the staff of the Verbiest Foundation made me aware that my thoughts are not without relevance for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church's presence in China. It is especially what I wrote about Christianity as a cultural religion that is so important for understanding the situation of the Church, not only in China, but anywhere else in the world. And especially the conviction that the Church should no longer pursue this position, not only not in a secular society but in no situation whatsoever.

During the course of our congress much thought was given to secularization and to evangelization. Especially enlightening were the many references to Vatican II and especially also what Paul VI wrote in *Ecclesiam suam*. The Second Vatican Council was indeed truly a conversion and a change of direction in all these issues. Hence the great emphasis today on dialogue, on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and on the question of inculturation. Even if Christianity is not the cultural religion of a society, the Church is always very much linked to the culture in which it lives and works. Christianity does not exist, as they say in French, *à l'état pur*. When the gospel was proclaimed in antiquity and for a long time afterwards, and even until recently, here in the West, it always happened within a context in which religion was important and fairly self-evident anyway. Just that is no longer the case. Many live in a world where the religious reference is not only irrelevant or unintelligible, but completely absent. One is not against it but does not know what it means. It becomes a message from another world.

Nevertheless, it remains my conviction that secularization is not the same as secularism and that secularization is neither the origin nor the cause of all problems, neither in the Church nor in society. I think that in the minds of many believers as well as Church leaders, there is a conviction that things can only go well again (!) with the Church if secularization ends. It always comes down to this one thing: one cannot think of the world other than as a Christian world or, if not, as a world yet to become one. The proclamation of the gospel is then correspondingly understood in that being.

This is the reason why, all further nuances notwithstanding, I have fundamentally understood secularization and a secular culture as a non-religious and, in this case, a non-Christian



Cardinal De Kesel in conversation with Msgr. Tomáš Halík

culture. Living and working in such a context is a grace rather than a threat. For 1500 years, Christianity has been a cultural religion. And gradually it has come to experience, behave and also understand itself that way. It has begun to think that its mission and vocation is to make the world and society Christian. And that she can fully realize her mission only if she can live and work in a Christian world. And that this is ultimately the normal situation. And where this is not yet (!) the case, it is her task to realize it. It is this self-understanding that has led to so many impasses and which has so threatened the Church's credibility. For with this mentality, she can still be friendly to other religions and beliefs, but must ultimately deny and condemn them. Anti-modernism from the second half of the 19th century until shortly before the Vatican Council was the painful end of that. It is my profound conviction that this Council, with *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, truly broke new ground. The pontificate of Francis aims at this one thing in everything: not to leave that path.

That's the reason why the understanding of the Church and its mission and of its proper (!) place in society is so crucial. Therefore, while secularization is really a challenge for the Church, it is not the threat and great danger to her mission. On the contrary! She is a trial but at the same time a grace that invites the Church to renewal and first of all to conversion. It is a *kairos* and a grace because it helps and, in a certain sense, obliges the Church to live not in her world but in the world, in the *seculum*. To rediscover its original mission: not to become the world but to be God's people in the midst of the world and to witness to his love for all men.

This is why the concept of sacrament is so important to understanding the mission and place of the Church in society. She is not the world. Neither should it become one. That is not her mission. She does have to be present in the world and not merely in the sense that she exists, but to be truly present, witnessing to the Gospel by what she says (and sometimes does not say!), by the fraternity that prevails in its midst and by the actual care for those who are in need in any way. The signum (*sacramentum*) may be small and seemingly insignif-

icant, but what it means (the *res sacramenti*) is universal. The Church is called to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples and in all existential situations. No one is excluded.

Pope Francis is calling the Church to be a more synodal Church. In this, he reinstates the deepest intention of Vatican II. Synod means "on the road together". *Lumen Gentium* sees the Church not primarily as a hierarchical institution but as the people of God. Of course, there are offices and services in the Church. It would be a problem if all were bishops! But in the Church, there are no masters and there are no subordinates. It is an explicit word of Jesus: "This must not be the case with you. You have only one Master, and you are all brothers."

Synodality not only applies to our inner-church relationships, but also to the Church's relationship with the world. The relationship is not one of opposition but of solidarity. The world is not a foreign entity to the Church. The world is God's creation and loved by God to the end. Therefore, the Church must also listen to the world. That is the real opening on the world. It is for that opening that the Vatican Council so advocated. It is the meaning of Pope John XXIII's *aggiornamento*. That is not a plea for adaptation to modernity as much as possible in everything, but a call not to be an unworldly Church. It is what Pope Francis calls a Church "*en sortie*".



Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Hangzhou shakes hands with Pope Francis during the October 2024 Synod of Bishops on Synodality at the Vatican. (Credit: Vatican Media.)

I want to end by recalling the opening words of *Gaudium et Spes*. I also ended my book that way. They are and remain prophetic words: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. (...) That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with humankind and its history by the deepest of bonds."

Pope Francis in Belgium. The link between the Belgian and Chinese Church

Andrea Gagliarducci (La Stampa)

Italian journalist Andrea Gagliarducci travelled to Belgium with Pope Francis' delegation last September. At this occasion he wanted to highlight the remarkable link between the Belgian and Chinese Church, and interviewed Father Jeroom Heyndrickx. We would like to present the interview to our readers below:

Father Jeroom Heyndrickx was one of the guests at Pope Francis' visit to the Belgian royal family at the Palace of Laken. Born in 1931, a dynamic missionary, he was a member of the Vatican Commission on China from 2008 to 2013. He visited China numerous times, and on several occasions arranged for Chinese bishops to visit Europe. In this interview with ACI Stampa, Fr. Heyndrickx explains the special bond of Belgian missionaries with China, the challenges of Chinese mission and the major issues that still need to be unravelled.

