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CHINA SOURCE

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COVER PHOTO: Catholic Church of the Savior in Beijing.

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BY JOHN LINDBLOM

Catholics in China



John Lindblom



Michael Agliardo

We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to present this special issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* on the Catholic Church in China. We extend our thanks to the *ChinaSource* editorial team, readers, and the many experts who contributed their valuable insights.

Catholics in China, like their fellow Christians and other religious believers, face both familiar and new challenges. Since 2015, Chinese authorities have increased control through policies like “Sinicization,” requiring registration, restricting youth involvement, curtailing online activities, and imposing intrusive surveillance. This includes cameras in and around churches, mandatory registration, and biometric data collection. Resistance, often through house or “underground” churches, has led to conflicts with authorities. While much has been written about Protestant struggles, the challenges facing Catholics have received less attention. We hope to help bridge that gap.

In addition to these contributions, we review *People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China*, edited by Cindy Yik-yi Chu and Paul Mariani, which further illuminates the current landscape. Our contributors, many of them experts with deep experience in China, bring unique perspectives. Cindy Yik-yi Chu highlights the Maryknoll Sisters’ missionary work, and Anthony E. Clark offers a thoughtful look at the struggles facing Catholics under Xi Jinping and the 2018 Sino-Vatican Agreement. Despite political challenges, Chinese Catholics continue to persevere, often inspired by the Confucian saying: “Three armies can conquer a general, but



St Joseph Catholic Church in Beijing

the resolve of even a commoner cannot be taken away” (三軍可奪帥，匹夫不可奪志). The 2018 Agreement, renewed in 2020 and 2022, remains a major point of discussion. Charetto Yan views it as an important step forward in Sino-Vatican relations, while Beatrice Leung contends that it has only intensified government repression. In the realm of cultural studies, my article explores John C. H. Wu’s efforts to synthesize Chinese humanistic thought with Christian spirituality. Fr. Anthony Chang reminds us of our shared responsibility to care for our common home, drawing on Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*. Fr. Michael Agliardo offers a broad overview of the challenges facing Catholics today, enriched by his conversations with Chinese laypeople, clergy, and scholars from around the world.

Finally, we include a special contribution from an anonymous Catholic friend, offering a rare look into the complex realities facing unregistered or underground Catholics in China.

We hope that reading these articles deepens your sense of the shared faith in Christ and the spiritual family ties that unite all Christians in China. Above all, we pray you will see how Chinese Catholics, despite the many challenges they face, remain deeply aware of Our Lord Jesus’ presence, living with hope and faith in ways that can inspire us all. We welcome your thoughts and questions to help foster meaningful dialogue and support for our Catholic brothers and sisters in China. 🇨🇳

John Lindblom, PhD, and Fr. Michael Agliardo, SJ, are guest editors for this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly*. Dr. Lindblom, an Assistant Professor at Notre Dame, researches the connection between Chinese humanism and Christian spirituality. Fr. Michael, a Visiting Associate Professor at Notre Dame, brings his pastoral experience and academic expertise in Chinese Catholic communities. Together, they provide fresh insights for this edition.

Cover Story

The Resolve of a Commoner: Some Reflections on China's Catholics Today

BY ANTHONY E. CLARK



A procession of Catholics in Shanghai, 1935.

News about China's Catholic community since 2018 has been polarized. While some experts and journalists have supported the Vatican's 2018 agreement with China's authorities as both necessary and salutary, others have condemned it as either uninformed or a betrayal of China's Catholics. Over the past six years, I have received reports from China's priests that have consistently described both improvements and detriments in the wake of 2018. On the same day during a visit to the Beijing cathedral a few years ago, one Chinese priest exclaimed optimism and hope that the pope will someday soon be able to visit China. And shortly after that, another priest refused to receive a rosary I had brought for him blessed by the pope; he was clearly unsupportive of the Vatican's policies toward China. An American priest friend of mine who was recently visiting China, attended an Easter Vigil Mass with thousands of attendees. The photos he sent me are astonishing. Realities of, and opinions about, the situation in China today are anything but monolithic.

“
Over the past six years, I have received reports from China's priests that have consistently described both improvements and detriments in the wake of 2018.
 ”

Reviews are mixed, because there have been few signs that the condition of the Church in China has benefitted from the Vatican's hoped for changes brought about by the agreement. Around forty dioceses still do not have a bishop, and only nine bishops have been consecrated since 2018. China's government is patient and persistent, and it has not obscured its aim to slowly and methodically eradicate religious belief from its cultural landscape. There is an old saying that "An ant's hole can eventually cause a dam to collapse" (蟻穴潰堤). While Sino-Vatican agreements have been signed and renewed since 2018, China's government consistently implements policies that weaken Catholicism. Despite the Vatican's

overtures to establish an official representative in Beijing, the state refuses the request. Among the envisaged results of the agreement was the "normalization" of the Catholic hierarchy in China, which means that all bishops are now officially recognized by the Holy See and that the so-called "underground" bishops are no longer required to operate furtively. This has, as China's authorities hoped, brought two-thirds of China's Catholics into open air, and the underground community is now much more vulnerable to the pressures of the government. I observe these developments having lived several years of my life in China, praying beside my fellow Catholics in pews from Hong Kong, to Taipei, to Shanghai, to Beijing. I have sat on church steps and listened to summoning stories recounting what it is like being a Christian in China, while my heart vacillates between optimism and despair.

I first lived in China when Deng Xiaoping was still in office, while the state was emerging from the hardline policies of Chairman Mao and churches were gradually reopening for worship. Deng was largely allergic to the slogan-mongering era of Mao, but during my most recent visit to the capital the long red banners of the Cultural Revolution had reappeared. After Mass one Sunday I read a prominent public banner that asserted, "Long live the great people of China! Long live the great Communist Party of China!" (偉大的中國人民萬歲！偉大的中國共產黨萬歲！) On the face of it, I would not be



Fr. Cui Zhenduo in a struggle session in 1967. Credit: From the private collection of the author

overly alarmed by these banners if they were not reminiscent of an era that callously repressed Christians as a “threat to Communism.” As I emerged from the Beijing subway on the same Sunday, I was yet again confronted by another banner eulogizing how socialism will “manifest a great resurgence of the Chinese people!” (實現中華民族偉大的復興！) All that was missing from this scene was a swarm of chanting Red Guards.

During the turbulent decade of the Cultural Revolution, Catholic churches were desecrated, demolished, or confiscated by the government for secular use. Beijing’s churches, both Catholic and Protestant, were all evacuated and reclaimed. North Church was used as a middle school, South Church became a processing factory, and West Church was repurposed as a warehouse for Chinese herbs. Crowds of mostly teenage Red Guards attacked churches throughout the country in 1966. South Church, where Matteo Ricci once lived, serves as an apt example. This elegant Baroque Christian edifice was emptied of its religious objects (statues, art, relics, tabernacle), which were heaved onto a large pile in front of the church façade and burned. A banner suspended on the church exclaimed, “Long live Chairman Mao!” (毛主席萬歲！) Priests and nuns were commanded to trample on crosses while Red Guards shouted, “Down with God!” Lian Xi describes this era with great clarity: “Throughout the country, church leaders were dragged into public ‘struggle meetings’ to be humiliated or beaten; countless were sent to ‘cowsheds’ (improvised places of confinement for the ‘ox demons’) and labor camps or driven to suicide or apostasy.”¹ China’s Catholics have not forgotten that from 1950 to 1976 Christians were persecuted and oppressed, and then the Christian community went into hiding from 1966 to 1980. The now-deceased bishop of Guiyang, Wang Chongyi, once said to me: “During Mao’s time no-one knew who was or who was not a Christian, and only God knows how many were buried then because they could not hide their faith.”

Much happened in China’s Catholic history from the era of Chairman Mao to the election of Pope Francis in 2013. Foreign missionaries were exiled during the 1950s; the so-called “Rome-independent” Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was established in 1957; religion in China was pushed underground during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976; state-approved Christianity reemerged as a legally practiced religion during the 1980s; and Pope John Paul II canonized 120 martyrs of China on October 1, 2000, renewing tensions between political leaders and the Vatican. Many of China’s last missionaries were deported from Shanghai in 1957, marking the official end of the missionary period in China. Pope Francis is a Jesuit, and it is notable that Jesuits have been in China through all the events I just outlined. Even today members of the Society of Jesus live

in China, though they do so not as missionaries. The most famous Jesuit to have lived through the Maoist era, and someone who became one of China’s most influential bishops during its Communist era, was Bishop Jin Luxian. Jin died just one month after Francis became the first Jesuit pope in the Catholic Church. I could say much about how Bishop Jin was an example of an effective Jesuit interlocutor with China’s modern government and society, but even his methods were, as he himself described them, “slippery.” Before and after the expulsion of missionaries, China’s Catholic history has largely been a Jesuit history.

In just the last few years, a spate of articles about the Vatican’s dialogue with China have appeared, each one either snubbing or supporting the Holy See’s engagement with China’s government. One dispatch in



Chinese Catholics go in procession to the Beijing cathedral for the Christ Mass, Easter 2024. Credit: From the private collection of the author

Vatican News explained that the Sino-Vatican agreement only regards “the process for the appointment of bishops,” and continues to clarify that its aim is to “permit the Catholic faithful to have bishops in full Communion with the successor of Peter.”² Another article published by the Catholic News Agency during the same year is critical of the agreement, suggesting that the Holy See should not sign an accord with a government that disallows children under the age of eighteen to attend Holy Mass, monitors church activities with state-installed cameras, imprisons clergy, and subjects the Xinjiang Muslim population to policies that have been condemned in global news sources.³ The article does, however, acknowledge Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin’s response that the goal of the agreement is “the unity of the Church,” and not to address the “many other problems that the agreement was not intended to solve.”⁴ Some Catholics in China presently wonder if the so-called ecclesial unity the Holy See envisions is worth the cost.

A Reuters article published in 2021 attempted to represent Pope Francis’ view on why he signed the 2018 and 2020 agreements. The report is entitled “Pope Defends Deal with China, Says Dialogue Necessary,” and succinctly summarizes the pope’s justification as, “an uneasy

dialogue is better than no dialogue at all.”⁵ In an interview with a Spanish radio network, Pope Francis stated with equal conciseness that, “China is not easy, but I am convinced that we should not give up the dialogue.” This view of dialogue is characteristically Jesuit. Looking back into the long historical Jesuit experience of dialogue with China one can easily imagine these precise words being expressed by such missionary icons as the Jesuit, Matteo Ricci. A more recent article in *The Atlantic* by Francis Rocca, “The Vatican’s Gamble with Beijing Is Costing China’s Catholics,” expresses globally increasing criticisms of the Vatican’s diplomatic entanglements with China’s government. Rocca writes:

Another cost of Francis’s overtures has come in the form of his silence about China’s human-rights violations. In July 2020, amid China’s crackdown on prodemocracy protests in Hong Kong, Francis decided not to deliver prepared remarks calling for “nonviolence, and respect for the dignity and rights of all” in the city, and voicing hope that “social life, and especially religious life, may be expressed in full and true freedom.” Vatican diplomats privately expressed puzzlement at the pope’s decision.⁶

Disputes, denunciations, and divisions

continue to saturate public and private discourse about the situation of Catholicism in China. Meanwhile, China’s Catholics continue to endure their present circumstances, attending services, meeting in their homes for private prayer and study, and supporting one another in their Christian faith.

China’s Catholics are, like all people in China, people of historical memory. As I muse on this reality, I am drawn to two photographs now on my desktop. The first photo image is of Fr. Cui Zhenduo, taken in 1967. The despondent priest stands with his head bowed during a Red Guard struggle session against him and his Christian faith; a massive photograph of Chairman Mao is seen looming behind him. The second photo is of a long line of Chinese Catholics processing into the Beijing cathedral for the Chrism Mass there just one month ago. Photos of the cathedral during that service are summoning; the church is crowded with nowhere to sit. One image portrays oppression, the other, freedom. I have often sat in pews in China during homilies, and Chinese clergy seem to enjoy quoting Confucius almost as often as the saints. One saying from *The Analects* that appeals to China’s Catholics today is, “Three armies can conquer a general, but the resolve of even a commoner cannot be taken away” (三軍可奪帥，匹夫不可奪志)。

¹ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 205.

² Andrea Tornielli, “The Holy See and China: Reasons for Agreement on Appointment of Bishops,” *Vatican News*, September 29, 2020, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-09/holy-see-china-provisional-agreement-appointment-bishops.html>.

³ Reports vary about where this policy is enforced. Some regions in China appear to overlook the regulation against minors attending religious services, while other areas strictly forbid anyone under eighteen entering a church.

⁴ Courtney Mares, “Vatican and China Renew Provisional Agreement on Appointment of Bishops,” *Catholic News Agency*, October 22, 2020, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/46307/vatican-and-china-renew-provisional-agreement-on-appointment-of-bishops>.

⁵ Philip Pullella, “Pope Defends Deal with China, Says Dialogue Necessary,” *Reuters*, September 1, 2021, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/pope-defends-deal-with-china-says-dialogue-necessary-2021-09-01/>.

⁶ Francis X. Rocca, “The Vatican’s Gamble with Beijing Is Costing China’s Catholics,” *The Atlantic*, May 14, 2024, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/05/pope-francis-catholic-church-china/678372/>.



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Catholic Education



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Maryknoll Convent School:

Her Story, 1925 to the Present

BY CINDY YIK-YI CHU

The Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic (originally known as the Foreign Mission Sisters of St. Dominic) were the first American Catholic congregation established for the purpose of sending missionaries overseas. The congregation was formed in 1912, and

subsequently received permission from Rome to send missionaries abroad. The Motherhouse (now known as the Maryknoll Sisters Center) is situated in Ossining, New York, USA.

The foundress of the congregation, Mother Mary Joseph Rogers (Mollie Rogers; 1882-1955) was born in a suburb of Boston and received her degree in zoology from Smith College, a prestigious

women's college in Northampton, Massachusetts. She later worked as a demonstrator at Smith College. In 1906 Mollie met with Father James Anthony Walsh (who would found the Maryknoll Fathers); both were interested in overseas missionary work. From 1908 to 1912 Mollie assisted in the publication of the mission magazine, *The Field Afar*.

The year 1912 marked the beginning of



Mother Mary Joseph Rogers (Mollie Rogers)

the history of the Maryknoll Sisters. Seven women, including Mollie, volunteered to be “secretaries” for *The Field Afar*. In 1920, Rome gave permission to the Foreign Mission Sisters of St. Dominic (generally called the Maryknoll Sisters) to send missionaries abroad.

In 1954 the Maryknoll Sisters became a Pontifical Institute, and the congregation changed its name to the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic.

EARLY BEGINNINGS: THE 1920s

The 1920s witnessed many of Maryknoll’s “firsts.” In 1921 the Maryknoll Sisters sent their pioneering group of missionaries

abroad, and on November 3, six religious women missionaries arrived in Hong Kong. The first overseas mission house of the Maryknoll Sisters was at 19 Chatham Road, adjacent to Rosary Church; it remained the Sisters’ convent until 1923, when they moved to 103 Austin Road.

In 1923, Mother Mary Joseph Rogers made her first visitation to Asia, traveling to Hong Kong and other Chinese cities. She supported the first major endeavor of the Sisters, who started the Industrial Department in the convent garage on Austin Road in 1924. The Industrial Department provided Chinese women with an opportunity to earn their living by making vestments sold through mail order to priests in the United States. Women recognized their own abilities and had confidence in themselves.

In 1925, the Maryknoll Sisters established their first school in Hong Kong. On February 11, they opened a kindergarten for twelve Portuguese children in the convent at 103 Austin Road. This became the Maryknoll Convent School (MCS). There was a demand for high-quality English-language education, and the Sisters responded to this need. In 1927, Mother Mary Joseph Rogers visited Hong Kong again.

In 1928 MCS moved to King’s Terrace, next to the convent, and in 1929, it moved again to Torres Building, 2 Kimberly Road. By then, the Sisters could claim many nationalities among their students: Chinese, Japanese, English, Portuguese,

“
Since their early days, the Maryknoll Sisters played an active role in society, helping Chinese women secure better livelihood through the Industrial Department, and offering education to children irrespective of race, religion, or social background.
”

Irish, French, German, Russian, American, Indian, and so on.

Since their early days, the Maryknoll Sisters played an active role in society, helping Chinese women secure better livelihoods through the Industrial Department, and offering education to children irrespective of race, religion, or social background. Their second school, Holy Spirit (later known as the Maryknoll Sisters School), was opened on Caine Road in 1927.

MOVING TO KOWLOON TONG: THE 1930s

The 1930s were a decade of challenge. Kowloon Tong was developing as a settlement for Chinese and Portuguese families; hillsides were leveled and roads were cut down. In 1932, with the

“
In 1921 the Maryknoll Sisters sent their pioneering group of missionaries abroad, and on November 3, six religious women missionaries arrived in Hong Kong.
”

completion of St. Teresa's on Prince Edward Road, the Catholic Church opened a parish in Kowloon Tong. To keep pace with the development of the government and the Church, the Maryknoll Sisters bought a plot of 200,000 square feet on Waterloo Road and Boundary Street for the construction of the MCS Building, and in 1932 MCS relocated to 248 Prince Edward Road.

At last, in May 1937, MCS moved to its present campus. The Industrial Department also moved to a structure adjacent to the building and linked to it by an archway. (Today this location is the Sisters' convent.) The MCS Building, with its tower and courtyard, was built in imitation of the Maryknoll Sisters' Motherhouse, which had been completed a few years earlier in Ossining, New York.

WAR YEARS & THE RETURN OF THE SISTERS: THE 1940s

The Japanese occupation of Hong Kong began in December 1941 and lasted until August 1945. The Japanese invasion came on 8 December, 1941.