Last year, you had the visit of four Chinese bishops, and you frequently travelled to China. How come that Scheut fathers have this Chinese connection? How has it developed over the course of the years?

CICM (Scheut) went to China in 1865 and worked for 90 years, till 1955, in Inner Mongolia and in fact in the whole North of China, over a distance of 3500 km. from east to west. North-China was then the most underdeveloped region of China, with no roads, mostly grassland and desert land. CICM worked among the Chinese and the Mongols, spreading the gospel but they also established hundreds of schools and clinics, one big modern hospital in Hohhot and, using water of the Yellow River, they made tens of thousands of hectares of farmland fertile by building an irrigation system of 700 km

of large, smaller and small canals leading the water unto the fields where farmers grew vegetables and grain. This way they improved the livelihood of the poor farmers.

What did the missionaries do throughout the years?

They established five big dioceses with also big Major Seminaries where 250 Chinese priests were trained, three of them became bishops taking over the administration of dioceses from bishops of CICM. The missionaries were famous also by their Verbist Academy in Beijing where they did research on Chinese and Mongolian cultures and languages. Although they were all self-made scholars, their publications are until today highly valued and widely used and quoted by local Chinese and Mongolian scholars. Altogether 679 Scheut fathers

from Belgium and the Netherlands worked in N. China during these 90 years. 252 of them died and were buried in N. China. 88 of them died of typhus. 8 were killed by the Boxers (1900) and 12 died in the course of the Civil war during the 1940's (some of them died in prison).

Were there difficult times for the mission?

In the years 1950 to 1955 they were expelled from China (254 of them). Many of them had spent 30-40 and more years of their lives in China without returning home even once. Some were expelled after having spent months, some even three years, in Chinese jails.

Despite this dramatic background, and inspired by Pope John Paul II's efforts to seek dialogue with China as of the early 1980's, CICM established in 1983 Verbiest Foundation (VF) in Leuven, Belgium, and gave it the task to assist Scheut to engage in dialogue with the Church in China and with Chinese Academic institutes with which it wished to enter into exchange and cooperation. In 1982 I became the director. In 2004, when I was well over age 79, I retired but, due to lack of a successor, circumstances made me continue until 2023.

Do you consider yourself to be a true pioneer with regards to the dialogue with China?

The real pioneers promoting dialogue with China were the popes. The first great pioneer was Pope Paul VI (in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*) and all the popes who succeeded him have followed that line. Our present Pope Francis reached the peak of this by establishing an agreement with China in 2018. CICM, through Verbiest Foundation Leuven, has closely followed the guideline of the Popes, first with Pope John Paul II, then with Pope Benedict XVI (who appointed me in 2008 as member of the Holy See's Commission for Chinese Church affairs - together with Cardinal Zen) and now with Pope Francis. While many, even some missionary congregations, criticized even opposed Pope Francis' Agreement with China, Verbiest Foundation has from the beginning until today openly backed it in word and deed (i.e. by taking initiatives with China and in our publications).

How did you succeed in promoting this dialogue?

Promoting dialogue with China in the early 1980's was very difficult. Many in the universal Church, more even in Taiwan and Hong Kong openly opposed it, because China was considered Nr. 1 enemy of the Church (but Pope John Paul II, despite his reputation of being anti-communist, privately en-

couraged Verbiest Foundation to continue its efforts towards dialogue. I experienced that personally).

But it is not so that inside China officials were all open for dialogue with the Church or with the Holy See (which they saw as "imperialistic Vatican"). As of 1982 I visited China very intensely. I insisted on meeting faithful and Church leaders of both the 'official' as the 'non-official' Church, which civil authorities did not appreciate. I was considered an 'infiltrator' and put on the blacklist. Sometimes my visa applications were rejected. I was also arrested, put in house arrest and interrogated for hours.

I took steps to dialogue formally with officials of the Religious Affairs Bureau. But dialogue first of all implies listening, as well as speaking, but without aggressivity. That produced good results. In December 1985 I was the first foreign priest to be invited to teach theology in a Major Seminary (Sheshan, in Shanghai). I have taught theology in various Chinese Major Seminaries for over twenty years (sometimes allowed, then again refused...) until I was in my early eighties. All those years I was closely supervised by the Public Security but that meant for me being also in 'close dialogue' with them, as well as with the National Security. In each of the dozens and dozens of China visits I made, I had each time 2 or 3 hours of dialogue with both entities. It means hundreds of hours of dialogue. That creates mutual understanding, even friendship.

What is the result of all of this?

The result of all this for 40 years is that, despite being on the blacklist officially, I am considered a friend by many Chinese officials; I and also Verbiest Foundation and CICM. And that's how, immediately after Covid, in 2023 the Chinese bishops – guided by civil authorities in China – proposed to come to Belgium, which we gladly accepted. We were even asked to organize for them a visit, not only to the Church in Belgium but also, as they requested "in two other countries in Europe". Only a month ago I accompanied the delegation of Cardinal De Kesel on their China visit. But I also personally visited Taiwan for two weeks because my work as a China missionary started in 1957. Dialogue with China includes for me, for CICM and the Verbiest Foundation, dialogue with Taiwan and Hong Kong; in fact with all communities with Chinese culture.