Sister Santa Maria Manning recounted what had happened that morning:

Just at the end of the Gospel, the air raid siren blew. We pricked up our ears but, as the buses still ran, we thought it was a "rehearsal," as we have had a few recently. On leaving the Church, we saw about 30 planes circling about like beautiful silver birds against a deep blue sky. The crack of anti-aircraft guns and machine gun fire told us it was no display. Men were flat against walls and we rushed for the convent with the now scattered planes nearly overhead. Somehow, we got across the street and gathered together many frightened children standing by the gate and under the archway. We took them quickly to the laundry, until some one from inside opened the "tiffin room," a partly underground room and a made-to-order shelter.¹

Soon the MCS Building became a hospital for Japanese soldiers. For two months, the Maryknoll Sisters remained in the building; then in February 1942, they were sent to the Stanley Internment Camp. Subsequently, the Sisters were released and repatriated. By January 1943, all Maryknoll Sisters had left Hong Kong, and they did not return until late 1945.

In January 1946 MCS reopened. The Sisters reoccupied part of the building which was still used for accommodating sick soldiers. Until May 1946, the Sisters lived with 600 Japanese soldiers in the building.

In December 1946 the first group of Maryknoll Sisters, who were sent abroad after the war, arrived back in Hong Kong. Among the group were Sisters Rose Duchesne Debrecht, M. Corinne Rost, and Miriam Xavier Mug; they began teaching right away. There was no time to lose, especially for children who did not receive education during the war years. Sometimes, students at the school listed with their age as a few years younger than it actually was. MCS also took some La Salle boys, as their teachers, the Christian Brothers, had not yet recovered their school building.

POSTWAR YEARS: THE 1950s

The 1950s witnessed an upsurge in demand for education. There was an explosion of the local population, and indeed the postwar years opened up tremendous opportunities.

In the 1950s Kowloon Tong was a rapidly growing settlement, and in 1950, MCS celebrated its silver jubilee. In 1953 the long-anticipated convent, whose construction was delayed during the war, was completed. The Sisters moved into the adjacent convent, and the entire MCS Building was then devoted to teaching purposes.

For more than twenty years until 1958, Sister Ann Mary Farrell was principal of MCS. Under her leadership, MCS continued as a grant-in-aid school (whose outstanding education standards were recognized by the government), and its graduates entered the University of Hong Kong. The Student Council also came into being. MCS maintained the high moral and academic standards expected by the Sisters, students, and society. Sister M. de Ricci Cain replaced Sister Ann Mary Farrell as principal in 1959.

“
In December 1946 the first group of Maryknoll Sisters, who were sent abroad after the war, arrived back in Hong Kong. Among the group were Sisters Rose Duchesne Debrecht, M. Corinne Rost, and Miriam Xavier Mug; they began teaching right away.
”

At the same time, the Sisters continued the Boys and Girls Club at MCS, for the less advantaged children.

YEARS OF EXPANSION: THE 1960s

The 1960s were years of expansion. In 1960 the MCS Secondary Section moved to the new building at 5 Ho Tung Road. With the increase in student numbers, expansion of the school campus was necessary. The Sisters assumed greater responsibilities for both the primary and secondary schools. In 1961 Sister Miriam Xavier Mug became principal of the Primary Section, and in 1967 Sister M. Corinne Rost took up the post. In 1965 Sister Rose Duchesne Debrecht replaced Sister M. de Ricci Cain as principal of the Secondary Section.

In 1967 the Head Prefect Shelley Lee suggested the formation of the Students' Association, and the secondary-school students drafted their own constitution. The Students' Association received guidance from Sister Jeanne Houlihan.

Sister Rose Duchesne Debrecht (principal, 1965–1972) said:

Working with the students and knowing that they found delight in being with you. Classroom atmosphere was always very enriching. I look back on it with much joy and appreciation. Particularly now, when former students come back and they will say things, "Sister remember when you said such and



Maryknoll Convent School in Kowloon, Hong Kong at night

such" and "remember when you taught us this." ... So, I find this very heartwarming...

We certainly had close relationships with our students, yes. I think I was more interested in their formation in terms of good character formation, providing a set of values that would carry them through their future adult life, hoping that the seeds of faith would be planted in many hearts.

Maryknoll Convent School has created

a priceless history. Each and every person, who has been a participant in the school's life, is to be given a grateful pat on the back for contributions so steadfastly made.... Our dream is that we'll continue being adaptable to technological and other types of change, while we radiate the ideals of Maryknoll.

Let's continue giving dynamic witness to truth, peace and justice through loving communion with all creatures in God's universe.²

¹ Sister Santa Maria Manning, "Hong Kong Happenings," n.d., p. 1, Folder 9, Box 1, Personal Narratives of World War II, Maryknoll Mission Archives.

² Sr. Rose Duchesne Debrecht, Maryknoll China History Project, Maryknoll Mission Archives.



Cindy Yik-yi Chu (朱益宜) is professor of history at Hong Kong Baptist University and editor of the *Christianity in Modern China Series of Palgrave Macmillan*. She has published 17 books and more than 50 articles in edited volumes and journals. Her recent works include: *People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China* (edited with Paul P. Mariani and published by Palgrave Pivot, 2020) and *Images of Macau: East-West Exchange and the Derwent Collection* (edited with Kishi Toshihiko and Irene Wong, and published by Bensey Shuppan Co., 2020). She is interested in the history of the Catholic Church in modern and contemporary China and Hong Kong. She is currently editing *The Palgrave Handbook of the Catholic Church in East Asia*. She is also finishing a biography of Cardinal John Tong in Hong Kong.



Image: Joan | Adobe Stock

Synthesizing East and West: Wu Jingxiong's Lasting Contribution to Chinese Christianity

BY JOHN LINDBLOM

In the fall of 1940, an unexpected series of events led to the creation of a landmark publication in Chinese Christian history: a new and highly unconventional classical Chinese version of the Psalms and New

Testament. The text resulted from a remarkable partnership between China's President Chiang Kai-shek and his wife Soong Mei-ling, who were Christians in Protestant traditions, and legal scholar and legislator John C. H. Wu (Wu Jingxiong), who only three years earlier had entered the Catholic Church. Wu had begun to

combine his love of classical Chinese poetry and his love of the Christian scriptures to recast some of the Psalms as Chinese poems in ancient styles, including those of the famed Tang dynasty. In 1938 Wu shared some of these with Mei-ling's sister, Soong Ai-ling.¹ She shared them with Chiang and Mei-ling, who in turn in



Dr. John C. H. Wu
吳 經 勝

Wu Jingxiong

1940 asked Wu to translate the whole Book of Psalms and New Testament into literary Chinese, saying that Chiang had wanted such a version for years, but had not until then found someone suitable for the job.² The resulting version has been prized for its beauty by Chinese Christians, including Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox.³ Throughout the text, Wu creatively incorporates the language and concepts borrowed from the Chinese classics, including philosophical concepts, poetic styles, four-character phrases (*chengyu*), and more, and by using these in new ways, creates a dialogue with the classics and even expands the meanings of some terms.⁴ For readers with the necessary language skills or strong interest, I recommend the study of Wu's version.⁵

Here, however, I will not discuss Wu's Bible translation itself, but rather a preliminary question, that of why Wu was the most suitable person for the work of integrating the vast and disparate fields of Chinese humanism on the one hand, and Christian spirituality on the other, into a seamless whole, producing a work he called, with utmost devotion and affection, "a Chinese tunic for Christ." Fortunately for

us English speakers, he used this same ability to synthesize to write exploratory essays in English, expounding on the compelling points of harmony he found between the wisdom of the Chinese sages, including Confucius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Buddha, and others, and the Christian saints, especially those who were mystically inclined, like St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and his favorite of all, St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Here I will briefly highlight Wu's integration of Chinese culture and Christian thought in his essays, compiled and published as *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality* in 1965 and republished in 2017,⁶ which continue to appeal to readers today, and have contributed to the formation of an authentically Chinese Christianity, as part of an essential missionary endeavor the Catholic Church calls "inculturation."⁷

THE ESSAYS: SYNTHESIZING CHINESE CULTURE AND CHRISTIANITY

From a young age Wu immersed himself in the humanities, learning the Chinese classics under the old system during the final years of the Qing dynasty, and later studied and developed a love for Western

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Why Wu was the most suitable person for the work of integrating the vast and disparate fields of Chinese humanism on the one hand, and Christian spirituality on the other, into a seamless whole, producing a work he called, with utmost devotion and affection, "a Chinese tunic for Christ."

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literature. He had a special love of poetry.⁸ In the 1930s he and other writers, including the famous Lin Yutang, founded *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, an English-language journal that featured writing on elements of Chinese and Western culture. Wu contributed somewhat playful titles like "Shakespeare as a Taoist." His lifelong intellectual pursuit, to which I will return again below, was the attempt to integrate the East and the West, into what he called a "living synthesis" between opposites.

Wu's approach to Chinese humanism and Christian spirituality is characterized by several major themes, which he elucidates with numerous examples.

First, he affirms the great value of China's humanistic tradition, crediting the Chinese sages with serving as the teachers who prepared him to recognize Christ as the true light of divine revelation:

To me at least, [Laozi and Confucius] were pedagogues to lead me to Christ; they served as lamps shining in a dark place, until the day dawned and the morning star arose in my heart.⁹



Jesus washing the disciples' feet, statue in the courtyard of Yanjing Seminary in Beijing

Similarly, he writes elsewhere,

Whenever I think of Confucius and Mencius, Buddha and [Laozi], I am inclined to call them—as St. Justin Martyr called Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—Pedagogues to lead men to Christ.¹⁰

At the same time, he draws a clear distinction between their wisdom and the light of divine revelation in Christ; as he wrote of Christianity and Taoism:

It must be noted that in substance Christianity and Taoism belong to different levels. For Taoism is natural wisdom, while Christianity is supernatural wisdom. But God being the Author of both Nature and Supernature, it stands to reason that natural wisdom may serve as a mirror of supernatural wisdom.¹¹

Believing that the wisdom of the sages had God as their ultimate origin, Wu also believed that their teachings could, and in fact must, be “baptized,” as the medieval Christians like St. Thomas Aquinas and others had done with Greek and Roman philosophy,¹² or transformed like water into wine, as Jesus did with the human efforts of the servants at the wedding of Cana (John 2). For example, Wu writes of the key Confucian idea of the six cardinal relationships among people:

For the purposes of my present discourse, the six waterpots stand for the six cardinal relations of men, as the Chinese ethical tradition has presented them. Confucius and other sages of old China have filled them almost to the brim with the water of natural wisdom, waiting only for us to do the rest and for Christ to turn it into wine.¹³

“ Wu saw great affinities between Chinese and Christian mystics. ”

Second, Wu saw great affinities between Chinese and Christian mystics, writing, “It seems that all mystics, whether Christian or pagan, Western or Eastern, talk the same language and sing the same tune. For one thing, they prefer the passive way to the active.”¹⁴ In one of his favorite comparisons, for example, Wu saw such a strong correspondence between the humility of St. Thérèse of Lisieux in her writing about the “Little Way,” her spiritual practice of choosing the lowliest path in imitation of Christ, that his first reaction was, “How Chinese she is!”¹⁵ He emphasizes this point in his essay on St. Thérèse and Lao Tzu,

To me as a Chinese, the most intriguing thing about Thérèse’s little way of spiritual childhood is that it is reminiscent, on the one hand, of the Confucian teaching of filial piety, and, on the other, of the Taoistic insight concerning the mystical significance of the little and the low, of the supple and the docile, of the feminine and the new-born.¹⁶

Wu continues in this vein throughout many of his essays, finding similar correspondences between, for example, Shakespeare and both Taoism and Zen. He wrote that “the moral system of Confucius is as practical and matter-of-fact as the Rule of St. Benedict.”¹⁷ And perhaps even more remarkably, he likened St. Paul and the ancient Chinese:

St. Paul was made joyful in his contemplation of God, but he was at the same time as sober as any

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Wu continued to write about the “living synthesis” between opposites in the years after his return to Christianity, with a focus on synthesizing the different approaches to the spiritual life traditionally found in the East and the West.

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Confucian gentleman in his dealings with men, and as unattached as any Taoist hermit or Buddhist bonze to human riches and glories. Only grace can fulfill the aspirations of nature.¹⁸

Finally, Wu’s writing is marked by a constant drive to achieve what he called a “living synthesis” between East and West. After his initial conversion and baptism by Methodist missionaries while in his late teens, Wu fell away from Christianity, and after achieving remarkable success in law at a young age, became a “freethinker” who admired Christ as a heroic figure but no longer cared whether or not he was divine. However, after falling into a dissolute lifestyle and feeling great misery in his soul, he experienced a dramatic reconversion to Christ, with tearful repentance, in 1937. Soon afterwards he became a Catholic, influenced by a Catholic family the classic book *Story of a Soul* by St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a French Carmelite nun whose spirit Wu felt was very close to that of the Chinese, especially Laozi.¹⁹ Through her words, St. Thérèse, with her desire to love Jesus by making herself as humble as a little flower existing only to make Jesus happy, completely captivated Wu, and won him over to the Catholic Church. Not only did she embody, in his eyes, the best of all of the Chinese sages, but she demonstrated with the great virtue of sincerity that Wu so deeply admired in Confucius, the “living synthesis” between opposites that had driven all his intellectual effort. In his words,

[In St. Thérèse] I found the living

synthesis between all pairs of opposites, such as humility and audacity, freedom and discipline, joys and sorrows, duty and love, strength and tenderness, grace and nature, folly and wisdom, wealth and poverty, corporateness and individuality. She seemed to me to combine the heart of the Buddha, the virtues of Confucius, and the philosophic detachment of Lao Tse. Here was a young Sister who died at twenty-four, and had attained such perfection. What was the secret? How could she realize her individuality so fully if she were not an integral member of the Mystical Body of Christ?

It was through reading this book that I decided to become a Catholic. Grace had touched my heart.

Wu continued to write about the “living synthesis” between opposites in the years after his return to Christianity, with a focus on synthesizing the different approaches to the spiritual life traditionally found in the East and the West. This was the topic of an essay called “Christianity, the Only Synthesis Really Possible Between East and West,” in which he wrote:

There is nothing that the human mind has discovered or can discover which is not already in the Fountain of Wisdom in an eminent way.



Nangangzi Catholic Church in Beijing

Image: Joann Pittman

*So far the East is more at home in the inexpressible, while the West is more at home in the expressible. But both the inexpressible and the expressible belong to the same Fountain, and the Holy Ghost alone can help us attain a living synthesis, because He alone knows the Mind and the Heart of the Father and the Son.*²⁰

In a sense, Wu's idea of a living synthesis, his discovery that the East and West contained the complementary but opposite elements that all originate in God, expresses what St. Paul writes about Jesus in Colossians 1:19-21:

For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Wu went on to say that only when the East and West are united in Christ, will they love each other, and their union give birth to the "new man."²¹

JOY AND INTERIOR HARMONY

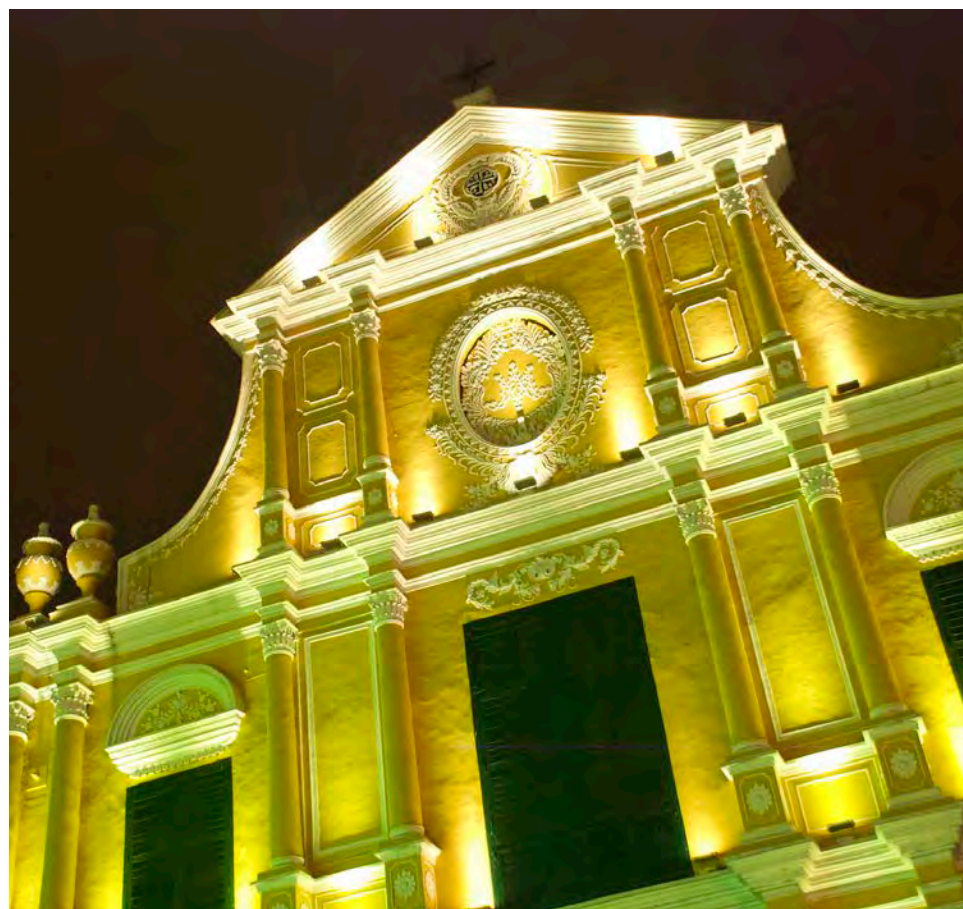
One missionary scholar and expert on Wu's work, Fr. Matthias Christian, SVD (1941-2020),²² often said, "John Wu is a man of the future." In conclusion, perhaps Wu's important message for Christians (and perhaps former Christians, or "nones") in the West, is that we need to recover to the experience of joy that follows from interior harmony, as was known by Christian mystics. Sixty years ago, he saw the dangers of

"the material civilization and technical habits of the modern times." In an essay with the bold title, "Christianity, the Only Synthesis Really Possible Between East and West," he concluded,

In order to convert the East, we must know how to "baptize" the Eastern culture and philosophy of life. But since the most representative Eastern sages are all mystically inclined, we shall not be able to "baptize" them unless we first delve

*into a much neglected part of our Christian heritage, the inexhaustible mine of Christian mysticism. To lead the East to Christ, we have to plunge ourselves into "the cloud of unknowing;" we must pray to the Holy Ghost to set our souls free from bondage to the material civilization and technical habits of the modern times.*²³

In another essay Wu connected the joy that comes from this freedom from



St. Dominic Catholic Church in Macau

Image: Joann Pittman


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bondage to material civilization, here called "interior harmony," with effectiveness in spreading the gospel:

It is only when we appreciate and radiate from ourselves the joy embodied in the Christian Gospel that we can effectively work as missionaries. Too many Christians fail to reflect this Divine joy...Were [the Chinese sages] far wrong in identifying joy with music? I think not, because music is the art of

harmony par excellence. The sages knew that joy follows from interior harmony. They knew, also, that interior harmony means development of the human personality.²⁴

Some of Wu's most engaging traits are his deep faith, deep humanity, and deep joy. His sense of humor at times reminds one of a child frolicking in the summer sun, unconcerned with looking like a fool. His knowledge of Chinese classical literature seems as deep as the knowledge

of Western literature displayed by someone like C.S. Lewis, and Wu was quite well-read in Western literature as well. Like the best writers, he was deeply grounded in human experience. His love of language and his total commitment to Christ make him an attractive companion for those who want to learn more about China's classics and how they, also being marked by the search for wisdom that originates in God, can deepen and broaden one's faith and effectiveness as ambassadors for Christ. 