You established Verbiest Foundation some 40 years ago. What was the purpose and which have been its achievements so far?

In 1981, 3 years after Deng Xiaoping had opened China for dialogue and exchange with the world, I proposed to the 9th CICM General Chapter a motion suggesting that CICM (Scheut) should, in line with the growing policy of Pope John Paul II, respond positively to this move of China and take a daring initiative in this line (even though dialogue with China was then not accepted by many in the Universal Church). The Chapter approved the motion and as a result, two years later, in 1982-83, Scheut set up Verbiest Foundation. It was the beginning of more than 40 years of efforts to promote dialogue with China.

The 40 years history of VF have been a constant struggle to find some support for dialogue from the few in the Church



Entrance of the hospital in Suiyuan (Hohhot), established by CICM



Fr. Jeroom and Chinese students of Leuven meeting Pope John Paul II

who supported it and to confront the criticism of the many inside and outside the Church who opposed it (and many still do today). But higher superiors at the Holy See always encouraged VF to continue. Even in the "Holy See Commission for Chinese Church affairs" where some also openly opposed dialogue! Despite personally witnessing this Pope Benedict XVI published in June 2007 his historical Pastoral Letter to the bishops, priests and faithful in China. I consider it as perhaps the historically most important document on Sino-Vatican relations where dialogue is openly promoted by the Pope.

The results were good?

Yes we obtained remarkable achievements: VF developed an intensive program of running formation sessions inside China for priests, religious and faithful; Formation sessions on catechesis, pastoral, social teaching, spirituality. (These have stopped now but are being taken over by faithful and priests of the local Chinese Church). Twice VF was allowed to run in Belgium a formation session for Chinese Bishops on administering a diocese, after we reached an agreement on it with the Holy See.

Based on your experience, what is missing in the dialogue with China? And what is actually working?

In 1937 Pius XI wrote *Divini Redemptoris* criticizing Communism strongly and rightly for what Stalin was then doing against the Churches in Eastern Europe. Communism today and Communism in China is no more the same as in the 1930's. It is still atheistic, not at all converted, but also no longer the Communism of Stalin's time or of Mao's time. Many in the Church speak of Communism with the backward mentality of the thirties. Not that Communists now trust the Church or are even open to dialogue. But if one shows honesty to openly dialogue, communication becomes possible. Not so that in our dialogue with them we willingly admit all their criticism against us. Yes we do admit mistakes of the past while we just as honestly point to their own failures. While most communists are not (yet) open (not yet allowed) to dialogue, some among them are. I feel that communists are as divided among them as we Catholics are.

What is missing most in our dialogue is an attitude to listen, admitting some points where they are right, the honesty and ability to properly phrase our agreements and disagreements with them but above all, a willingness to exchange and develop friendship. That RELATIONSHIP counts most. But it takes



Chinese bishops visiting Cardinal De Kesel and Archbishop Luc Terlinden in 2023

time, a long time, much patience and...most of all, the ability to speak with them fluently in their own language....

The presence of the Chinese bishops in Belgium was not a first. How many bishops and scholars from China have come during these years, and how things have changed?

In November 1985 Verbiest Foundation (VF) organized the first ever visit abroad of the First Chinese Catholic Friendship Delegation to Belgium. University of Leuven Rector Piet De Somer invited 3 official bishops -- Bp Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing, with Archb. Wang Xueming of Hohhot and Bp. Tu Shihua of Hanyang -- with Mr Anthony Liu Bainian [General Secretary of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA)], for a 13-day visit to Leuven University and dioceses in Belgium. The bishops had just obtained permission of the government to reopen their seminaries for formation of Chinese priests after they had been closed during the Cultural Revolution. Rector De Somer welcomed them to see and learn ways of priestly formation in the existing seminaries in Leuven and in Belgium dioceses.

Two of the bishops had been married during the Cultural Revolution. All were members of the official CCPA which made it impossible to ask and obtain the approval of Pope John Paul II to invite them. That's also why Cardinal Danneels did not invite the bishops to come to Leuven but Rector Piet De Somer did. The cardinal did however receive the bishops for a dialogue exploring future exchange and cooperation. It was a daring historical move, criticized openly by several Church institutions in East and West (but as we found out followed with keen interest by Pope John Paul II who favoured engaging in dialogue with China).

That was the first of many other invitations by VF (there must have been around 12 invitations during the following years). Twice the bishops were even invited by Queen Fabiola at the Royal Palace. At two other occasions VF invited the National Director of the Bureau of Religious Affairs with a delegation and introduced them to the Ministry of Justice in Belgium for a briefing and exchange on "Freedom of Religion in Belgium and China" followed by a press conference here reporters could freely ask questions.

Did all this change things? It most certainly contributed to developing a relationship of mutual trust with the official Chinese Church and the government. This runs parallel with the



Visit of Chinese bishops and priests to Mgr. Luc Van Looy in Ghent in 2004

improvement of the relationship on a higher level between China and the Vatican.

The Pope will be in Belgium in the days when the Holy See might renew the agreement with China on the appointment of bishops. What do you think about the agreement? Which were the good fruits the agreement brought?