- ¹ Soong Ai-ling (Song Ailing) 宋靄齡, also known as Madame H. H. Kung, was the wife of H. H. Kung, Chinese Minister of Finance from 1933 to 1944, and a sister-in-law of presidents Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek. See *New York Times*, "Mrs. H. H. Kung, 85, Dies; Sister-in-Law of Chiang," October 21, 1973, accessed June 26, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/21/archives/mrs-h-h-kung-85-dies-sisterinlaw-of-chiang.html>.
- ² John C. H. Wu, *Beyond East and West* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1951; second edition published by University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 290-91.
- ³ The text of Wu's versions, both Psalms and New Testament, is available at Jesus Taiwan: <http://jesus.tw> (accessed June 26, 2024). A print version of the Psalms is available in Taiwan: Wu Jingxiong, yi, *Shengyong Yiyi Xinban* (吳經熊譯, 聖詠譯義 新版) [Wu Jingxiong, translator, a paraphrase of the Psalms, new edition] (Taipei: Commercial Press, 2011). <https://www.cptw.com.tw/book/02000037>. Wu's New Testament is not currently in print.
- ⁴ See John A. Lindblom, "A 'Chinese Tunic for Christ': John C.H. Wu's Incorporation of the Chinese Classics in Translating the Psalms and New Testament," PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2021; and Hong Xiaochun, "The Bible between Literary Traditions: John C. H. Wu's Chinese Translation of the Psalms," *Religions* 13 (2022): 937.
- ⁵ Those interested in other commentaries on Wu's version can see Lloyd Haft, "Perspectives on John C. H. Wu's Translation of the New Testament," in *Reading Christian Scriptures in China*, ed. Chloë Starr, (New York: T&T Clark, 2008); Francis K. H. So, "Wu Ching-Hsiung's Chinese Translation of Images of the Most High in the Psalms," in *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, ed. Irene Eber, Sze-kar Wan, and Knut Walf (Sankt Augustin; Nettetal: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1999); and Hong Xiaochun, "The Bible between Literary Traditions: John C. H. Wu's Chinese Translation of the Psalms."
- ⁶ John C. H. Wu, *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality*, ed. Paul K. T. Sih (New York: St. John's University Press, 1965; second edition published by Angelico Press, 2017).
- ⁷ The Catholic Church understands inculturation as "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures." See "Faith and Inculturation" by the International Theological Commission, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html
- ⁸ Wu enjoyed translating Chinese poetry into English and finding parallels in English poetry. See John C. H. Wu, *The Four Seasons of T'ang Poetry* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1972).
- ⁹ Wu, "St. Thérèse and Lao Tzu: A Study in Comparative Mysticism," in *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality*, 120.
- ¹⁰ Wu, *Beyond East and West*, 48.
- ¹¹ Wu, "St. Thérèse and Lao Tzu," 119.
- ¹² Wu wrote, "Time has come for Christian scholars to explore systematically the rich mine of natural wisdom of life in the culture of China and other countries in the Orient, in order to "baptize" them as our medieval predecessors did with the Greek and Roman cultures." See Wu, "Water and Wine: Chinese Ethics and the Christian Faith," in *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality*, 196.
- ¹³ Wu, "Water and Wine," 174.
- ¹⁴ Wu, "St. Thérèse and Lao Tzu," 107.
- ¹⁵ Wu, *Beyond East and West*, epilogue.
- ¹⁶ Wu, "St. Thérèse and Lao Tzu," 97-98.
- ¹⁷ Wu, "Water and Wine," 179.
- ¹⁸ Wu, "The Spirit of Joy in Chinese Sages," in *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality*, 49.
- ¹⁹ Wu, "St. Thérèse and Lao Tzu," 98.
- ²⁰ Wu, "Christianity, the Only Synthesis Really Possible Between East and West," in *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality*, 176.
- ²¹ Wu, "Christianity, the Only Synthesis," 178.
- ²² "In Memoriam – Fr. Matthias Christian SVD (1941-2020)," University of St. Joseph (Macau), July 22, 2020, accessed June 27, 2024, <https://www.usj.edu.mo/en/news/memoriam-fr-matthias-christian-svd-1941-2020/>.
- ²³ Wu, "Christianity, the Only Synthesis," 171.
- ²⁴ Wu, "The Spirit of Joy in Chinese Sages," 50.



John Lindblom received his MA in International Studies (China) at the Henry M. Jackson School at the University of Washington, with a focus on the Catholic Church in China. He received his PhD in World Religions World Church (theology) at the University of Notre Dame. His research examines connections between Chinese humanism and Christian spirituality in the work of Chinese Catholic writers.

Sino-Vatican Agreement I

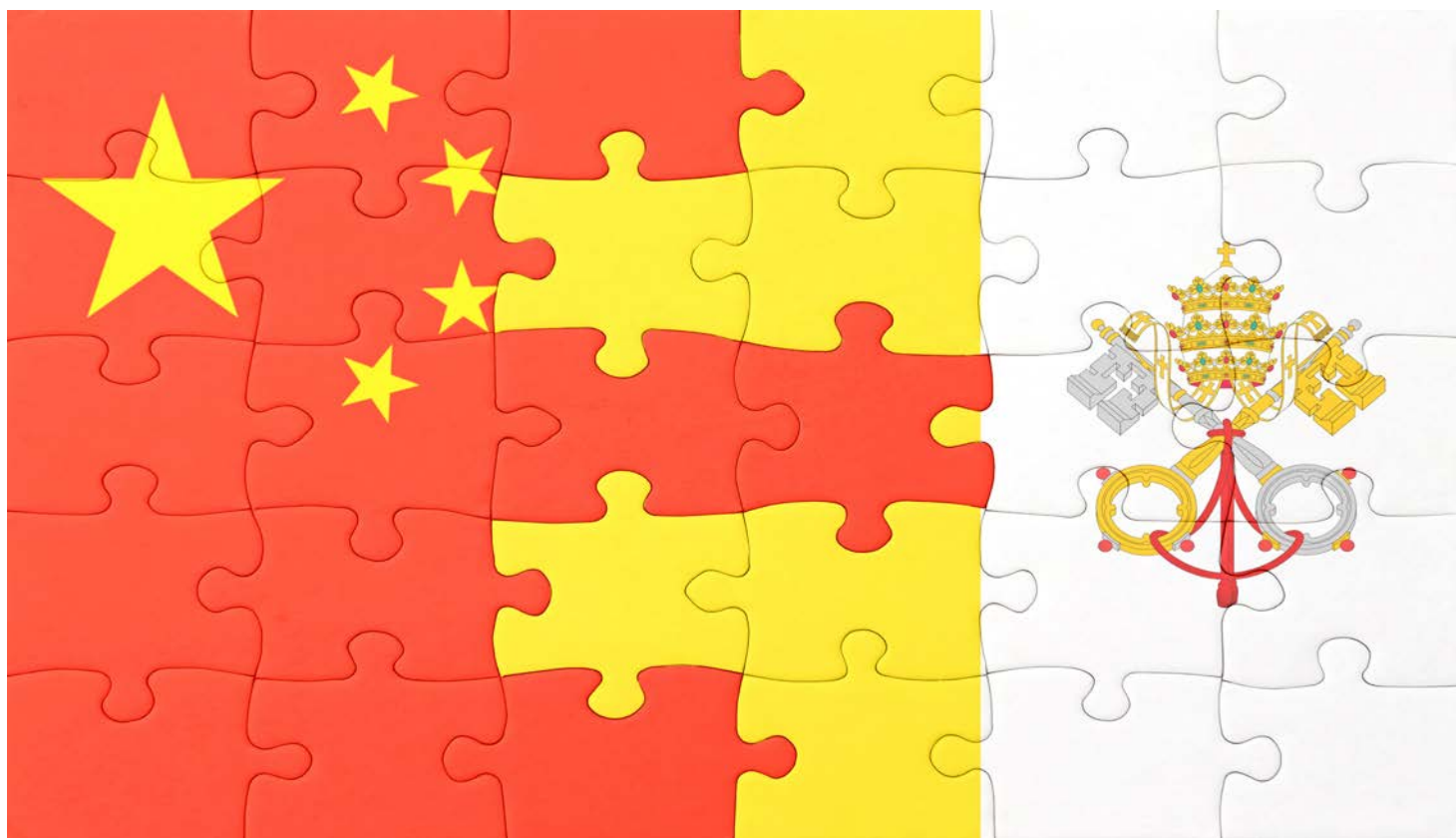


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Holy See-China Provisional Agreement: The Balance Sheet 5 and a Half Years Later

BY CHIARETTO YAN

BIGGER HISTORICAL PICTURE

The Church is missionary by nature. When Catholic bishops from around the world gathered for the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), they shifted the Church's focus from the object of faith to the greater discovery of the situation of man, the interlocutor to whom mission is aimed.¹ Therefore, it is essential to know the Chinese situation better when engaging in mission there. Taking a snapshot of the

broader context, evangelization had some success when missionaries went to China in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. However, we cannot deny the fact that it was the colonial period, and they were under the protection of Western powers. The phrase "one more Christian, one less Chinese" was circulated. In recent history, China has suffered "a century of humiliation" at the hands of Western powers and Japan.

Afterwards, even under the People's Republic of China, there were moments of absolute chaos: the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the Tiananmen protests, and so on. As a result, ordinary people are afraid of the repetition of these tragedies. After the reform and opening-up policy of 1979, they see that the People's Republic of China has a system that provides stability, development, and well-being for ordinary people.

The government has lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty in recent decades. More than 180 million Chinese traveled abroad as tourists in 2019, that is, prior to the pandemic. Instead of calling for notions of rights and freedoms, which are rather individualistic, people also feel the need to highlight values appropriate to Chinese culture, especially the spirit of sacrifice for the collective common good, the community, unity, and stability of the country.

With regard to skepticism towards Christianity, since the nineteenth century, both Catholicism and Protestantism alike have been associated with Western imperialism in the minds of the Chinese people. Because of this perception, the Chinese government is concerned that religion—particularly Catholicism, which is well organized at the international level—not become a political tool for foreign interference. It draws parallels with Tibet and Xinjiang, regions allegedly associated with terrorism and separatism. Whether or not this concern is valid, that is at least how the government perceives it.

In our day, Catholic leaders often take great care to show their respect for Chinese sensibilities. During the Papal trip to Mongolia in September last year, Pope Francis took the hands of Cardinal John Tong Hon, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, and Cardinal-elect Stephen Chow Sau-yan, SJ, bishop of Hong Kong, at the end of a public Eucharistic celebration and said: “I would like to take advantage of their presence to send a warm greeting to the noble Chinese people. I wish all the people the best, and to move forward, always progress. And I ask Chinese



Image: Tomasz | Adobe Stock

Statue of Pope Saint John Paul II by Władysław Dudek

Catholics to be good Christians and good citizens.”²

GOOD CHRISTIANS AND GOOD CITIZENS

It was Pope Saint John Paul II who appealed to the Chinese people to be true Christians and to be authentic Chinese,³ a call now often echoed by Pope Francis. Chinese Catholics are called to witness to their fellow citizens that they are Christians and good citizens, like all others, working

for the common good of the whole country and in keeping with their own culture.

“Historically, in ways that are certainly different but not in opposition to one another, China and the Catholic Church are two of the most ancient ‘institutions’ in existence and operating on the world scene: both, though in different domains—one in the political and social, the other in the religious and spiritual,”⁴ said John Paul II. He was convinced that Christianity



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I hope and pray that the path opened by Fr. Matteo Ricci between the East and the West, between Christianity and Chinese culture, will give rise to new instances of dialogue and reciprocal human and spiritual enrichment.

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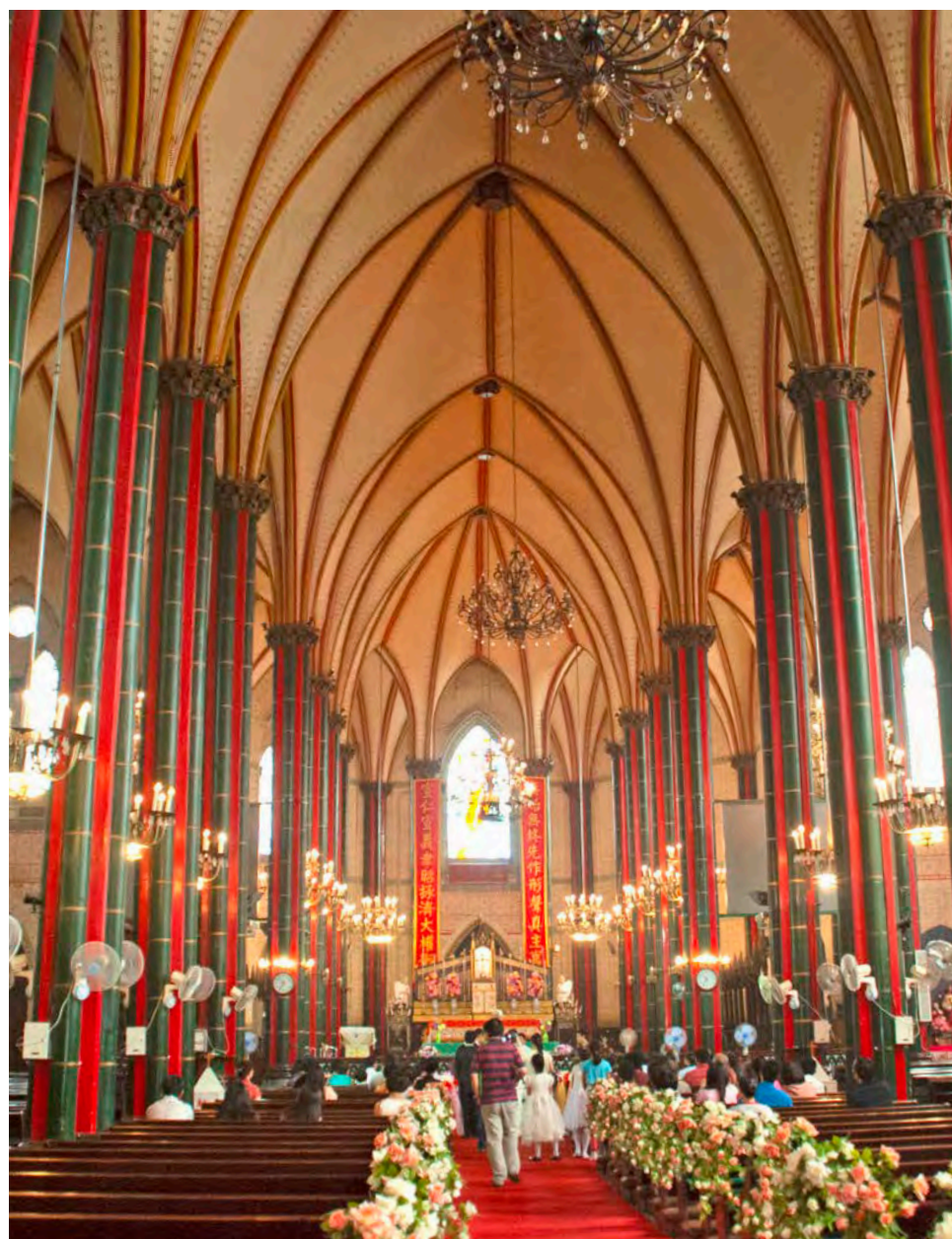
desired that the unofficial community came into the open. “The clandestine condition is not a normal feature of the Church’s life,” he said. “The Holy See hopes that these legitimate Pastors may be recognized as such by governmental authorities for civil effects too—insofar as these are necessary—and that all the faithful may be able to express their faith freely in the social context in which they live.”⁷ In his 2007 letter to the Catholic Church in China, he outlined a solid theological foundation for dialogue with China, encouraging reconciliation within the Catholic Church in China and dialogue with civil authorities.

would further uplift Chinese culture in its spiritual dimension, and vice versa, Chinese culture and its human experiences would further enrich the Church. John Paul II looked forward to a new encounter between Christianity and Chinese culture. He said, “I hope and pray that the path opened by Fr. Matteo Ricci between the East and the West, between Christianity and Chinese culture, will give rise to new instances of dialogue and reciprocal human and spiritual enrichment.”⁵

CONTINUITY OF RECENT POPES: CONSISTENT ATTITUDE OF OPENNESS TO CHINA

There is continuity in the efforts of recent popes in pursuing a process of rapprochement between the Holy See and China, and they give special attention to China and Chinese Catholics. John Paul II initiated a spirit of Vatican II openness, a search for new language, new ardor, and new models for a new evangelization in mission lands like China, where Catholics are a small minority. The practice of legitimizing Chinese bishops originally ordained without the mandate of the pope was explicitly desired by Pope Saint John Paul II.⁶ Legitimizing them is not a cold bureaucratic act, but rather, a journey of genuinely and profoundly ecclesial discernment.