When speaking about 'fruits' to be expected from a Vatican-China agreement one must first be keenly aware of what happened in the Europe-China relations during and after the Opium War (1841) and of the role ascribed by China to the Catholic Church in this confrontation. Both Vatican and the Catholic Church (i.e. the Holy See) have a long distance to cover before establishing an Agreement. Only to achieve this in 2018 was a major achievement. But we were not surprised to learn and experience that during the initial years the agreement did not yield quickly the expected results for the Holy See. Those who criticized the Agreement repeated that their criticism was justified by the seeming lack of good fruits. But recent signals clearly show that the patience of the Holy See negotiators pays off. Several breakthroughs in appointing, jointly by Rome and Beijing, of more bishops and of unofficial bishops joining the official ones are in the making. For many years I have personally followed with admiration the patience and skills of chief Vatican negotiators as Cardinal Parolin and Archbishop Celli. From inside China I learned the admiration of Chinese authorities for their attitude. Their years of patience may result soon, I hope, in moving to Beijing the so-called "Study Bureau" of the Holy See in Hong Kong; a move that would significantly facilitate communication of the Holy See with China.

I admit that 20 or even 30 years ago foreign missionaries had more hope for the future as they were able to participate quite openly in pastoral contacts, seminary teaching etc inside China. All this has disappeared now. But in the present situation it seems to me that the Holy See is achieving the best it can achieve.

How do you see the future of the Vatican - China relations?

One must look at the future of Vatican-China relations by starting from the time and the contributions to the pioneer of it Pope Paul VI and his contributions during his historical short visit to Hong Kong in 1970 and his historical visit to the UN FAO organization in Rome that same year where, in the



Cardinal Danneels receiving the Chinese bishops in 1985.

presence of the Taiwan FAO official delegate, he pleaded for the need for an FAO delegate of PRCChina!). Since that time hope for a better future for Sino-Vatican relations has grown under all succeeding popes, slowly but surely. Pope Francis with his Agreement reaches a peak. I trust that this peak will grow higher.

Is China the most important missionary task today? And if so, why?

China, the second biggest [most populated] country in the world next to India, is obviously growing to become the most powerful country. For the Church, and for all reasons explained above, China is for the Church the most important "Mission country!"

Which are the biggest challenges missionaries have to face in China?

Missionaries and missiologists should learn to understand the very complex situation of the Church in China from inside China. Most important is to learn the language and, only then, learn to fully appreciate and understand China. Besides this, missionaries in all countries of the world in East and West, particularly in China must learn to spread the gospel in the secularized societies that are growing in all countries. Not try to make China into a Christian country, but be present in the secularized society also in China, witnessing there for the gospel, yes, because there is Freedom of Religion also in China, but not enforcing our gospel on them; respecting their freedom to accept the gospel message.



Pope Paul VI during his visit to Hong Kong in 1970.

When the East meets the West: Taipei Ricci Institute

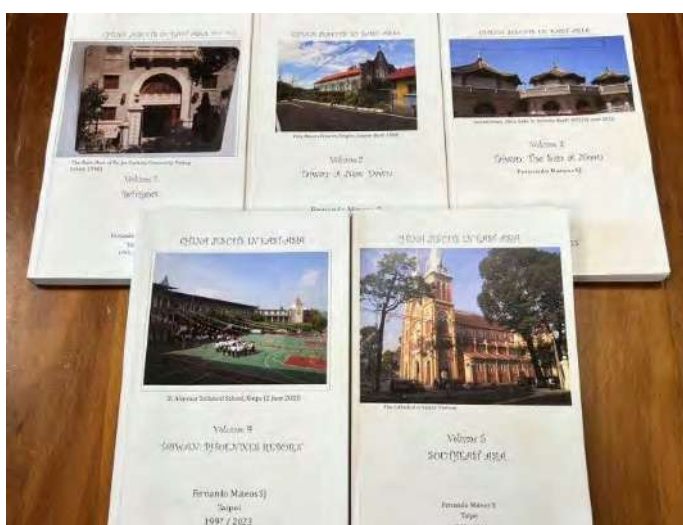
Olivier Lardinois sj

The Taipei Ricci Institute (TRI), which was founded in 1966 by Fr. Yves Raguin sj to promote dialogue between western and Chinese cultures, is now 58 years old. Over the last six decades, the Institute engaged in multiple activities, such as editing well-known Chinese-French and Chinese-Spanish dictionaries, and publishing two periodicals, the Ricci Bulletin that ran from 1966 to 2005 and *Renlai* magazine, that ran from 2005 to 2013. TRI also regularly organised conferences and published books in various fields such as East Asian religions and spiritualities, oracle bones, history of Christianity in China, Chinese ethics and politics, Taiwan history and current social challenges, neo-Confucianism, Chinese literature and arts, and Austronesian peoples, among others.

In 2014, the TRI downsized itself, which led to the donation of part of its rich library to the Taiwan National Library, where it now constitutes the *Matteo Ricci Donation*. At the very end of last year, the Institute downsized once again and moved to a smaller office on the fourth floor of the *Tien Educational Center*, which led to the dispersal of another substantial part of its former library in favour of two different institutions: the department of religious studies at Fu Jen University and the Taiwan National Library. At the same time, the archives of sinologists Fr. Yves Raguin sj and Fr. Jean Lefeuvre sj were sent to the archive center of the French Jesuits in Vanves, near Paris, where they will be much more easily at the disposal of researchers.

Presently, the main activities of the TRI consist of editing, publishing, and selling books in relation to Chinese Christianity, especially those related to the mission of the Jesuit order in China and Taiwan in the *Ancien-Régime* (16th-18th centuries) and from the mid-19th century until today. For example, last year the Institute published in Chinese an annotated edition of Fr. Michele Ruggieri's (1543 – 1607) major work by Wang Huiyu who is an Associate Professor at Guanzhou Sun Yat Sen University. This year, two works are going to be published in English by the institute: a detailed history of *China Jesuits in East Asia 1948 – 1968* in six volumes written by Fernando Mateos sj and fully revised by Edmund Ryden SJ; and the PhD dissertation of Olivier Lardinois sj, which was successfully defended in May 2022 at the Department of Anthropology, National Taiwan University, under the following title: *Multi-faced Christianity in an Austronesian Tribe of Taiwan: A Comparative Study on the Theologies and Religious Practices of Tayal Christians in Mountain and Urban Communities of Hsinchu County*.

Presently, TRI is preparing, together with the French Jesuits running the Paris Ricci Institute, an international symposium, *Who is God? What is the Dao?* This workshop, which will be held at the Taiwan National Library in Taipei from 8 to 10 May 2025, is going to gather contemporary specialists of Judaism, Christianity, and Daoism to look anew at questions first raised by Jesuit missionaries to China in the 16th, 17th, and 18th cen-



China Jesuits in East Asia 1948-1968 book series



Fr. Olivier Lardinois SJ at the Taipei Ricci Institute office

turies. Besides the above-mentioned two Ricci Institutes, four other academic institutions are collaborating in the preparation of the symposium: Taipei Fu Jen St Bellarmine Theologate, the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy and Theology of Paris, as well as the Departments of Religious Studies of National Chengchi University and Fu Jen Catholic University.

Dutch-speaking missionary sinologists and their forgotten works

Missionary Sinology research program at the Verbiest Institute KU Leuven

Simon Yongjun Zheng

Sinology, as its name implies, is a field of study that focuses specifically on China. It covers a wide range of topics, from language to culture, history, religion, and many others. Although China has been described under the pen of Europeans as far back as the 13th century, the emergence of Sinology as an academic discipline is, however, a relatively recent development.

Jean Pierre Abel-Remusat (1788-1832) was appointed professor of Chinese and Tartar-Manchu languages and literature at the *Collège de France* in 1814, making him the first professor of Sinology in European history. Undoubtedly, his numerous publications on China have earned him an excellent academic reputation. Remusat, in fact, was purely an armchair sinologist who had never been to China throughout his life. The knowledge and research resources he possessed were entirely reliant upon the work compiled by those dedicated and diligent field workers, namely, the China-based missionaries. At present, it is common for scholars to refer to them as “Missionary Sinologists”, and their various studies about this Far East land are often termed “Missionary Sinology”.

Of all the Missionary Sinologists, those handful of early Jesuits in the 17th century who served at the Qing court, were unquestionably the pioneers. Their Sinological works have been highly valued and carefully studied both in the Eastern and Western academic world until the present day. In the 19th century, since the two opium wars and a series of unequal treaties opened China's door to the West, a large number of missionaries began pouring into this ancient empire, working in the different Apostolic Vicariates that had been assigned to them by the Holy See. In the following decades, Missionary Sinology, alongside the emerging field of academic Sinology back in European universities, began to flourish.

A regrettable fact however is that the Sinological work of quite a number of Dutch-speaking missionaries from the Netherlands and Belgium, has not been properly acknowl-



The forthcoming book of Dr. Zheng on his research about CICM in China and Joseph Mullie. (published by Fudan University)

edged and studied. To say the least, their historical records, archives, and literature related to China that remain today are of considerable value, yet to a great extent largely unexplored. Perhaps, language barriers that prevent flexibility in handling Chinese-Dutch materials, particularly the large number of handwritten documents, are the primary cause of this situation.

As of recently, I have published an article entitled “The contribution of the Scheut Missionaries to Sinological Studies” in the academic series “Leuven Chinese Studies” launched by the Verbiest Institute KU Leuven. This 30-page article provides a general overview of the rich studies on China carried out by numerous missionaries from the Scheut Congregation, a male religious community mainly made up of Dutch-speaking Flemish Belgians. In writing this paper, I have no other purpose than to make academic circles in both the West and China aware of the significant works that were compiled by those Flemish people, and I wish to emphasize as well that the value of their first-hand Sinological studies and documentation is in no way inferior to the many well-known works produced by the French-speaking Jesuits, Lazarists, or the English-speaking Protestants in China.

Since it was founded in the 1980's, the Verbiest Institute at Leuven University, a unique academic institution devoted to the research of Missionary Sinologists, specifically those from the Low Countries, has published more than 40 volumes related to this topic under its “Leuven Chinese Studies” series. In my role as a Sinological researcher at the Institute, I am currently studying Jozef Mullie, a Flemish CICM missionary sinologist who is widely respected both within the Scheut Congregation and in secular academia. This ongoing “Mullie Research Program” consists of three main parts, examining Mullie's life as a Chinese missionary and academic scholar, his two monographs on Chinese grammar written in Dutch, and his extensive articles published in Flemish newspapers that he contributed anonymously from China.