At the same time, Pope Benedict XVI



Church of the Savior (also called Xishiku Church or North Church) in Beijing

Image: Joann Pittman

At the start of the papacy of Pope Francis, he reached out to China with a humble spirit, and there had been positive signs already. On his apostolic journey to Korea on August 14, 2014, he flew over China in a Papal flight, and in a telegram, he greeted the country's leader and invoked his blessings upon the people. It was the first time a pope had been allowed to enter Chinese airspace. On another occasion, he recalled the moment and commented that he was moved by the idea of flying over so much culture and wisdom. Then during the in-flight press conference of his return flight to Rome, he stated, "Do I want to go to China? Of course—tomorrow! Oh, yes. We respect the Chinese people; it is just that the Church seeks freedom for its mission, for its work; no other condition. We must not forget that fundamental document for the Chinese question: the Letter to the Chinese written by Pope Benedict XVI. That Letter is still timely today. It is good to reread it. The Holy See is always open to contacts—always—because it has genuine esteem for the Chinese people."⁸

China's Foreign Ministry has welcomed Pope Francis' gestures. For example, in response to the Pope's greetings on his way to Mongolia last year, the spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that the pope's blessing reflected "friendliness and goodwill," noting that China and the Holy See had maintained contacts in recent years. "China is willing to continue to walk in the same direction with the Vatican, conduct constructive dialogues, enhance understanding, accumulate mutual trust, and promote the process of improving the relationship of the two sides," said Wang.⁹

FROM TENSE RELATIONS TO VATICAN-CHINA ICEBREAKER

There have been many challenges in Holy See-China relations, and yet there are opportunities as well. China is changing rapidly. Despite exceptional economic developments in recent decades, there are unmet spiritual needs of the people. Catholics constitute less than one percent of the Chinese population. How can the Catholic Church contribute to human values and aspirations of the majority of the people? Its priorities in China should not be political or even diplomatic; rather, the main concern should be pastoral first of all. As Cardinal Parolin, the Secretary of State of the Holy See, said in an interview with *Vatican Insider* in early 2018, "It is not, therefore, a matter of maintaining a perennial conflict between opposing principles and structures, but of finding realistic pastoral solutions that allow Catholics to live their faith and to continue together the work of evangelization in the specific Chinese context."¹⁰

On the political front, there have been longstanding criticisms of the Chinese government on issues of religious freedom. There was open talk of excommunicating some bishops of the Church in China in 2012.¹¹ However, there was no great doctrinal issue at stake. Italian historian Agostino Giovagnoli has pointed out that all popes, from Pius XII to Francis, have always refused to use the word "schism" in connection with situation of the Chinese Church. Rather, they have emphasized healing the wounds caused by the illegitimate consecration of bishops, and it would be absurd to do otherwise.¹²

History taught us that such wounds are hard to heal.

Upon his election, Pope Francis renewed efforts to promote dialogue with China. As a result, in 2018, he was able to make a historic agreement with China on the nomination of Chinese bishops. In a conference in June 2019 at the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) in Beijing, Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, said, "Rather, it is an important step on a journey of well-thought-out steps taken by both parties."¹³ This took concrete shape in the granting of full communion to the Chinese bishops who had been ordained without pontifical mandate, along with an agreement concerning the way to approve future bishops.

Fr. Spadaro went further, saying that in current agreements between the Holy See and some Western democratic countries, there are still rules on the power of veto of the governments on the nomination of bishops, and in some countries, civil governments still have the right of consultation. In the process, some wonder whether the Holy See has ceded too much of its authority to ordain bishops to the Chinese government. The question is posed incorrectly. The Church does not give up its authority to ordain bishops. Rather, this agreement is part of a long history of the search for agreements with political authorities on the nomination of bishops. In a Q&A section later at the Jesuit-run Beijing Center for Chinese Studies on the campus of the University of International Business and Economics, Professor Ren Ranli of CASS even doubted who ceded more to whom in China-Holy



China is willing to continue to walk in the same direction with the Vatican, conduct constructive dialogues, enhance understanding, accumulate mutual trust, and promote the process of improving the relationship of the two sides.



See relations. He said, according to some of us Chinese scholars, the attitude of recent popes to approach and get closer to China has been consistent, but it is the first time that China responded and conceded to make an agreement; this truly constitutes a big step from China and a decision made by its top leadership. Therefore, there is indeed a big concession from the Chinese part.

CONCRETE FACTS OF EPISCOPAL ORDINATIONS FOLLOWING THE PROVISIONAL AGREEMENT

Just to cite some concrete results after signing of the agreement: First, by signing the “Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops” on September 22, 2018, Chinese authorities recognized the role and involvement of the Pope in appointing bishops in China. Considering the Holy See as an authority from outside, this concession from Chinese authorities is quite exceptional. Therefore, the agreement in 2018 is indeed a historical milestone.

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Considering the Holy See as an authority from outside, this concession from Chinese authorities is quite exceptional.
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On September 22, 2018, with the signing of the agreement, Pope Francis readmitted into full ecclesial communion eight Chinese bishops, who were ordained without pontifical mandate. They are Bishop Joseph Guo Jincai, Bishop Joseph Huang Bingzhang, Bishop Paul Lei Shiyin, Bishop Joseph Liu Xinhong, Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin, Bishop Joseph Yue

Fusheng, Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu, and Bishop Anthony Tu Shihua, OFM who, before his death on January 4, 2017, had expressed the desire to be reconciled with the Apostolic See.

On the other side, from January 22, 2019 to August 18, 2020, seven bishops secretly ordained without recognition by the Chinese government have publicly taken office or undergone “a ceremony of officialization” denoting recognition by the civil authorities. They are Bishop Zhuang Jianjian of Shantou Diocese, Guangdong Province, Bishop Jin Lugang of Nanyang, Henan, Bishop Guo Xijin of Mindong, Fujian, Bishop Lin Jiashan of Fuzhou, Fujian, Bishop Li Huiyuan of Fengxiang, Shaanxi, Bishop Ma Cunguo of Shuozhou, Shanxi, Bishop Jin Yangke of Ningbo, Zhejiang.¹⁴ In a recent development, on August 27, 2024, Bishop Melchior Shi Hongzhen has been officially recognized for civil purposes as the Bishop of Tianjin, and the Holy See expressed appreciation for this “positive outcome.”¹⁵

Each year from 2019 to 2021 there were two bishops ordained within the framework of the Provisional Agreement. In 2019 Bishop Yao Shun of Jining, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and Bishop Xu Hongwei of Hanzhong, Shaanxi, were ordained; in 2020 Bishop Chen Tianhao of Qingdao, Shandong, Bishop Liu Genzhu of Linfen, Shanxi; in 2021 Bishop Li Hui of Pingliang, Gansu, Bishop Cui Qingqi of Wuhan, Hubei. Notably, Bishop Yao Shun was one of the two Chinese bishops who participated at the 2023 Synod in Rome.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, face-to-face meetings between Vatican representatives and Chinese representatives became less frequent. In November 2022, Bishop Peng Weizhao of Yijiang, Jiangxi, was recognized and installed as the auxiliary bishop of Nanchang, Jiangxi, without the involvement of the Holy See. Then on April 3, 2023, the Chinese authorities transferred Bishop Shen Bin to Shanghai, again without involving the Holy See in this decision.

Soon thereafter, from April 17–21, 2023, Bishop Stephen Chow visited the Beijing Diocese, the first Hong Kong bishop to do so after the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. In an interview later with Fr. Spadaro, editor-in-chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, he shared his opinion with regard to the Provisional Agreement, “It is not dead as some seem to have suggested. But the discrepancies of views between the two sides on the assignment of bishops to other dioceses could be a factor to be better understood.” Therefore, he suggests, “if more regular and in-depth talks were held in the future, perhaps clarifications would result.”¹⁶ As a matter of fact, three months later, the Holy See “rectified the canonical irregularity,” as Cardinal Parolin said, for the “greater good of the diocese” and announced the appointment of Msgr. Shen by Pope Francis in July 2023.¹⁷

Not only is the Provisional Agreement not dead; it is moving ahead vigorously with three episcopal ordinations at the beginning of this year, all within one week. Bishop Wang Yuesheng for the diocese of Zhengzhou, Henan Province, was ordained on January 25; Bishop Sun Wenjun was ordained for the new diocese of Weifang, Shandong, on January 29; and Bishop Wu Yishun for the diocese of Shaowu (Minbei), Fujian, was ordained on January 31.

In the case of Bishop Sun, his ordination also involved the formal creation of the new diocese of Weifang, with its newly defined ecclesiastical boundaries.¹⁸ Such diocesan restructuring had not happened since 1949, and it involved the Holy See and the Chinese government in compliance with the agreement.¹⁹ In the case of Bishop Wu, the Holy See Press Office also announced that his appointment was as set out in the framework of the Provisional Agreement. It transpires not only that the episcopal ordinations were done according to the agreement between both sides, but this process also involved ironing out issues with regard to defining the boundaries of diocese such as Shaowu (Minbei).

EVALUATION: SETBACKS AND CLARIFICATIONS TO GO FORWARD

Due to urbanization and migration since 1949, much has changed in China as far as administrative divisions and demography are concerned. In the records of the Holy See, the ecclesial territories in China and the number of dioceses, archdioceses, apostolic prefectures, and ecclesiastical administrations remain as listed before 1949; they need to be updated, and in some cases redefined. In his letter to Chinese Catholics in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI already said that “the Holy See is prepared to address the entire question of the circumscriptions and ecclesiastical provinces.”²⁰

national seminary in Beijing and other seminaries in China as a visiting professor. In the national seminary, there are at present 99 seminarians in both theology and philosophy, 58 sisters taking three-year courses, 24 to 30 sisters on average taking two-month updating courses, 18 priests and nuns taking up graduate studies, and additional students studying foreign languages in preparation for study abroad.

As in the seminary of the Beijing Diocese headed by Bishop Li Shan, there are at the moment 60 seminarians. I can see that the Church in Beijing is developing, and there is a steady increase of vocations, partly due to the relatively smooth relationship with civil authority. The youth and the laity

be heard, and their needs should be watched. As Pope Francis appealed, Chinese Catholics are called to give a united testimony before the eyes of the larger population.

People outside of China are often influenced by an “old mindset.” What is this old mindset? The situation of religious practice in China, including for Catholics, can be complex and varies by region and context. The perception of persecution may stem from personal experiences, reports from human rights organizations, and international media coverage. It is important to approach this issue with an understanding of the broader sociopolitical context in China and recognize that experiences can vary widely among individuals and communities. Still, some interpret the Chinese context from a Western perspective.

Some portrayals of Chinese policy are politically motivated and are manipulated by certain political entities that feel threatened by the rise of China. In fact, this is the current dynamic in China: The government does not change, but development policies are constantly changing to meet the needs that arise. Policies can change very swiftly.

Just to cite a case in point, starting December last year, China unilaterally implemented a visa-free policy of 15 days for ordinary people from some European countries: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain. This policy later expanded to Switzerland, Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Poland, a total of 12 European countries. China also implemented a visa-free transit policy open to 54 eligible countries, including the USA, for a six-day stay in many Chinese cities, facilitating tourism, people-to-people exchanges, and the promotion of international cooperation.

The system of government, in a country like China and many others, has to be determined by the history of the country, its culture, and the degree of economic development.



Since the agreement was signed in 2018, two setbacks arose due to the movement of two bishops made without consulting the Holy See.



Since the agreement was signed in 2018, two setbacks arose due to the movement of two bishops made without consulting the Holy See. In the case of Bishop Peng, a dispute arose in connection with whether the province of Jiangxi has four dioceses (as recorded before 1949) or only one diocese (as recognized by government authority). If there is only one, the installation of Bishop Peng as the auxiliary bishop of Nanchang would not be considered a movement, but rather the officialization of his status as bishop as recognized by the government. In the case of the movement of Bishop Shen Bin, further clarification was needed in order to move ahead in the spirit of agreement. Subsequent approved episcopal ordinations proved that things are now moving ahead in the right directions.

I have been teaching at the Catholic

are active in the parishes of the Beijing Diocese. The diocese registered 500 baptisms this year up through Easter time. Even in the diocese of Shanghai, there had been 470 baptisms registered this year up to Easter time after the arrival of Bishop Shen Bin, noticeably the highest in recent years.²¹ My impression is that the fewer controversies, the better for the local church. Dialogue between Church institutions and civil authority is necessary to move forward.

Another positive effect of the agreement is that there is more peace of mind within and among various Catholic communities. As a result, church communities are able to give more attention to gospel testimony and love of neighbor, rather than wasting too much time in internal conflicts. The voice of the “silent majority”—who more properly represents China today—should

Historically, in Europe, spiritual or religious authority was above temporal authority; Charlemagne was crowned by the pope, and even Napoleon was, in a certain sense. In Confucian China, it was just the opposite; the realm had many different ethnic minorities (55 at present), and with respect to the different religions, the mandarins had the role of governing and administering the regions entrusted to them. Therefore traditionally, temporal authority was above religious authority. This is deeply rooted culturally and difficult to alter overnight, even if one wanted to.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE FOR WORLD PEACE

The Provisional agreement between the Holy See and China marked a significant breakthrough after decades of tension and lack of formal relations between the two entities. This agreement provided a framework focused primarily on the appointment of bishops in China, a contentious issue that had been a stumbling block in relations between the Chinese government and the Holy See.

By reaching this agreement, the Vatican gained a say in the appointment of bishops in China, while the Chinese government acknowledged the pope authority in the Catholic Church. This represented a significant step towards the normalization of relations between the two entities and opened up possibilities for increased cooperation on various issues of mutual interest.



Stained glass windows at the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (also called Xizhimen or West Church) in Beijing

The agreement also has faced criticism and skepticism from some quarters, particularly from those concerned about religious freedom in China. However, it also aims precisely to improve religious freedom for Catholics in China. By formalizing the relationship between the Chinese government and the Holy See, the agreement provides a framework for addressing other issues related to religious freedom, such as the recognition of Catholic churches and the protection of Catholics' rights to practice their faith without interference.



Image: Joann Pittman

Catholics in China, though small in number, could contribute to the country by being a leaven of love for society, but only when Catholics are reconciled among themselves can they give testimony of love and service to society. The keys are reconciliation among Catholics, testimony of unity, constructive dialogue with civil authority, and friendship with people at large.

The agreement also has broader implications beyond China and the Holy See. It is seen as a reflection of China's increasing engagement with the international community and its desire for greater acceptance on the world stage. It is a very positive sign that the Holy See and China are engaging responsibly in constructive dialogue. In this regard, Pope Francis could be a game-changer for international relations. A papal visit to China is much desired, God willing. We are in a world today with so many divides; the improved relationships and the dialogue between these two ancient institutions of the world could pave the way and contribute to world peace. 

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- ¹ Cf. Second Vatican Council. "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965," Vatican website, sections 1–10, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.
- ² Francis, *Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis to Mongolia*, "Remarks of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Conclusion of Holy Mass," Ulaanbaatar, September 3, 2023, Vatican website, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/september/documents/20230902-mongolia-autorita.html>.
- ³ John Paul II, "Address to the Chinese Catholic Communities in Asia," Manila, February 18, 1981, sections 3-4, Vatican website, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1981/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19810218_manila-comunita-cattoliche-cinesi.html.
- ⁴ John Paul II, "Message to Participants of the International Conference Commemorating the Fourth Centenary of the Arrival in Beijing of Fr. Matteo Ricci," Vatican, October 24, 2001, section 6, Vatican website, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20011024_matteo-ricci.html.
- ⁵ John Paul II, "Message to Participants of the International Conference Commemorating the Fourth Centenary of the Arrival in Beijing of Fr. Matteo Ricci," section 7.
- ⁶ Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord, SJ, "Dialogue with China: Apostolic Succession and the Legitimacy of Bishops," *Vatican News*, July 17, 2018, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-07/dialogue-china-holy-see-apostolic-succession-legitimacy-bishops.html>.
- ⁷ Benedict XVI, *Letter of the Holy Father to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*, Rome, May 27, 2007, section 8, Vatican website, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china.html.
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He is the author of several books, including *Evangelization in China* (2014), *Il Vangelo oltre la Grande Muraglia* (in 2015), 《福音遇上中國夢：天主教在中國的挑戰與前景》(2016), *Season for Relationships: Youth in China and Church Mission* (2018), and *My Chinese Dream: Bridging East and West—Hopes, Challenges, and Opportunities* (Orbis, forthcoming).

Sino-Vatican Agreement II



St. Michael Catholic Church in Qingdao, China

Image: Mirko | Adobe Stock

The Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement 2018

BY BEATRICE LEUNG

INTRODUCTION

Pope Francis, soon after his accession to the See of Peter, was determined to push for a breakthrough with China and to re-activate the nearly three decades long hiatus in Sino-Vatican relations.¹ A pre-negotiation joint working group was formed with representatives from Beijing and the Vatican to first thrash out thorny questions before the real negotiations could then take place. The question of the appointment of Chinese bishops was discussed.