CICM fathers learning Chinese (1948)



CICM Fathers in Chinese clothing

In fact, my interest in Mullie was sparked during my master's studies at Sun Yat-sen University, where I made my master's thesis on his "*Korte Chinese spraakkunst van de gesproken taal*", a 500-page grammar book on the Chinese Northern Pekingese dialect. After being continually fascinated by Mullie's Sinological works as well as the relatively obscure history of the Scheut mission in China, I decided to continue my studies at Fudan University in Shanghai as a PhD student. My PhD dissertation, which I submitted in 2021, titled "A study on CICM in China and its Flemish Sinologist Jozef Mullie", has now been accepted for publication in Fudan University's academic series "Fudan Global History: between the East and the West." This work will be one of the first four books to be released in this newly launched series.

It is obvious to me that a detailed study of Jozef Mullie is only the beginning of a series of research programs to examine Dutch-speaking missionary Sinologists. Having studied Mullie's life in greater depth, I have come to realize that there were numerous Flemish missionaries who dedicated their lives to studying China. Aside from those well-known names, such as Antoon Mostaert, Willem Grootaers, Henri and Paul Serruys, there are a lot of more lesser-known names and works that are equally valuable for today's Sinological studies: for example, Joseph Van Hecken wrote a series of volumes regarding the Scheut Mission in Northern China and published them privately for internal use; Eugene Grossé compiled in 1930 the first Dutch- Mandarin dictionary, entitled "*Praktisch Chineesch-Nederlandsch woordenboek*", of which only a few copies survived due to a serious flooding, as well as Jozef Rutten's innovative Romanization Interdialectic Phonetic System, which was developed with the intention of transcribing all Chinese dialects through the use of a unified manner.

Also, I would like to highlight the broad variety of writings on China contained in the Scheut Annals, "*Missiën Van Scheut*", a monthly periodical published in both Scheut and Sparrendaal between 1889 and the 1960's. The vast number of articles and correspondence presented in this publication, regardless of whether they are long or short, vividly depict China's transformation from an Imperial Empire to a modern Republic country, since many dramatic political events were witnessed and personally experienced by the Scheut missionaries stationed along the Sino-Mongolian borderlands. Aside from the published writings in the periodical, there are also innumerable unpublished diaries and letters preserved in the archives, in which they shared their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with their family and friends without any reservation. Needless to say, all of those first-hand materials could serve as a valuable source of information and provide unique insights into Chinese life and culture of the early modern era through the lens of Dutch-speaking missionaries.

In a word, it is our objective and responsibility, as the research unit within the Verbiest Institute, to not allow these dust-covered materials to be left in the archives unseen. The task ahead of us is clear: to commit further time, patience, and effort to uncovering, examining, exploring, and learning the remarkable stories that were being told by these overlooked China experts and fieldworkers from the Low Countries.

Tombs with a message for all of us today

Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm

Prof. Dr. Chen Xinyu, Beijing, wrote a book on 252 tombs of CICM Missionaries in China. To collect the data and history of each of the tombs she travelled thousands and thousands of kilometres in North China during many years. Her book is an academic 700-page report on the data of each tomb. Prof. Chen travelled especially from Beijing to the 15th Verbiest Conference to introduce her book.



For the Church in Belgium and the Netherlands as well as for the Universal Church, the message of the 252 tombs is historical and relevant.

679 CICM missionaries from Belgium and the Netherlands worked between 1865 & 1950 in the North of China. 252 of them died and lay buried there in the desert sand beyond the Great Wall, spread over 3500 km. They freely & heroically opted to leave their homeland and share the life of the poor farmers in Inner Mongolia, the then most underdeveloped region of China. They preached the Gospel and improved the life condition of the poor farmers: opening schools for the children, clinics for the sick. They dug thousands of kms of canals to irrigate tens of thousands of hectares of poor farmland to improve the life of the people. In 1950, after 90 years, the living missionaries were expelled from China and accused of being "imperialists", an accusation they have since then contested.

Twice the tombs were broken open during political upheavals (in 1900 and in the 1960's). Twice the pious, devoted Chinese Christians silently picked up the pieces of bones left after the violence was over, and they restored the tombs! Today the tombs are still there, thanks to the Chinese Christians. A message, though unspoken, sounds loud and clear from 252 CICM tombs in North China, saying:

"We were and remain friends, brothers of the people in Northern China. Please stop quarrelling about politics and things that divide us! Through dialogue we seek what unites us in mutual respect. We did that 150 years ago, why don't you continue that today?"



Tomb of Mgr. Th. Rutjes cicm (1844-1896)

Chinese bishops at synod assembly: 'we are in communion'

Andrea Tornielli, October 17, Vatican News

Two Chinese Bishops, Joseph Yang Yongqiang and Vincent Zhan Silu, offer their greetings to other delegates at the ongoing Synod on Synodality, reflecting on the faith and communion of Chinese Catholics.

"The Church in China is the same as the Catholic Church in other countries of the world: we belong to the same faith, share the same baptism, and we are all faithful to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church."

With these words, Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang, bishop of Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province in China, conveyed his greetings to the Synod a few days ago. He is one of two bishops from mainland China participating in the ongoing second session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod, taking place in the Vatican. He was joined by Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu, bishop of Xiapu (Funing) in the coastal province of Fujian.

This marks the third time that two bishops from the People's



Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang and Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu meet Pope Francis

Republic of China have taken part in the Synod, following previous occasions in 2018 and 2023 (the Synod on Youth and the first session of the Synod on Synodality, respectively). Before

the signing of the provisional agreement between the Holy See and the Chinese government in September 2018, bishops from mainland China had not been able to participate in the Second Vatican Council or the subsequent Synods of Bishops.