THE AGREEMENT: CRITICISM AND OPPOSITION

The Sino-Vatican Agreement was officially signed on September 22, 2018. The contents of the Agreement were never opened to the public. The Agreement specified that the government would nominate bishops, while the Pope would only have veto power.²

Those who know Chinese politics have reasons to believe that, on the issue of

bishop appointments, the veto power of the pope could easily become meaningless. The political environment in China is not conducive to the implementation of the religious freedoms which Sino-Vatican Agreement aims at. Under the authoritarian leadership of President Xi Jinping, religious security has been raised to the level of national security, suppression of religious activities has been tightened, and religions have been placed under the thumb of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³

The agreement under discussion has been heavily criticized outside of China by those who assert that the Vatican lacks understanding of Chinese political culture, most especially the communist way of understanding religious freedom.⁴ Taiwan's *China Times* unreservedly views the agreement as a compromise which is not in the interests of the Church.⁵ The *New York Times* commented that it raised more questions than it answered, adding that the proposed compromise could draw fierce protests from Chinese Catholics.⁶ Willy Lam, a Hong Kong-based Catholic political commentator, in fact argued that in the end, the agreement will not be honored, given China's declining record in honoring foreign agreements. Lam noted that because religious security has been raised to the level of national security, the political climate under the Xi Jinping administration is averse to its implementation. In this light, the Vatican should consider whether the PRC is a trustworthy negotiating partner.⁷ Frank Ching, a distinguished Catholic political commentator, proposed that the agreement would allow agents of the PRC to obtain total control over nominating bishops. "The price is too high," he stated.⁸

In January 2018, Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kun of Hong Kong went to the Vatican to discuss issues pertaining to the Agreement with the Pope, in particular, the forced resignation of two legitimate underground bishops and their replacement with two illicit, open-Church bishops. Zen found out that it was Archbishop Claudio M. Celli, the negotiator on the Vatican side, who had asked the underground bishops to stand aside in order to facilitate the negotiation.⁹ As Cardinal Zen was very much concerned for the underground Catholics, he argued against the course of action taken by officials of the Vatican. In his view, they were out of their element, insofar as they had traditionally dealt with European Communists, rather than Chinese Communists.

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The Vatican has issued a series of in-depth articles to explain the reasons for the Agreement and to justify its need for dialogue, negotiation, and the appointment of bishops.¹⁰ However, given that the power of appointment would rest in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party, whose consistent policy goal has been the extinction of religion,¹¹ the Vatican's articles do not advance convincing religious reasons to support the proposed Agreement.

In November 2018, Cardinal Zen delivered a new letter to Pope Francis, again stressing the deplorable situation of underground Catholics in China.¹² In his 2018 book, *For Zion, I Will Never Keep Silent*, Zen restated his opposition to the Agreement.¹³

THE FRUIT OF AGREEMENT

In 2022, four years after the launching of the Agreement, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's secretary for relations with states, admitted that the fruit of Agreement "is not terribly impressive."¹⁴

On November 23, 2022, without the Pope's authorization, the CCP appointed Giovanni Peng Weizhao (彭衛照), the unofficial administrator of Yujiang Diocese, to be the Auxiliary Bishop of Jiangxi. Not only did the government impose this episcopal appointment on the Vatican. In doing so, it overrode existing diocesan

boundaries. According to official Church records, Jiangxi Province is divided into five dioceses, one of which is Yujiang. In essence, this move also suppressed those dioceses. Then in April 2023, the government arranged the transfer of Bishop Shen Bin from the Diocese of Haimen to the Diocese of Shanghai, again without Vatican approval, as required by the agreement. The Vatican issued a statement lamenting this unilateral move.¹⁵

THE AGREEMENT: INSTRUMENT OF SUPPRESSION

After the Sino-Vatican Agreement, Chinese Catholics have suffered greater oppression at the hands of CCP religious officials than before it was signed. They have often tried to restructure the Church, creating new dioceses and extinguishing others, sometimes merging smaller, perennially vacant episcopal seats in the process. This has presented Rome with difficult problems.¹⁶ To cite another example, in January 2024, Fr. Ma Xianshi (麻顯士), a communist-sponsored diocesan administrator of Wenzhou, transferred priests in the diocese, realigned parish boundaries, downgraded another local diocese to a parish within Wenzhou, and made the decision to ordain certain seminarians, all without the approval of the Vatican-recognized bishop, Msgr. Peter Shao Zhumin (邵祝敏主教). When Bishop Shao objected, he was arrested.¹⁷ This is quite serious because it constitutes interference into a religious group's



Image: Carmen | Adobe Stock

A memorial site of a Catholic church in Hong Kong

internal affairs. When the government's control of religion usurps its legitimate rights, it will lead to the undermining of religion. This is the strategy of the religious freedom policy handed down from Mao.¹⁸

In their joint meeting in November 2023, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and the Chinese Bishops Conference launched a detailed five-year plan (2023-2027) for implementing the Party-state policy of "Sinicization of Christianity."¹⁹ Insofar as "Sinicization" entails subordinating the Catholic Church to the communist concept of what religion in China should be, the CCPA and the CBCC have sold out and undermined the Agreement. This policy is far from the "spirit of dialogue and collaboration" advocated by the architect of the Agreement, Cardinal Parolin.

More recently, three bishops were ordained recently by mutual agreement between the Holy See and Beijing. They are Bishop Wang Yusheng (王躍勝) in Zhengzhou Diocese (鄭州教區) on January 25, 2024, Bishop Sun Wenjun (孫文君) in Weifang Diocese (濰坊教區) on January 29, 2024, and Bishop Wu Yishun (吳弈順) in Shaowu Apostolic Prefecture (邵武監牧區) on January 31, 2024. At the same time, there are still Chinese Catholics who have

no word of what has happened with their bishops, some who have been missing for several weeks, if not several years.²⁰ Such a record of interference in the Chinese Catholic Church even after the signing of the Agreement proves that the Agreement has not served the interests of the Catholic Church as expected.

THE AGREEMENT: SUCCESS OR FAILURE

In 2023, the Vatican decided to open a new channel to amend the insufficiency of the Agreement. On September 30, 2023, two and half years after his episcopal ordination, Pope Francis elevated the Jesuit bishop of Hong Kong, Stephen Chow Sau Yan, to be a cardinal, a position of high honor in the Church. This appointment derived in part from Bishop Chow's successful visit to Beijing in April 2023, during which he was able to foster good relations with the government and the Church in China. With the future of the Church in China in mind, Pope Francis handpicked him to act as a bridge between the Vatican and China.²¹ In an interview, Bishop Chow admitted that not much fruit has been reaped by the Agreement, and he suggested that dialogue and respect would be the way forward in future Sino-Vatican relations.²²

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CONCLUSIONS

The Vatican has been careful to avoid splitting the Chinese Catholic Church into an official sector and an underground sector. Accordingly, it made a significant concession by sharing its authority of appointing bishops with the PRC government. However, given that at present, Xi Jinping's paramount concern is the submission of religion to government control, the timing of the launching of the Agreement is problematic. To date, the Agreement has not reaped much fruit for the Catholic Church. Indeed, one must acknowledge that the Agreement does not mean that Chinese Catholics are now freer.

Stephen Cardinal Chow Sau Yan of Hong Kong, the new bridging figure between China and the Vatican, suggests that the complex and sometimes contradictory administrative machinery of Chinese religious policy might need time to deal with the Agreement. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, which signed the Agreement, has regarded it as a diplomatic success when it comes to China's international prestige. Will this problematic Agreement be abandoned or renewed on better terms for the Catholic side? Can the Vatican achieve better results in dealing with China with the assistance of its new bridging figures? This remains a question for international diplomacy to resolve. ■

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- ⁹ The cardinal revealed details of a private audience with Pope Francis. He mentioned this issue to the author when she had the chance to talk to Cardinal Zen on various occasions between 2018-2023.
- ¹⁰ Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord SJ, "Dialogue with China: There Is No Magic Wand," *Vatican News*, May 2, 2018, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2018-05/holy-see-china-diplomacy.html>; Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord SJ, "Dialogue with China: Small Steps toward Mutual Trust," *Vatican News*, May 7, 2018, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2018-05/holy-see-china-diplomacy-mutual-trust.html>; Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord SJ, "Dialogue: Necessary for the Church's Mission in China," *Vatican News*, June 26, 2018, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-06/holy-see-china-dialogue-pope-francis-catholic-church-vatican.html>; Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord, SJ, "Protagonists of Dialogue: Chinese Authorities and the Holy See," *Vatican News*, June 30, 2018, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-06/pope-francis-holy-see-china-dialogue-protagonists.html>; Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord, SJ, "The Vatican and China: Dialogue and Negotiation," *Vatican News*, July 3, 2018, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-07/pope-francis-vatican-china-dialogue-negotiation.html>; Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord, SJ, "China and the Bishops: Why Is This Issue So Important?" *Vatican News*, July 7, 2018, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-07/vatican-china-diplomacy-bishops.html>; Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord, SJ, "Dialogue with China: Apostolic Succession and the Legitimacy of Bishops," *Vatican News*, July 17, 2018, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-07/dialogue-china-holy-see-apostolic-succession-legitimacy-bishops.html>; and Sergio Centofanti and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord, SJ, "Dialogue with China: More Fully Catholic, Authentically Chinese," *Vatican News*, July 13, 2018, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-07/dialogue-china-holy-see-fully-catholic-authentically-chinese.html>.
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- ²² See note 21.



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The Underground Church



Image: Anton Pentegov | Adobe Stock

Life in the Underground Catholic Church

BY A CHINESE FRIEND

The Catholic Church in China is very complex, and it is difficult to explain clearly the above-ground and underground churches using a simple dichotomy. However, I still have to use such terms to describe the overall situation of the underground churches. In this short article, I will first briefly describe

the historical origins of the above-ground and underground churches, and then discuss the three major challenges faced by the underground churches. I hope that this small article can serve as a guide for those who are unfamiliar with the Catholic Church in China.

THE HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF THE ABOVE-GROUND AND UNDERGROUND CHURCHES

The leaders of the People's Republic of China established the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) in the 1950s. Due to outright persecution and fear, some bishops and priests joined the Patriotic Association, ostensibly severing ties with Rome. However, another group of bishops and priests insisted that they were loyal only to Rome, which prompted stronger government action. Because of the government's persecution, they fear, hate, and avoid the government, and are

unwilling to have any dealings with it.

Thus, at the beginning, the definition of the above-ground church and the underground church was simply this: the church that obeyed Rome and rejected the leadership of the government was the underground church, and the church that obeyed the government and rejected the leadership of Rome was the above-ground church. However, decades later, the situation had changed: some Patriotic Association clergy were in private contact with Rome and obtained Rome's recognition. In recent years, Pope Francis has recognized all officially ordained bishops in China, making them legally recognized bishops by the church.

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Under these circumstances, the boundaries between above-ground and underground are less clear. The Patriotic churches in some places are very loyal to Rome. For example, one elderly bishop in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning province in northeast China, also serves as the chairman of the Patriotic Association. According to people familiar with the matter, he took this position to prevent the government from controlling the church. Some local churches, although they have not joined the Patriotic Association, are privately close to the government and have good relations. To some extent, they are more inclined to obey the government. In short, it is currently not possible to analyze the Catholic Church in China simply in terms of above-ground and underground churches, because some above-ground churches are very loyal to Rome, while some underground churches are very close to the government. However, for the convenience of description and to make it easier for others to understand, I have to use terms such as “above ground” and “underground” to discuss the three major challenges of the underground church.

THREE MAJOR CHALLENGES TO THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH

1) THE FIRST CHALLENGE IS HIGH PRESSURE FROM THE GOVERNMENT.

From the beginning, the underground church attracted more persecution because of its loyalty to Rome and its resistance to the government. However, the underground church has not succumbed to persecution. Instead, most of the churches in China are still so-called underground churches. The largest “underground” churches are in places such as: Zhengding, Baoding, Lanzhou, Fuzhou, Mindong, Xiwanzi, Xuanhua, Anguo and other places.

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have been recognized by the Patriotic Association. The process for a priest to join the Patriotic Association is as follows: first he must go to a state-designated seminary to study for four months. This arrangement is mainly for political brainwashing. Then, he must celebrate Mass with a bishop trusted by the government as a sign of communion. Only after this can he obtain a nationally-recognized priest's certificate. If some underground clergy are unwilling to go through such a process, the government will take some coercive measures to force them to submit.

So far, only two *zhengquan* (正权, “of correct authority”) underground bishops have not joined the Patriotic Association: Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding and Bishop Shao Zhumin¹ of Wenzhou. Bishop Jia is already over 80 years old, but he is still confined to his home and is not allowed to go out without permission from the government. Bishop Shao is relatively free and can still exercise his episcopal powers. However, during major festivals, he is “invited” by the government to travel, preventing him from celebrating Mass.

To sum up, we can see that the first challenge faced by the underground church is external pressure.

Faced with such challenges, my suggestion is that one should decide whether to join the Patriotic Association or not based on his personal situation. Pope Benedict XVI understood the pressure and persecution faced by Chinese priests and therefore did not punish those priests who joined the Patriotic Association, but only invited them to be true to their consciences. The implication is that there is no unified standard for the church to join or not to join the Patriotic Association, and it is decided by the conscience of the respective priests. Pope Francis further recognized those official bishops who had not been recognized by the church before, and also let everyone see that joining the Patriotic Association is not an abandonment of faith, but a compromise to protect and maintain faith.

2) THE SECOND CHALLENGE IS THE "BETRAYAL" FROM THE CHURCH

After underground Bishop Guo Xijin of Mindong Diocese in Fujian province voluntarily retired (in 2019 or 2020) [to comply with the Holy See's request to allow a government-approved bishop take over as bishop of the diocese], most of the underground believers were disgusted and even resented the priests who had joined the Patriotic Association. The faithful refused to receive sacraments from priests who joined the Patriotic Association, and only attended Mass from those priests who persisted and did not join the Patriotic Association. Therefore, the government continues to put pressure on the few underground priests who have not joined the Patriotic Association. At the same time, the priests who join the Patriotic Association will also put pressure on the priests who have not joined, saying that if everyone joins the Patriotic Association, the faithful will no longer be divided and entangled.

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that underground Catholics believe that the pope betrayed and abandoned them to please the government or for political considerations. For many years, they have been persecuted by the government in order to remain loyal to the pope and loyal to the church. However, the Pope actively cooperates with the government to recognize those underground bishops who have been illegally ordained. What's the point of their suffering and loyalty? What is the bottom line for the Pope and the Church? What did their persistence get for them in return? This emotional and moral betrayal has left believers confused, helpless, and angry, causing many believers to no longer attend church. For example, a village in Fuzhou originally had 10,000 church members, but now only 2,000 members still attend church. There are also some underground church clergy who, many years after Pope Francis came to power, still read the name of Pope Benedict XVI during Mass. Through these specific examples, what I want to express is the overall struggle of the underground

church: Do we still need to be loyal to the Catholic Church, which is always ready to sacrifice the underground church?

Regarding the second challenge, I suggest that the apostolic representative or bishop stationed in Hong Kong needs to have regular communication with underground bishops and clergy to learn more about their demands and emotions, so that the decision-makers of the church can take more into account the emotions and interests of the underground church while remaining open to the Chinese government, then the true unity of the Chinese church will be smoother and the relationship between state and church will be more stable.

3) THE CULTIVATION OF UNDERGROUND SEMINARIES IS RELATIVELY CLOSED AND BACKWARD

Due to government raids, the underground seminaries often changed locations. Even if the church finds a place to serve as a seminary, under normal circumstances, seminarians are not allowed to come and go freely. Under the psychological pressure of fear and isolation over a long time, the seminarians are quite introverted, closed, and restrained, and do not dare to communicate with others. Moreover, in this environment, obedience and discretion among seminarians become particularly important. However, once these seminarians become priests, they are more likely to become dictatorial and demand that their subordinates or parishioners obey orders. At the same time, due to the constant changes of locations, the underground seminary's academic resources and cultivation system are rather poor.

In addition, the clergy trained in underground seminaries are more resistant to the government and the Patriotic Church, and do not want them to have more contact or interaction. All in all, the teachers, resources, and the psychological and spiritual conditions of the seminarians

in the underground seminaries are not as rich and stable as those in the above-ground seminaries. In this case, the seminarians are relatively conservative, closed, and obedient.

Regarding the third challenge, my suggestion is that those in underground churches who want to be priests can be sent abroad for training. If cultivated in an open and peaceful environment, the individual's psychology will be more stable, he will be focused on knowledge, and he will be open in his dealings with others.

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(Note: The underground church is quite resistant to sending its seminarians to official seminaries for training, fearing that their ideas will be assimilated by the government.)

Finally, let me briefly summarize the context of this article: I show first that it is difficult to simply divide the Catholic Church in China into above-ground and underground churches, because some above-ground churches are very loyal to Rome, but some underground churches secretly cooperate with Rome. The government is always very close. However, for the sake of discussion, I have to use these words. Then I analyze three challenges of the underground church and put forward some personal suggestions in response to these challenges. Of course, the views put forward here are far from describing the entire current situation and many challenges of the underground church. However, I try to maintain an objective and impartial attitude to put forward my own limited views and observations. I hope that through such sharing, it will not only help people better understand the Chinese church, but also help those who are willing to lend a helping hand to the underground church in a better and more effective way. Of course, it would be great if it could provide some ideas for church decision-makers. 🇺🇸

Editor's note: This article was originally written in Chinese and was translated by the ChinaSource team.

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¹ Both Bishops, Jia Zhiguo and Shao Zhumin, have been detained by authorities multiple times. More information about them is available in the Political Prisoner Database of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China: Jia Zhiguo, record number 2004-05304, accessed July 5, 2024: <https://www.ppdcecc.gov/ppd?id=result&number=2004-05304>. Shao Zhumin, record number 2005-00232, accessed July 5, 2024. <https://www.ppdcecc.gov/ppd?id=result&number=2005-00232>. See also, e.g., “Bishop Shao of Wenzhou Arrested Again,” AsiaNews, March 1, 2024, accessed July 5, 2024, https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Bishop-Shao-of-Wenzhou-arrested-again-59866.html#google_vignette; “Msgr. Jia Zhiguo: The Church Must be Open to Everyone, Even Those Under the Age of 18,” AsiaNews, October 7, 2020, accessed July 5, 2024, <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Msgr.-Jia-Zhiguo:-The-Church-must-be-open-to-everyone,-even-those-under-the-age-of-18-50549.html>



The author is a Chinese Catholic who comes from the underground church.