Bishop Yang Yongqiang recalled these gatherings in communion with the universal Church: "We follow the evangelical spirit of 'becoming all things to all people,'" he said. "We effectively adapt to society, serve it, adhere to the direction of the sinicization of Catholicism, and preach the Good News. The Catholic Church in China has initiated active exchanges with Catholic communities around the world based on the principles of equality, friendship, and mutual respect. We conduct exchanges on topics such as evangelization and pastoral care in the Church, social services, and theological studies; we actively participate in international meetings and prayer activities of religions for peace; we strive to be like 'light and salt' for world peace and the promotion of a community where humanity can enjoy a shared destiny; finally, we promote development through various types of projects." The bishop concluded by extending "a welcome to Catholic communities and religious groups from all countries who wish to visit the Church in China."

Bishop Zhan Silu focused his remarks on the history of Christianity in China, recalling the figure of the Jesuit missionary, Fr.

Matteo Ricci, and his "experiment" to "adapt the Christian Gospel to different human practices." However, noted Bishop Zhan Silu, "the discernment between cultural differences and the need to preserve the authenticity of the Christian faith became a source of confusion for missionaries in China. This confusion led to the famous Rites Controversy, which took place precisely in my diocese, in Mindong. From a historical perspective, one of the reasons for this setback was that the Church ignored the differences and complementarity of human cultures." "Being a synodal Church engaged in the mission of evangelization," continued Bishop Zhan Silu, "means respecting and listening to the voices of different stories, cultures, and traditions in the journey of seeking humanity's ultimate goal, which is God."

Among the issues that the Chinese Church must face with fresh eyes, the bishop concluded, are "how to address the challenges that mixed marriages present for family education; how to adapt to local laws and regulations; or how to resolve the confusion that exists among the laity between popular beliefs and some aspects of traditional culture. The Church in this new era has been given a new task of discernment, even though the voice of the Holy Spirit is always gentle and difficult to distinguish. For this very reason, learning humbly from both historical and current experiences is an important way to evangelize, that is, to discern the new path the Lord is indicating to the Church."

Matthew Zhen Xuebin new Coadjutor Bishop of Beijing

Marta Zhao, Agenzia Fides, October 25

"I do all things for the sake of the Gospel!" With these words, Matthew Zhen Xuebin, the new Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Beijing, who was ordained today, Friday, October 25, in Beitang ("Church of the North"), the cathedral dedicated to the Saviour, introduced himself, quoting the famous phrase of the Apostle Paul. In his final speech of thanksgiving, the new Bishop said: "I am grateful to the Lord for his grace in choosing me, a humble servant, as Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Beijing. I am aware that I do not have the qualities required for the task entrusted to me, but I accept it in faith and entrust myself to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Matthew the Apostle, trusting with all my heart and promising to dedicate myself entirely to the fulfillment of my pastoral duties, because 'I do all things for the sake of Gospel'."

"This candidate was approved by the Pope", reads the Letter of Approval from the "College of Chinese Catholic Bishops". This Letter, dated Saturday, October 12, was read in full at the beginning of the liturgy by Father Joseph Yang Yu in his capacity as Secretary of the aforementioned body.

The liturgy of consecration was presided over by Joseph Li Shan, Bishop of the Diocese of Beijing, who was the principal consecrator. Four other Chinese bishops took part in the Eucharistic concelebration: Peter Ding Lingbin, Bishop of Changzhi (the home diocese of the newly ordained Bishop), Joseph Guo Jincai (diocese of Chengde), John Baptist Li Su-guang (diocese of Nanchang), Anthony Yao Shun (diocese of



Auxiliary bishop Matthew Zhen Xuebin (picture via ChinaCatholic.cn)

Jining) together with about 140 priests (about eighty from Beijing, and the others mostly from Shanxi, Bishop Matthew Zhan's home province). Another 500 people (nuns, lay people and many relatives of the new Bishop) took part in the liturgy of consecration and the convivial moment following the mass.

The statement of the ordination published today by the Holy See Press Office reports that Pope Francis appointed Father Matthew Zhen Xuebin "as Coadjutor Bishop of Beijing, (Municipality of Beijing, China) on August 28, 2024", and "approved his candidacy within the framework of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic

of China". Matthew Zhen Xuebin was born in Changzhi, a village in the Chinese province of Shanxi, on May 10, 1970. From 1988 to 1993 he carried out his studies in the Philosophical and Theological Seminary of Beijing; from 1993 to 1997 he continued his studies at Saint John's University, a university founded by the Vincentian Fathers and based in New York (USA), obtaining a licentiate in Liturgy. On June 25, 1998 he received priestly ordination, and was incardinated in the diocese of Beijing. From 1998 to 2007 he held the office of

Vice-Rector of the Seminary of Beijing. He then exercised his ministry in various parishes of the city. He has served as diocesan chancellor since 2007, and in recent years he has also followed with care the pastoral care of non-Chinese Catholics residing in the diocese of Beijing, who take part in liturgies celebrated in Korean, English and Tagalog. The diocese of Beijing has 100 thousand faithful with about 80 priests, a female diocesan congregation dedicated to Saint Joseph and about forty parishes and churches.