Creation Care



Image: Wonchalerm | Adobe Stock

Caring for Our Common Home

BY FR. ANTHONY CHANG

I will start from my personal experience and development in the Catholic faith and the Church's concern for the poor and underprivileged and social teachings. Caring for our common home has become something that we cannot ignore.

My first concrete contact with God was after I became an altar boy when I was eight years old.

I could feel the presence of God when I sat quietly looking out into the ocean and sky. I could also feel God within his whole creation, and this helped me also to care for the environment.

A LEAF FALLING AND RETURNING TO ITS ROOTS

My father was born in 1887 in Hong Kong and regarded Hong Kong as part of China and his hometown. He emigrated overseas in the early 1930s, but in 1947 he felt he was already old and was going to die soon. So for the sake of being "a leaf falling and returning to its roots," he returned to Hong Kong to die on Chinese soil. He ultimately died in 1948.

My father affected me most deeply in my sense of belonging to, and caring for, China and the Chinese people as a whole, and I first entered mainland China in 1978 to begin contacting the Catholic Church and Catholics there.

THE INCULTURATION OF THE FAITH AND THE UNITY OF MANKIND

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Vatican II, 1962-1965) resulted in many breakthroughs for the whole Church.

One breakthrough was the emphasis on the indigenization and inculturation of

local churches in language and personnel. Hong Kong began to use Chinese in place of Latin at Mass in the late 1960s, and Bishop Francis Hsu was ordained the first Chinese bishop of Hong Kong in 1969.

In 1980, I went with over 50 Catholics and another priest to visit the cathedral in Guangzhou, and the parish priest invited us to celebrate a post-Vatican II Mass in Chinese, as he wanted the parish leaders to attend and experience the way we celebrated in Hong Kong.

The first section of the 1965 papal document "Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," is a good summary to link us up with the whole world and humankind, especially the poor:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.¹



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THE CATHOLIC MESSENGERS OF GREEN CONSCIOUSNESS

In the 1980s we began to promote care for the ecological environment and in the 1990s established the "Catholic Messengers of Green Consciousness" to promote consciousness for the care for the ecological environment, and basic attitudes and values for action.

The Catholic Messengers of Green Consciousness deeply believes that "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Romans 1:20).

VISION, STANDPOINT, AND ORIENTATION

We deeply believe that each person is basically good in the depths of the heart and soul, and that the cosmos and the earth are imbued with good energy.

God appreciates his creation, loving and cherishing all creatures (See Genesis 1: 1-31).

The Catholic Messengers of Green Consciousness are likewise willing to appreciate nature in loving care, cherishing the nourishment of the Earth, respectful of the cosmic mystery, cherishing life in thankful praise and, in tandem with the evolving of the cosmos, to bring into full play our latent human potential.

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in tandem with the evolving of the
cosmos, to bring into full play our
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Image: RyanKing999 | Adobe Stock

We emphasize the wholeness of the person, in the integral union of body, mind, and spirit, giving importance to healthy living and healthy eating, exercise, emotional balance, and meditation with a quiet heart.

We see the basic contradictions and sense of emptiness of present-day people, as a consequence of internal alienation from the self, from other humans, and from the earth, distanced and estranged from our own essence and from the Earth, losing our balance, our value of the self becoming blurred and hazy.

We hope to be specific about reconnecting with ourselves, with others, with God and with the earth, in a macrocosmic union of heaven (God), Earth, and humans; to move from weakening the capacity of the Earth to endure damage, towards protecting the

continual cyclic renewal of nature in its ability for unending sustainability. We wish to hand on a good and healthy environment to our posterity, so that their body, mind, and spirit will have stretching space for reaching out and making multifarious contact with the ecological environment, able to communicate with it and understand it, building a deeper relationship with it in joint growth.

We are hoping that in the coming years, Hong Kong Catholics will have assumed a consciousness for and practice of green environmental protection as the Church's mainstream orientation, thinking, and agenda; willing to learn and grow together with other green and religious groups and individuals, caring for and placing great importance on the ecological environment, and to become Messengers of Green Consciousness.

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CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

We were overjoyed with the publication in 2015 of Pope Francis' breakthrough ecological encyclical: "Laudato Si: Care for Our Common Home." It is a very important encyclical, and what we needed, to spur the whole Church forward to enter concretely into the twenty-first century, to participate with the present-day world to face up to the most serious ecological crisis—the climate change crisis.

The encyclical also emphasized "care for the environment is an essential part of faith."



Image: Marcel | Adobe Stock

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In our catechetical teaching, we cannot only mention love of God and man, but need to holistically bring out “love of God, love of humans, and love of the Earth.”

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In our catechetical teaching, we cannot only mention love of God and man, but need to holistically bring out “love of God, love of humans, and love of the Earth.”

In my view, the Chinese vernacular version of the Our Father needs to be revised as soon as possible to accurately return to the

true meaning of the original text: namely, that the will of the Father must be carried out “on earth” (*yu di*) and not limited to the “human world” (*ren jian*).²

The Chinese Catholic communities over the whole world need to be awakened for the change to bring out the vision of faith to be broader and more holistic. ■

Editor's note: This article was originally written in Chinese and was translated by the ChinaSource team.

¹ Pope Paul VI, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World – *Gaudium et Spes*,” Vatican: the Holy See. Rome, December 7, 1965, accessed July 5, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

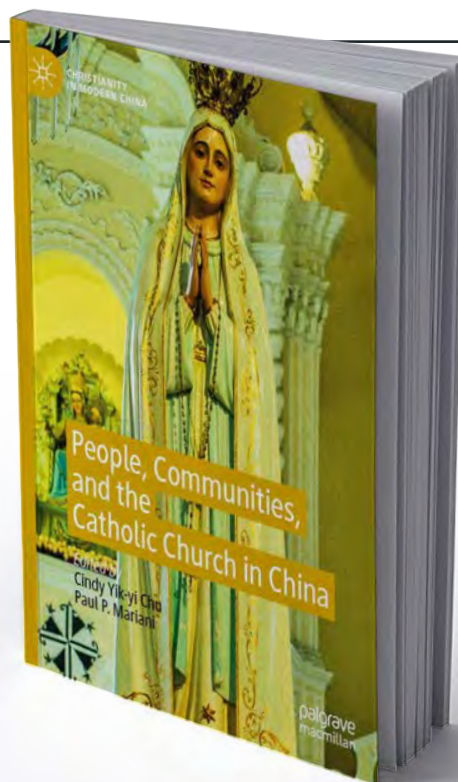
² The author is referring to a difference in Chinese versions of the Lord's Prayer used at different times historically in the Catholic liturgy, or Mass, in Chinese, and he is advocating a return to an earlier usage. In earlier Catholic versions of the Lord's Prayer as well as in the current official Catholic version of the Bible, the Sigao version, the Lord's Prayer is translated, 愿你的旨意承行于地 [may your will be carried out on earth], 如在天上一样 [the same as in heaven]. In the current Chinese Catholic liturgy, however, the text reads, 愿你的旨意奉行在人间 [may your will be carried out among humans], 如同在天上 [as in heaven].



Fr. Anthony Chang is the co-founder and editorial consultant of *Yi—China Message* since 1979; established and has been the director of the Centre for the Re-research of Faith since 1983; is the co-founder and spiritual advisor of *Catholic Messengers of Green Consciousness* since 1989; of *HK Catholic Vegetarian Association* and *HK Catholic Breastfeeding Association* since 2011, and of *Catholic Sustainable Garden of Joy* since 2012.

The Many Facets of China's Catholic Church: Caution, Confidence, and Conviction

BY JOHN LINDBLOM



When Pope John Paul II canonized 120 martyrs of China on October 1, 2000, he recalled the words, which are often quoted by Chinese Catholics themselves, of the early Church father Tertullian: “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Historian Anthony E. Clark recalls observing, as have I, Chinese Catholics who pray with fervent devotion at sites where loved ones or even Catholics of distant memory suffered, died, or were buried. He concludes, “China’s Church, as it always has, transforms struggle into pious conviction.”¹ Although the harsh persecution that marked the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution is not the norm for most Chinese Catholics today, a Chinese priest recently confirmed to me that restrictions on religious practice are as tight as ever, and surveillance is everywhere. Despite the challenges, however, faithful Christians, including Catholics and Protestants, continue to worship, evangelize, and teach, their efforts marked by both caution and confidence.

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This collection of essays on various dimensions of the Catholic Church in China aims to remedy a purported lack of scholarly attention on Chinese Catholics in comparison with Protestant Christians. It serves as an excellent introduction to their history and present challenges. The contributing authors, experts in their respective fields, provide enough history for context, while explaining current circumstances (since the book’s publication in 2020, some topics discussed have seen new developments, but the core

issues remain relevant). It is organized thematically in four sections (“Policies,” “People,” “Organizations,” and “Communities”) each with two essays. It will benefit general readers and scholars who wish to understand both old and new forces affecting Catholics in China.

In the first section, “Policies,” two Catholic priests give historical analyses. PIME missionary Gianni Criveller² reviews the recent history of the Catholic Church in China, including actions of the last three

popes, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, in the first chapter, “An Overview of the Catholic Church in Post-Mao China.” He details the approaches each pope took toward the Church and the government, and what each accomplished. Among these, he discusses John Paul’s elevation of the imprisoned Bishop Ignatius Kung Pin-mei (Gong Pinmei) of Shanghai as a cardinal in secret (*in pectore*) in 1979, and the aforementioned canonizations in 2000, as well as Benedict’s 2007 letter to China’s Catholics, in which he expresses his closeness with them and his desire for reconciliation between aboveground and underground Catholics, and calls on civil authorities to recognize and cease pressure on underground bishops to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), a government body whose goals are “incompatible with Catholic doctrine” because it demands “independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration” for the Church, including the power to appoint bishops.³ Criveller understands both the open and underground church communities. Of the former, he writes, “Members of the open church want to be loyal to their faith and to the pope. They are the object of intense government pressure, control, and manipulation, be this through enticements or harassment” (p. 18). For those in the underground, things are even worse: “the Chinese authorities’ final aim is the elimination of the underground church and the forcing of its members to register in the CCPA” (p. 20). The refusal of underground clergy to sign a declaration of “independence and autonomy” from the Vatican is still the main point of conflict. Regarding the controversial Sino-Vatican Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops signed by Pope Francis in 2018, Criveller writes: “By conceding to the involvement of political authorities in the process of selecting candidates to be presented to the pope, the Holy See made a gesture of great complacency toward China.” Nevertheless, he concludes that, finally, “the Church knows no other way than to follow the pope and to support [his]

commitment in guiding the people of God.” It is also important to note that despite the challenges at the political level, Criveller writes that the greatest challenge is the “transmission of faith to the younger generations” (p. 21).

less harsh, but Ticozzi characterizes the present situation as one of “oppression from the civil authorities.” He concludes with some sobering observations: 1) that “the underground church tends toward isolation” due to lack of trust;

“**It is also important to note that despite the challenges at the political level, Criveller writes that the greatest challenge is the “transmission of faith to the younger generations”.**”

In the second chapter, “The Development of the Underground Church in Post-Mao China,” Sergio Ticozzi traces the government’s attempts first to ignore, then to repress and destroy the underground church. In the late 1970s, although still not registered or officially allowed to practice their faith, underground clergy and faithful kept a vibrant faith, a worshiping in homes or makeshift spaces and often relied on memory or handwritten texts. Underground seminaries and convents reemerged, Pope John Paul II made special allowance for the ordination of underground bishops without prior approval, and an underground bishops’ conference was formed. Repression has come in waves, such as after the issuance of government documents in 1989 and 1991 and 2018, when children under 18 were officially prohibited from participating in church activities. Authorities targeted defiant leaders, such as Bishop Peter Joseph Fan Xueyuan of Hebei, who ordained others, and was detained, tortured, and killed in 1992. Other clergy have been detained and held incommunicado, two for over 20 years, without trial or legal due process, or detained repeatedly and placed under close surveillance.⁴ In some times and places authorities have been relatively

2) there is “widespread fear” that the oppression of the underground church would increase under the 2018 Sino-Vatican Agreement (a fear that has been validated by events since then); and 3) recent government policies and control measures “seem to aim at the elimination of the unofficial section of the Church in China” (p. 40).

The second section offers a close-up look at two leaders, Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian (1916-2013) of Shanghai, and Archbishop emeritus Joseph Cardinal Zen of Hong Kong (born 1932). Rachel Xiaohong Zhu, in “Bishop Jin Luxian and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association of Shanghai,” presents Bishop Jin as a pragmatist who, as with Cardinal Kung and others, endured decades in prison, but afterwards Jin chose to cooperate with authorities, believing he could thereby most effectively build up the church. He made major contributions to the rebuilding of schools, charitable organizations, Catholic publishing, and pastoral care in Shanghai and made over thirty visits abroad. Jin was friends with his Protestant counterpart, Ting Kuang-hsun (1915-2012) or Bishop K. H. Ting, the leader of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). Jin, says Zhu, “often felt as if he was walking a tightrope between the Church

and the state” (p. 47). He cooperated with the CCPA, hoping to steer it toward serving the church and society (p. 50), while he also “unofficially stated that the CCPA could not be reconciled with Catholic doctrine and faith, at least at a national level” (p. 56). Jin also believed that the principles of “independence and autonomy” from Rome, noted above, could be part of the Church’s “normal administrative autonomy” (p. 56).

Beatrice K. F. Leung, an expert on Sino-Vatican relations, in “Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kien of Hong Kong,” praises Joseph Cardinal Zen as “a prophet of a society in turmoil.” She casts the recent tragedy of Hong Kong in biblical terms: “The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah lamented the fall of Jerusalem and the desperation of Israel. Cardinal Zen laments the fall of Hong Kong” (p. 62). Leung traces Zen’s prophetic role back to 1999, when he advocated for the rights of refugees from China to settle in Hong Kong. He became a vocal leader in Hong Kong citizens’ struggle for democracy and against the PRC’s imposition of vague “national security” laws against “treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People’s Government” and similar offenses (p. 65).⁵ In 2014, 82-year-old Zen slept overnight on the street with “Umbrella Movement” protesters. Zen is known for his support of Benedict XVI’s 2007 letter to China’s Catholics, and for his efforts to dissuade Pope Francis from entering into the 2018 Sino-Vatican Agreement. He has continued to criticize the agreement and its renewals since, in 2020 and 2022,



Cathedral of the Nativity of Our Lady in Macau

arguing that they have continued to a worsening situation for Catholics, especially in the underground church (p. 72), and has publicly called for the release of detained underground bishops in China, such as Cui Tai. Zen has been called “the new conscience of Hong Kong” and given numerous awards for his human rights advocacy (p. 72).

The next two chapters, in “Organizations,” describe the work of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Sinense, which completed the first complete Catholic Chinese translation of the Bible in 1968, and the development of Catholic Charities in China. In chapter 6, “The Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Sinense from 1976 to Present,” Raissa De Gruttola describes the decades-long translation work initiated by Franciscan missionary Gabriele Allegra (1907-1976), who brought together a team to complete the Sigao Bible (so named after medieval

Franciscan scholar John Duns Scotus). It is still the official Chinese Catholic version, although others exist, and a new Catholic translation is in progress. Some collaborative translation efforts by Catholics and Protestants have taken place, but the results have never overcome what scholar Irene Eber called “the interminable term question.”⁶ The “interminable” problem is that Catholics have one official name for God, *Tianzhu* (天主), the favored term adopted by Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552 -1610) over 400 years ago, and Protestants use multiple names, such as *Shen* (神) (which can simply mean “god” or “deity”) or *Shangdi* (上帝) (which has various uses throughout history), but lack agreement among them, so their Bible versions in Chinese differ according to the chosen name.

In chapter 7, “The Jinde Charities Foundation of Hebei Province and Catholic Charities in China,” Zhipeng Zhang discusses the recovery of Catholic charitable work in China since 1979, focusing on the first registered non-profit, Jinde Charities in Hebei. Zhang finds that despite challenges, social services in China in the past 40 years have made major contributions in areas such as disaster relief, medical treatment, elder and orphan care, adoption, scholarships, and more. They have become “a very important and effective way to witness

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He has continued to criticize the agreement and its renewals since, in 2020 and 2022, arguing that they have continued to a worsening situation for Catholics, especially in the underground church.
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to the Gospel,” and “have raised the status of the Church in Chinese society, contributing to eliminating the prejudice and misunderstanding of the Church in Chinese society” (p. 107).

Part IV, “Communities,” includes “Recent Developments of Youth Ministry in China” by Hong Kong-based French missionary priest Bruno Lepeu, and “The Sheshan ‘Miracle’ and Its Interpretations,” by Jesuit historian Paul P. Mariani. Lepeu describes the emergence of vibrant ministries to youth since 2000, which have borne much fruit despite great challenges, including poor resources and training and the attractions and distractions of city life, not to mention government restrictions. Despite these, through the experiences of community with other Catholic youth, often in summer camps, their faith comes to life and deepens. Leadership training for youth, Bible study and catechism, prayer, worship, service, and, crucially, accompaniment on the path of faith, all lead to a deeper relationship with Christ.

Mariani analyzes a historic event that occurred at China’s most famous Marian pilgrimage site, Sheshan, outside Shanghai, in March 1980. Not long after the desolation of the Mao years ended in 1976, thousands of Catholic pilgrims gathered, to the vexation of government authorities who did not expect such a reappearance of religious devotion. The unexpected arrival of crowds of devoted pilgrims from around China, singing hymns en route and lighting firecrackers in celebration, caused a spontaneous joyous atmosphere that many thought could not occur at that point in history. Some believed the rains that brought dried-up canals back to life, and mysterious lights that appeared in the sky, as well as the size and exuberance of the crowds, to be miraculous. Mariani analyzes the event from four perspectives: the experience of participants; a “scientific explanation” offered by the government to counter the miracle narrative, a “social scientific” explanation describing the event as a predictable, non-miraculous

phenomenon aided by the government’s tolerance and help. Finally, a “political interpretation” published a decade later aimed to discredit the origins of the Sheshan pilgrimage, attacking it as the scheme of a “Counterrevolutionary Clique” led by Jesuit priest Zhu Hongsheng, a political attempt to turn China into a “second Poland” after the fall of communism there.