Celebration of Dutch Bishop Frans Schraven's martyrdom in Zhengding

Antonius

At 8:00 PM on the evening of October 9, 2024, priests from Zhengding and Xingtai dioceses, staff of Faith Press, four deacons, two religious, and hundreds of Catholics celebrated a memorial mass for Bishop Schraven and his companions in Zhengding, praying for Bishop Schraven's canonization. This year, many pilgrimage groups came to visit Zhengding.

On 9 October 1937, the Japanese conquered the city of Zhengding, where Bishop Schraven was responsible for the protection of some 4,000 refugees, mostly women and children. The soldiers plundered the city and killed and raped at will. The Japanese authorities demanded that Bishop Schraven hand over some women 'to fill the soldier's need for comfort', in other words, to serve as sex slaves.

The bishop refused the demand. In the evening of the day that the city fell, Bishop Schraven and nine priests were arrested and deported by truck. That same evening, the Japanese army, were thought to have burned the bodies of all the killed not far from the centuries-old Buddhist pagoda in Zhengding, Hebei Province. It took until 1973 before the fate of Bishop Schraven was discovered: he and others had been burnt alive on a pyre. The parish priests and Christians in Zhengding want to let more and more Chinese people know about Bishop Schraven's love for the Chinese and his contributions to the Church in China, and are willing to continue to pass the mission of the Vincentians, to proclaim the Gospel to the Chinese, to protect women's dignity. The Christians pray for Bishop Schraven's early canonization! We hope to share the progress of his canonization with his family in the Netherlands.

Christians not only come to Zhengding on the day of Bishop Schraven's martyrdom, but some Zhengding Christians also go weekly to sweep the tombstone of Bishop Schraven and pray in the Tanning temple. In recent years, the num-



Inside the church in Zhengding.



Bishop Schraven with his companions were killed in front of the Buddhist pagoda in Zhengding.

ber of visitors to Zhengding has gradually increased, including individuals and groups from all over China. The local Christians tell them about Bishop Schraven's contributions to the protection of Chinese people that led to his martyrdom.

Due to historical conditions in China, in 1947, Bishop Chen Zhiming of Zhengding led almost all the Zhengding diocesan priests to Brazil, and they never returned. Consequently, there were many difficulties in running the diocese that continue to the present time and Bishop Schraven's proposed canonization was not raised for many years. Despite the difficulties, Christians in Zhengding are now working hard to make Bishop Schraven's deeds of justice and charity become public knowledge and encourage prayers for the canonization of Bishop Schraven.

The Chinese Christians pray together with the Church in the Netherlands to bear witness to the gospel of the Lord. The Church in Zhengding is now building an exhibition garden to present Bishop Schraven's deeds that witness to Christ's love for the Chinese people. The yard of the house will be called Bishop Schraven (文致和主教之家). The Chinese Christians look forward to its completion soon. I also look forward to physically

attending the Bishop Schraven canonization ceremony.



Prayer in front of the statue of Bishop Frans Schraven in the yard of the church in Zhengding

Picture report

The redaction

15th International Conference

Throughout this edition of Verbiest Courier, you have had the chance to read more about our 15th International Conference. We welcomed 30 speakers from East and the West, resulting

in a vibrant atmosphere of exchange in mutual respect, and in a true spirit of dialogue. In the following photo report we would like to share this atmosphere with you.



Mgr. Tomáš Halík (Charles University, Prague) and Archbishop Thomas Menampampil (Emeritus archbishop of Guwahati, India) (photo by Photo – Khe)



We were honored to welcome Mgr. Guo Jincai (Chengde, China) among the speakers, as well as Mgr. Yue Fusheng, Fr. Sun Jianping and Fr. Zhu Jie who attended the first two days of the sessions. (photo by Photo – Khe)



Mgr. Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, Archbishop of Reims (photo by Photo – Khe)



Prof. Dr. Erik Borgman, Tilburg University



Dr. Stijn Van den Bossche (photo by Photo – Khe)



Prof. Dr. Erica Siu-Mui Lee, Holy Spirit Seminary, Hong Kong



Dr. Vanessa Siu-Wai Cheng, Holy Spirit Seminary, Hong Kong



We concluded our 15th International Conference in the "Grote Aula" of the Faculty of Theology in Leuven, with contributions by Cardinal De Kesel, Mgr. J. Hendriks (Haarlem-Amsterdam) and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism (photo by Photo – Khe)



32 Chinese faithful joined the Pope's mass in Brussels on September 29.

On November 11th, 22 Chinese students of Leuven University (2 Catholics, the others non-Christians) gathered for a sharing, and to celebrate Chinese mass in the Chinese College in Leuven, presided by Fr. Jeroom.



News from Poro Balgason in Inner Mongolia

On September 26, the parish of Poro Balgason, Hohhot Diocese in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, celebrated its 150th anniversary. Bishop Meng Qinglu presided the mass, which began with the singing of Gloria in Mongolian and Chinese. 25 priests, religious and more than a thousand Catholics from all over the country shared the joy and happiness. In 1874, two Belgian cism fathers, Alfons Devos and Remi Verlinden, arrived in Poro

Balgason and studied hard to learn Mongolian language and adapt to the local culture. In July of that year they installed the first Catholic church in Poro Balgason. In 1882, their confreres expanded the church property and built more than 20 residences. Until today, Poro Balgason is the only Mongolian Christian community in the world.



Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation

Mission Statement

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation (VF) is legally established in Leuven. 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.
- 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

courier
懷仁之驛



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