This volume opens up many still unresolved problems facing the Church. Despite the serious challenges, one can still come away with a sense of hope. Many heroic Catholic Christians in China have considered what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the “cost of discipleship,” and followed the Lord Jesus, remained on the vine, and borne much fruit. Taken as a whole, this volume offers an excellent introduction to major issues shaping the experiences of Catholics in China today and is highly recommended. 📖

- 1 Anthony E. Clark, “China’s Church(es): An Interview with Father Daniel Cerezo (June 2006),” in *China’s Catholics in an Era of Transformation: Observations of an “Outsider,”* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 49.
- 2 Gianni Criveller is a missionary priest and theologian with the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), who has served in greater China since 1991. He is currently editor-in-chief of AsiaNews. See Gianni Criveller, “AsiaNews, our unbiased window on Asia,” October 1, 2023, accessed June 27, 2024, <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/AsiaNews.-our-unbiased-window-on-Asia-59263.html>.
- 3 Pope Benedict XVI, “Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China,” The Holy See, May 27, 2007, accessed June 27, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china.html.
- 4 The Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) publishes a searchable online Political Prisoner Database containing records on prisoners of conscience, including these Catholics and other Chinese citizens detained for practicing their religion, or for human rights advocacy, criticizing the government or its policies, and other actions protected under international human rights law. See www.cecc.gov.
- 5 Zen’s activities also included, after this book’s publication, opposition to the 2020 “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region,” often referred to as the “National Security Law.” Zen was convicted and fined with around four others for establishing a group to help democracy advocates with their legal expenses following the protests, and Zen has been vilified in PRC state media.
- 6 Irene Eber, “The Interminable Term Question,” in *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, ed. Irene Eber, Sze-kar Wan, and Knut Walf (Sankt Augustin; Nettetal: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1999).

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People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China

↳ Edited by
Cindy Yik-yi Chu
and Paul P. Mariani.

New York: Palgrave Macmillan,
2020, 176 pages. Hardcover,
ISBN-10: 9811516782
ISBN-13: 978-9811516788

↳ Amazon

amazon.com/People-Communities-Catholic-Church-Christianity/dp/9811516782



John Lindblom received his MA in International Studies (China) at the Henry M. Jackson School at the University of Washington, with a focus on the Catholic Church in China. He received his PhD in World Religions World Church (theology) at the University of Notre Dame. His research examines connections between Chinese humanism and Christian spirituality in the work of Chinese Catholic writers.



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A New China and a New Catholic Church

BY MICHAEL AGLIARDO, SJ

Since the sixteenth century, when the first European missionaries of the modern era arrived in southern China, China has summoned the Western Church to go beyond itself. Transcending sea and land to enter into the global vastness beyond the Western outpost of Eurasia that is Europe, these missionaries had to make sense of a sophisticated culture that challenged their imaginary. How were they to reconstruct their mental topography to make room for China? Were the Chinese “idolaters”? Or did they have an ancient and venerable appreciation of divinity alive in their traditions and ethics? Did existing

religious categories comprehend what the missionaries encountered, or did they need the openness to learn and grow?

The early Jesuit missionaries to China were among those who risked bending European categories to make sense of their experience in China. Schooled in Renaissance humanism, they found apt

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The early Jesuit missionaries...risked bending European categories to make sense of their experience in China.
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dialogue partners among the Confucian literati they engaged. However, in Europe, trends in the Catholic Church were heading in a different direction. The Protestant Reformation and the doctrinal controversies it spawned led to a hardening of boundaries, as did the controversies occasioned by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.



In this imaginary, truth is a timeless ideal whose dimensions fit together with logical consistency, and the goal on earth is to participate in and manifest that ideal in this incarnate world.



In the contemporary world, we are used to thinking historically and contextually. Evolution is such the assumption that we wonder whether there is such a thing as Truth. We have what has been termed a “historical” mindset. For much of its history—perhaps stemming from its engagement with ancient Greek philosophy—the Western Church has often operated with an ahistorical imaginary. In this imaginary, truth is a timeless ideal whose dimensions fit together with logical consistency, and the goal on earth is to participate in and manifest that ideal in this incarnate world. For this mindset—the “classicist” mindset—Euclidean geometry is the exemplar.¹

Catholic missions persisted under the Qing emperors, the Portuguese Padroado, and the French Protectorate. And well into the twentieth century, a classicist imaginary dominated; this imaginary stood as a fortress against difference and unwanted change. There is a stability and a clarity in the classicist mindset. In the Chinese mission, it clearly delineated what was and was not to be held and practiced. Catholicism was—or aspired to be—a complete and consistent world.

That is not to say that Chinese wisdom and culture were excluded. But what was admitted into the Catholic scheme of things had to be carefully vetted and deemed coherent with the faith. Indeed, once it deems something safe, the Catholic Church can be quite bold. It established one of the earliest radio

stations in Europe (1931), approved of modern biblical critical methods (within boundaries) (1943), and affirmed evolution (1950). In the Chinese context, it approved the use of traditional Chinese rites (if understood correctly) in 1939. Nonetheless, in these and numerous other cases, Church authorities acted with care, caution, and sometimes trepidation so as to safeguard the timeless ideals it professed.

The Second Vatican Council ushered in a very different moment for the Catholic Church. Whereas the classicist mindset prizes integralism in the social order, Vatican II called upon Catholics to be open and “listen to the signs of the times.” Vatican II made changes to existing Church “orientations” regarding everything from the nature of the Church to the status of other faiths to the freedom of individual conscience. In practice it affirmed “the development of doctrine.” In highlighting the need to respond to the moment

and effecting development, the Catholic Church affirmed its historicity. The historical imaginary had claimed its due.

Many treatments of the history of the Catholic Church in China focus on enculturation or China’s own dizzying transformation—which they should. They necessarily mention changes in the Catholic Church. But they do not always give these changes their full weight. The worldwide Catholic Church of 1949, when China began to close its doors to the outside world, was very different from the worldwide Catholic Church of 1978, when Deng Xiaoping led China to reopen. This change came as a shock most especially to the Catholics of China, who had no experience of Vatican II. The church they remembered and defended was a church that spoke Latin and championed a fortress mentality.

Just as Deng Xiaoping urged China to open its doors—with all the risks that entailed—Vatican II summoned Catholics to leave the ghetto behind. “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”² With these opening words, *Gaudium et Spes*, one of the foundational documents of Vatican II, called Catholics to stand in solidarity with all human beings.



The worldwide Catholic Church of 1949, when China began to close its doors to the outside world, was very different from the worldwide Catholic Church of 1978, when Deng Xiaoping led China to reopen.





Exterior of the Church of the Savior in Beijing

By affirming change, historicity, and solidarity with all people, Vatican II reoriented the worldwide Catholic Church in a fundamental way. In certain respects, this has led to a lowering of one's guard and an affirmation of mainstream culture. And where that culture is secular and individualistic, we have seen a decline in church participation.

In the Chinese context, the changes of Vatican II have led to particular challenges.

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Chinese Catholics formed in an earlier day understood how to stand their ground—and why.

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Chinese Catholics formed in an earlier day understood how to stand their ground—and why. However, in the post-Vatican-II era, Catholic orientations are different. Does that mean one can cooperate with authorities who promote atheism? Where does one draw the line? Did the bishops at the Second Vatican Council have the Chinese Communist Party in mind when they wrote their seminal documents?

Throughout history, Chinese Christians have borne inspiring witness to their faith, often at great price. And now they are being summoned once again to meet their moment in history. In Hong Kong, the

Catholic Church played an important role in shoring up basic educational and service organizations at a crucial and formative time in its history. Cindy Chu shows how one missionary group, the Maryknoll Sisters, taught their students how to serve and play a vital role in this new and modern society. Fr. Anthony Chang reflects on faith and ecology, responding to the call of Pope Francis in *Laudato si'* to care for our common home and God's invaluable creation. In doing so, he draws on his own experience and Chinese tradition.

Meanwhile, on the mainland, one priest reports on the circumstances of unregistered Catholics under Xi Jinping's new regime. Sr. Beatrice Leung outlines the challenges that Catholics face in China despite the accord struck by the Holy See with Beijing. Nonetheless, Chiarretto Yan affirms the positive dimensions of that

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Did the bishops at the Second Vatican Council have the Chinese Communist Party in mind when they wrote their seminal documents?

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accord. And Anthony Clark offers some historical perspective. Dr. Clark quotes Pope Francis: “China is not easy, but I am convinced that we should not give up the dialogue.” And again, “[A]n uneasy dialogue is better than no dialogue at all.” In a classicist world, we can throw up our walls and construct our world with the like-minded. But historical consciousness leaves us in the thick of it, and there may be no alternative but to enter into dialogue. The question then is whether the other party also maintains the openness that historical consciousness teaches and dialogue demands.

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**Dr. Clark quotes
Pope Francis: “China
is not easy, but I am
convinced that we
should not give up
the dialogue.”**

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At this crossroads, perhaps Wu Jingxiong points the way forward. A man steeped in Chinese tradition, he brought that tradition into dialogue with Christian faith. A man of the Church, he was every bit a Chinese. In the era before Vatican II, he brilliantly captured the synthesis that is classical Catholicism—its sacramental imagination, its sense of tradition at the service of faith, and its mystical depths—yet his articulation of the classical synthesis was not rigid or exclusive. Rather, he was both rooted in tradition and a man of his time. Rather than looking to an abstract ideal, Wu Jingxiong’s faith was incarnational. In an era when conflict threatens to dehumanize us all, Wu Jingxiong’s Christian humanism remains to this day a beacon of hope. ■



Interior of the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Beijing

Image: Joann Pittman

- ¹ For the “classic” discussion of these mindsets, see Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “The Transition from A Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness” in *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 1–10.
- ² Second Vatican Council, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965,” Preface, section 1, Vatican website, accessed October 5, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.



Fr. Michael Agliardo, SJ is a member of the Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious order more commonly known as “the Jesuits.” Early in his career as a Jesuit, he worked in campus ministry and taught theology at Fordham University in New York. After receiving a doctorate in sociology at the University of California, San Diego, he taught sociology at Boston College and Loyola University Chicago, and he has been a research scholar affiliated with the sociology department at Santa Clara University.

He is currently a Visiting Associate Professor of the Practice at the McGrath Institute for Church Life at Notre Dame University.

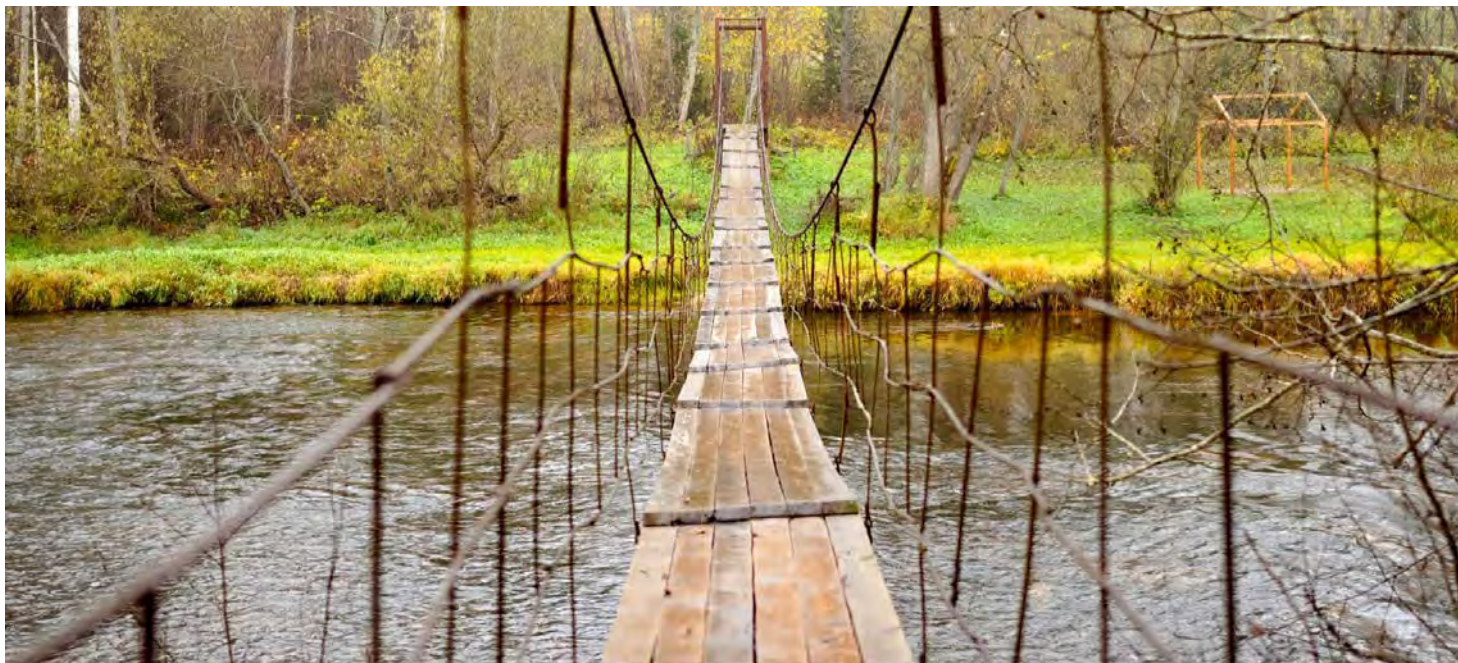


Image: Kristaps Ungurs | Unsplash

A Shared Hope

BY BRENT FULTON

As guest editor John Lindblom suggests in this issue of ChinaSource Quarterly, China's Catholic and Protestant communities share many of the same challenges. Most obvious, particularly in the Xi Jinping era, is the fraught relationship between church and state. Within the constraints of this relationship, both Catholic and Protestant believers seek to witness for Christ as they live out an authentic faith. Finally, as part of the universal church, they must grapple with how to relate to believers outside China when their doing so is often misconstrued as a threat to the regime. How China's Catholics have navigated these challenges historically, and how they continue to face them in the current situation, has much to

say to the church at large about the hope they share in Christ.

DEALING WITH THE STATE

While the terms "underground" and "official" might provide a convenient shorthand for understanding how various parts of the church have historically responded to government pressure, a Chinese believer who represents

the former camp warns against oversimplification. He points out that some in the "underground" church have good relations with the government, and there are also bishops with longstanding Vatican ties who serve in the official Catholic Patriotic Association. "In short," he cautions, "It is currently not possible to analyze the Catholic Church in China simply in terms of above-ground and underground churches, because some

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Within the constraints of this relationship, both Catholic and Protestant believers seek to witness for Christ as they live out an authentic faith.
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above-ground churches are very loyal to Rome, while some underground churches are very close to the government.”

The example of John C.H. Wu (Wu Jinxiong) can be an encouragement to believers in China today as they face increasing restrictions aimed at limiting the growth and influence of the church. Living through a tumultuous and tragic time in China, Wu found in Christian mysticism the way to recovering the joy that comes from inner harmony, which is key to embodying the gospel as Christ’s representatives in the world.

Wu’s writings also offer some guidance for a church being squeezed by the current Sinicization of Religion campaign. Wu’s desire to achieve a “living synthesis” between East and West meant that his witness for Christ could not be divorced from his deep knowledge of the Chinese classics; rather, it was the works of Confucius, Laozi, and others whom Wu said prepared his heart to receive the gospel. Seeing God as author both of natural and supernatural wisdom, Wu wrote, “It stands to reason that natural wisdom may serve as a mirror of supernatural wisdom.”

PUBLIC WITNESS

Despite current restrictions, China’s Catholics continue to find ways to witness for Christ. For more than 40 years the Jinde Charities Foundation of Hebei Province has helped to raise the profile of the church by providing disaster relief, medical services, care for orphans and the elderly, and other types of assistance. Ministries to Catholic youth have helped to nurture the faith of a new generation of believers. Hong Kong Catholics promoting care for God’s creation offer a much-needed alternative to the culture of

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May the recurring message of hope amidst difficulty conveyed in these articles spark the imaginations and encourage the hearts of all who seek to stand faithfully with their brothers and sisters in China.
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materialism and pervasive consumerism so prevalent in urban China.

A CONTROVERSIAL AGREEMENT

No discussion of relations between Christians in China and the global church can take place without recognizing China’s long tradition of state dominance over religion. In this regard, some may view the controversial 2018 Provisional Agreement between China and the Holy See as an effort to acknowledge the proverbial elephant in the room and constructively address a fundamental difference between East and West that has long hampered interaction among Christians inside and outside China.

But is a narrow and seemingly precarious bridge better than no bridge at all?

In the years since 2018 the government has redrawn diocesan boundaries for political reasons and unilaterally ordained seminarians over the objections of a Vatican-approved bishop. Chiaretto Yan notes instances where Beijing has acted independently in violation of the Provisional Agreement. Yet he views the arrangement as a net positive for the health of the Catholic community in China.

Other contributors to this issue of the *Quarterly* question whether the Agreement has been worth the cost, including the Vatican’s silence on the changing situation in Hong Kong and its alienation (some would say betrayal) of Catholics inside and outside China who have voiced strong opposition to an agreement that took shape prior to implementation of the current restrictive policies and whose contents remain a secret.

While highlighting the unique challenges facing China’s Catholics, the articles in this issue speak as well to the broader issues facing the larger body of Christ in China. Readers wishing to delve further into the historical background and current realities surveyed here will want to explore the comprehensive bibliography featured in the Resource Corner.

ChinaSource is deeply grateful to John Lindblom and to the many contributors who have shared their extensive knowledge of the Catholic experience in China in this issue. May the recurring message of hope amidst difficulty conveyed in these articles spark the imaginations and encourage the hearts of all who seek to stand faithfully with their brothers and sisters in China. ■



Dr. Brent Fulton is the founder and catalyst of ChinaSource.

Resource Corner

Recommended Reading on the Catholic Church in China

BY CHINASOURCE TEAM



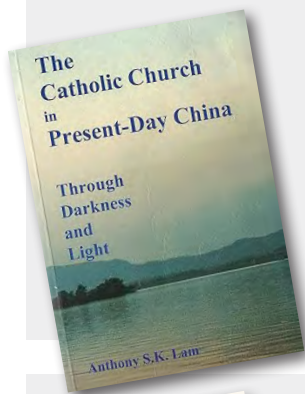
Image: Hieu Vu Minh | Unsplash

The key works and representative studies listed below provide a robust starting point for understanding the Church in China today and how it has been shaped by its history. Meant for the general reader, these books draw on fields as diverse as history, sociology, and theology. All serve to illustrate how culture and history have shaped the Christian life and witness in China.

This list is far from comprehensive. In particular, insofar as it focuses on the Catholic Church, it omits many excellent works that discuss the history of Orthodox and Protestant Christianity in China.

ChinaSource is grateful to the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame for their permission to use this comprehensive reading list.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA (DATING FROM CHINA'S REOPENING IN THE LATE 1970S)

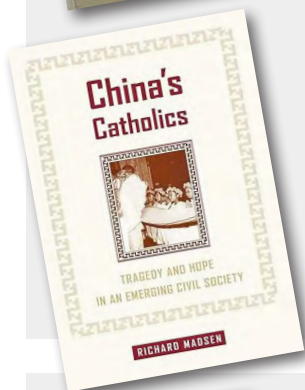


THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN PRESENT-DAY CHINA: THROUGH DARKNESS AND LIGHT Anthony S. K. Lam

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation (1997)



Written in the 1990s by Anthony Sui Ki Lam, this book covers the Open Church's recovery, the rise of the Underground Church, and the Communist Party's policy towards religion. The author interviewed many older Catholics from the mainland, who shared their personal trials during the difficult years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), adding his insightful reflections as a veteran observer of Chinese affairs.

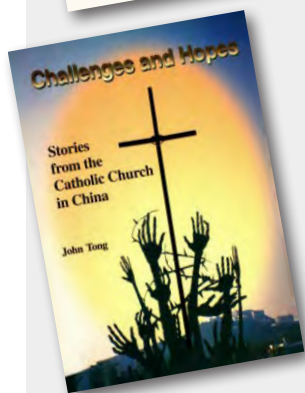


CHINA'S CATHOLICS: TRAGEDY AND HOPE IN AN EMERGING CIVIL SOCIETY Richard Madsen

University of California Press (1998)



A respected sociologist who conducted extensive fieldwork among China's Catholics in the 1990s, Madsen discusses the revival and "astonishing vitality" of the Catholic Church after its suppression during the era of Mao. He interviewed Catholic believers of different ages, from both urban and rural backgrounds, members of the "underground" and "above ground" communities, and staunch Catholics and those who were less devout.

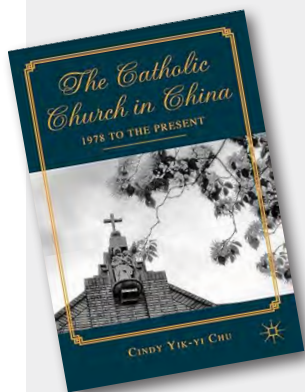


CHALLENGES AND HOPES: STORIES FROM THE CHURCH IN CHINA John Tong

Holy Spirit Study Centre (2002)



The author has a long and distinguished career as a scholar, an observer of Chinese affairs, and as a pastor. Serving on the staff of the Hong Kong Holy Spirit Study Centre since 1979, he became auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong in 1996 and bishop of the diocese in 2009. In this volume, Tong provides an overview of the Church in China since 1949; then he introduces many of its leading clergy and other personalities. A bishop who knows the persons and the situation well, he discusses the divisions in the Church and its contemporary circumstances in a thoughtful and balanced way.



CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA: 1978 TO THE PRESENT Cindy Yik-Yi Chu

Palgrave Macmillan (2012)



Cindy Yik-Yi Chu offers the reader a multidimensional overview of the history of the Catholic Church in China since China's "Reform and Opening," from 1978 to 2012. In particular, she provides an insightful account of the Church's challenges during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Catholics in the underground and official communities often related to each other in ways that were more fluid than many outsiders realize. While most bishops in the official or registered church community had applied for and received recognition by the Holy See, Chinese authorities continued to appoint new bishops without Vatican approval.



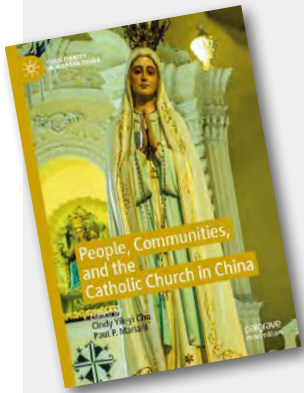
THE NEVER-ENDING MARCH: CHINA'S RELIGIOUS POLICY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Sergio Ticozzi

Chorabooks (2018)



The present volume provides a coherent, thoughtful, and detailed account of the recent history and political circumstances of the Catholic Church in China. Ticozzi himself has lived in China for over 50 years and long served on the research staff of HSSC. Well-versed in the study of China's religious policy, he examines key precedents under the Qing Dynasty before moving on to discuss its contours under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since 1949. His analysis highlights key developments and their implications against the perennial background of China's culture and traditions.



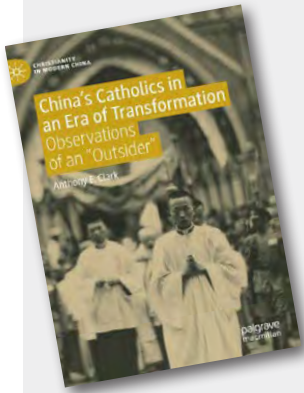
PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES, AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA

Cindy Yik-yi Chu and Paul P. Mariani (editors)

Springer/Palgrave (2020)



Edited by two veteran observers of the Church in China, this collection of landmark essays penned by experts on a range of important themes will prove invaluable for anyone who wants to understand the issues facing Catholicism in China today. Topics covered include the vicissitudes of the Catholic Church in post-Mao China; the dilemmas facing the underground Church in particular; prominent bishops Jin Luxian of Shanghai and Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong; the place of Marian apparitions in Chinese Catholic life; issues concerning the translation of the Bible into Chinese; Catholic charitable work in China; and Catholic youth ministry.



CHINA'S CATHOLICS IN AN ERA OF TRANSFORMATION: OBSERVATIONS OF AN "OUTSIDER"

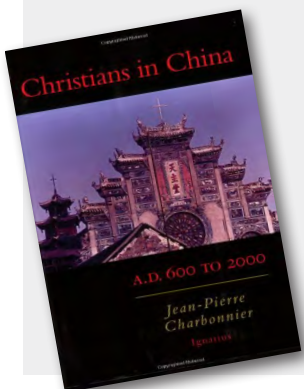
Anthony E. Clark

Palgrave Macmillan (2020)



This book is a collection of essays written between 2005 and 2019 by Anthony Clark, a Sinologist and historian who has conducted first-hand archival research and interviews with key figures in the Chinese Church. Clark's skillful treatment allows the voice of his protagonists to emerge from his pages, while he provides historical context to developments ranging from church demolitions to the Sino-Vatican agreement.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE CATHOLIC MISSION IN CHINA



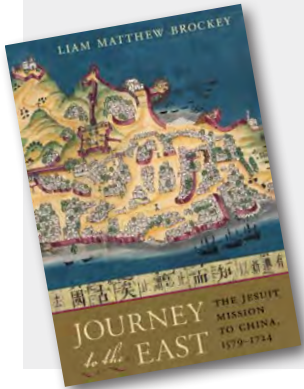
CHRISTIANS IN CHINA: A.D. 600-2000

Jean-Pierre Charbonnier

Ignatius Press (2007)



This major work consists of a series of brilliant historical portraits, each treating a seminal encounter between Christianity and Chinese culture in its historical context. While telling the stories of various Christians throughout Chinese history, the author returns to key questions: How did the Church develop over many centuries in a culture so different from the West? How do Christians in China give witness to their faith? How do they contribute to the life of all who profess the Gospel, both inside China and throughout the world?



JOURNEY TO THE EAST: THE JESUIT MISSION TO CHINA, 1579-1724

Liam Matthew Brockey

Harvard University Press (2008)



Liam Brockey retraces the path of the Jesuit missionaries who sailed from Portugal to China, believing that, they could convert the Chinese to Christianity. His book shows how these priests, in the first concerted European effort to engage with Chinese language and thought, translated Roman Catholicism into the Chinese cultural frame and eventually won over hundreds of thousands converts to their vision, a vision which transcended both Western and Chinese culture.



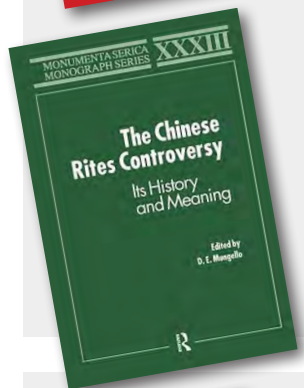
THE CHINESE RITES CONTROVERSY FROM ITS BEGINNING TO MODERN TIMES

George Minamiki

Loyola University Press (1985)



The “Chinese Rites Controversy” refers to the debates that reverberated in China and in the Western Church regarding whether Chinese Christians could continue to engage in traditional Chinese practices such as the veneration of Confucius and of the ancestors. Minamiki provides a clear historical account and explains how the Chinese Rites Controversy was finally settled by a case that arose in Japan.



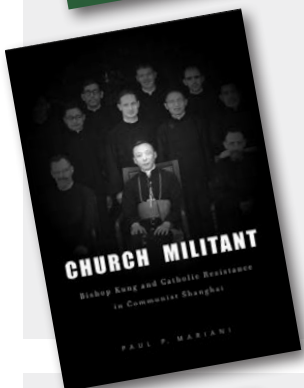
THE CHINESE RITES CONTROVERSY: ITS HISTORY AND MEANING

David Mungello (editor)

The Ricci Institute for East-West Cultural History (1994)



Each essay breaks open a key development or dimension of the Chinese Rites Controversy. Did educated elites understand these practices differently than ordinary Chinese, and in that case, which understanding was most central to the “meaning” of these rites? How did the controversy affect how the Chinese viewed Christianity? What can we learn from past attempts to elucidate cultural misunderstanding?



CHURCH MILITANT: BISHOP KUNG AND CATHOLIC RESISTANCE IN COMMUNIST SHANGHAI

Paul P. Mariani

Harvard University Press (2011)



Mariani provides a gripping narrative of how dedicated Catholics in Shanghai in the 1950s tried to resist the Communist Party, and how the Party mobilized to crush them. He shows how Party strategists used multifaceted campaigns against the Shanghai church, infiltrated Catholic organizations, and to divide Catholics from one another.



ON THE ROAD: THE CATHOLIC FAITH IN CHINA

Lu Nan

Ignatius Press (2021)



From 1992 to 1996, Lu Nan, one of China’s most revered black-and-white photographers, traversed ten provinces in China to capture the images that comprise this moving photo essay. His images bring to life the way love and their Catholic faith sustain believers amidst the great challenges they face in daily life.



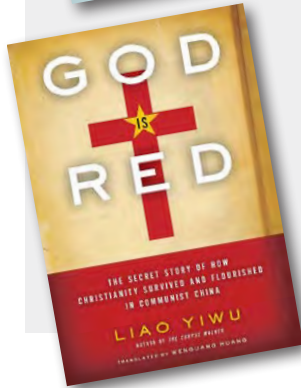
THE CHINESE SISTERS OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Cindy Yik-Yi Chu

Palgrave Macmillan (2016)



This project traces the origins of the Chinese Sisters of the Precious Blood in Hong Kong and their history up to the early 1970s. These Chinese religious sisters worked in both Hong Kong and in Guangdong Province. This study makes a valuable contribution to the neglected area of study of Chinese Catholic women.



GOD IS RED: THE SECRET STORY OF HOW CHRISTIANITY SURVIVED AND FLOURISHED IN COMMUNIST CHINA

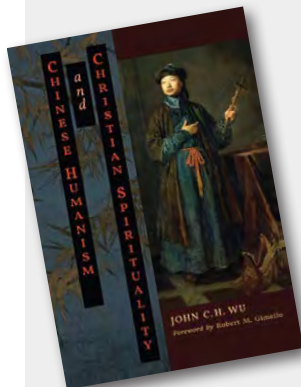
Liao Yiwu

HarperOne (2011)



In this volume, Chinese journalist Liao Yiwu presents gripping interviews with Chinese people of many backgrounds, who tell their stories of embracing Christian faith. His protagonists search for answers to the emptiness on the inside, and they struggle to endure hardships imposed by political and societal pressures from the outside.

CHRISTIANITY AND CHINESE CULTURE



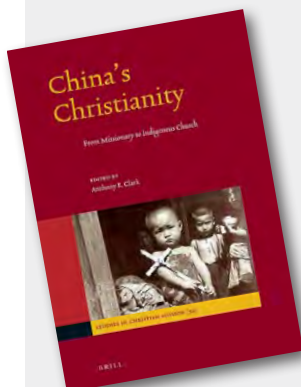
CHINESE HUMANISM AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

John C. H. Wu (Wu Jingxiang)

Angelico Press (2017 [1965])



In these collected essays, Wu elucidates points of harmony between the spirituality of Catholic saints like Therese of Lisieux, John of the Cross, and Thomas Aquinas, on the one hand, and the great figures of China's "three teachings," Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, on the other. As scholar Robert Gimello notes, "Wu offers in these essays insight after insight into the deeper meanings of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, while also critically evaluating them from the rare perspective of an accomplished sinologist who was also a devout Catholic intellectual."



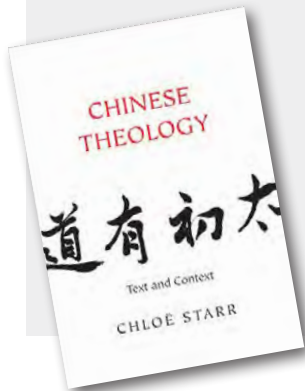
CHINA'S CHRISTIANITY: FROM MISSIONARY TO INDIGENOUS CHURCH

Anthony E. Clark (editor)

Brill (2017)



This collection by leading scholars presents stories and arguments supporting the conclusion that over several centuries Christianity has become authentically Chinese. It includes treatment of the historical activities of foreign missionaries to China, in particular, their work towards indigenization. At the same time, it also brings into focus the contributions of Chinese Christians themselves, from the suffering endurance of ordinary believers to the erudition of contemporary Chinese scholars who study Christianity. As historian Jean-Paul Wiest writes in this volume, "The birth and growth of the Chinese indigenous Church is more than a result of the endeavors of foreign missionaries; it is as well the fruit of the efforts and sacrifices of Chinese Christians and their faith communities."



CHINESE THEOLOGY: TEXT AND CONTEXT

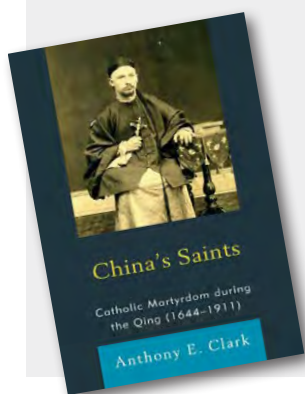
Chloë Starr

Yale University Press (2016)



In this groundbreaking and authoritative study, Chloë Starr explores key writings of Chinese Christian intellectuals, from philosophical dialogues of the late imperial era to sermons and microblogs of theological educators and pastors in the twenty-first century.

BIOGRAPHY / AUTOBIOGRAPHY



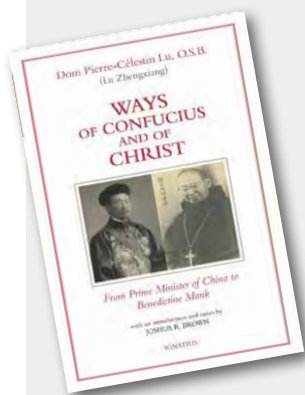
CHINA'S SAINTS: CATHOLIC MARTYRDOM DURING THE QING (1644-1911)

Anthony E. Clark

Lehigh University Press (2011)



This book narrates the lives of martyrs during the Qing dynasty, both Western missionaries and Chinese Christian converts. Anthony Clark approaches the stories of these martyrs from the unique perspective of one who is both a careful scholar working with rare archival materials and, at the same time, a widely-traveled explorer familiar with the places and people connected to their stories. Wielding the tools of the scholar, Clark analyzes the differing cultural viewpoints that led to misunderstanding and conflict.



WAYS OF CONFUCIUS AND OF CHRIST

Dom Pierre-Célestin Lu, O.S.B. (Lu Zhengxiang)

Ignatius Press (2023 [1946])



Lu Zhengxiang received a traditional Confucian education and in the early twentieth century, rose in China's diplomatic service to become the nation's premier and prime minister of foreign affairs. Most Chinese know him by his Chinese name in connection with his representing China at the Paris Peace Conference at Versailles. He took up the Catholic faith in 1912. Following the death of his Belgian wife, he entered a Benedictine monastery in Belgium as the monk Pierre-Célestin, eventually being chosen to serve as its abbot. In this reprint of his 1947 autobiography, Dom Pierre-Célestin, perhaps "the most influential Chinese Christian of the twentieth century" (according to historian Anthony E. Clark), recounts a profound journey in life that unites the "ways of Confucius and of Christ."



BEYOND EAST AND WEST

John C. H. Wu (Wu Jingxiang)

Notre Dame Press (2018 [1951])



Wu received a traditional Chinese education in Ningbo just as the last Chinese dynasty was about to give way, taking a world with it. Wu then narrates his first encounter with Christianity through American missionaries, a fascination with law that led him to study in the US, and a deep friendship with US Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. After also studying in Europe, Wu returned to Republican China and helped draft its new constitution. During the sorrow-filled years of the Japanese occupation, Wu embraced the Catholic faith. After World War II, Wu served as China's delegate to the Holy See, and the Chinese civil war flared up again. Wu still found the inspiration to translate the Psalms and the New Testament into classical Chinese.



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