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A new phase for Verbiest Foundation Leuven

Pieter Ackerman, Director VI KU Leuven

When Verbiest Foundation was established by the CICM (Scheut) General Government in Rome in 1983, the option for China of Theophile Verbist, the founder of CICM, was faithfully honored. Although expelled from China in the fifties, CICM created VF in 1983 to promote dialogue, cooperation and exchange with China. A new, and difficult challenge! Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm reminds our readers of the exodus from China of the CICM fathers in the 1950's, and describes how the 'old' CICM missionaries were instrumental in establishing a new relation of dialogue and cooperation with the PRC. After 23 years of developing exceptional missionary activities to promote dialogue, thanks to the daily efforts and dedication of a team of qualified colleagues, CICM considered its task as initiator of VF as accomplished. In 2004, CICM decided to transfer VF to a newly established Verbiest Foundation-Leuven presided by Cardinal Danneels (Malines) with Archb. Joseph Tikang (Taipei) as vice chairman. Initially we experienced this transfer as a crisis. However... Not if we look at it in the Chinese way. In Chinese, crisis is translated as *wei-ji* (危机). *Wei* (危) means danger or crisis. *Ji* (机) means opportunity. Each crisis implies danger, but at the same time offers a new opportunity, even growth. And that is what VF did: we grew into an international community, which was completed with the transfer of the VF direction and administration from Taipei to the offices of VF Leuven, with the understanding that VF does not belong to Belgium, nor to Taiwan or any other country. We realize that VF is entering into a new phase of its history, as both our research program and pastoral program are growing, while remaining faithful to both the option for China (understood as *Zhonghua* - including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Overseas Chinese, rather than *Zhongguo* - which only points to the country PR China), and to dialogue. With our option for dialogue, we follow in the footsteps of the Holy See. Looking at the ongoing talks between China and the Vatican, we share in this, long overdue, Courier the words of Cardinal Parolin, who said the Vatican is

Editorial



On August 19 we received our friends from the Dutch Lazarists. With the portrait of Vincent Hermans, who died on January 13 of this year, in the center, we made plans for the future.

taking the right steps toward “reconciliation within the Church,” including with the Church in China, which he further describes as “a fundamental part of the Catholic Church”.

From August 24th to 27th, VF organised its 14th international conference. Due to the Corona pandemic, we have organised this 3-yearly event online, but were nevertheless happy to welcome over 30 speakers, from 7 different countries. Central in this conference was our main field of study: the History of CICM in China. A remarkable figure in this history was Paul Splingaerd, on who Verbiest institute KU Leuven recently published the book: “*De Belgische Mandarijn. Paul Splingaerd*”, a translation of the book “*The Belgian Mandarin*” written by Paul’s great-granddaughter Anne Splingaerd Megowan. In this Courier we wanted to portrait how the CICM fathers of that time saw Paul. Father Jan-Baptist Steenackers (born 1848, Kasterlee, Belgium) had arrived in China as a young missionary in 1874. In 1907 he published an article about Paul Splingaerd, his close friend, in the CICM magazine “*Missions en Chine et au Congo*”. A unique time document which you can read further in this issue.

At VF we are convinced that the history of CICM, and other missionaries from the Low Countries is still relevant today, for East and West! This is illustrated by Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx, introducing our planning for the “Memorial Garden”. After the inauguration of the first part in 2018, we encountered unexpected delay, but now we can finally start planning how the other parts of our interior court at the Chinese College in Leuven can be transformed into a place where people can come and witness the impressive work, that was done by missionaries from the Low Countries – Belgium, the Netherlands and French Flanders. From Willem Van Rubrouck OFM, who travelled to Mongolia in the 13th century, over the Jesuits who went to China in the 17th Century, to the 679 CICM fathers from Belgium

and the Netherlands, the ICM Sisters, Flemish and Dutch Franciscans, Dutch Lazarists, Sisters of the Choorstraat (den Bosch), Sisters of Heerlen, the FMM Sisters and others. A remarkable contribution - which shows that the relation between East and West has not always been as positive as readers can read in the article on “the Three Great Pillars of Chinese Catholicism” - is made by Fr. Matthew Gong, rector of the Chinese College in Leuven. In his study, based on existing literature, but also on new and recently discovered Chinese archive material, the anti-Christian movement reached its peak at the turn of the 19th to 20th century. The Catholic Diocese of Southwest Hubei, at that time under the care of the Belgian Franciscans, was no exception. Fr. Matthew Gong introduces us to the tragic story of Father Victorinus Delbrouck OFM and The Elder Brothers Society (Gelaohui), a group that targeted Catholic believers during this period of turmoil.

In our Courier we also wish to present our reader testimonies from inside China, testimonies that show how active and vital the Chinese Church is today. Joseph Lim, working at the Verbiest Institute in Taipei, introduces the readers to the courses that were organized in Taipei on the book “Catechesis in the field of communication”, originally published in French by Prof. André Fossion sj, and translated by the Verbiest Institute. Two newly Chinese baptized testify about the positive shock, when seeing frescoes and altarpieces from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and about playing the organ which gives the opportunity to serve the Church. Next to these witness we read about three Chinese priests ordained in Chengde Diocese. A beautiful testimony is also made by Sr. Maria Wu, who writes about how she was able to bring a relic of St. Damian from Leuven to China, much to the delight of her bishop, Mgr. Du Jiang of Bameng Diocese, Inner Mongolia, and his faithful.

Dialogue with the PRC

Updating the traditional CICM Option for China.

History of Verbiest Foundation-Leuven, 1980-2021

A new Phase of Mission History in China

Many of our readers remember the Exodus from China of the CICM Fathers in the 1950’s: Dries Van Coillie, Ignace Rybens, Joseph Schyns, Ulrich Lebrun, Octaaf De Vreese and 240 others arrived in Belgium, expelled by the Communists, some of them straight from prison where they had been maltreated. Thirty years later CICM established Verbiest Foundation-Leuven (VF) and gave it the task to develop a new relation with the People’s Republic in China (1983). The old CICM missionaries, even though condemned in China, locked up and then expelled, played an important role in bringing about a new relation of dialogue and cooperation with the PRC. The “new relation” means: adapting the original meaning of “CICM Option for China” (direct evangelization) decided by the CICM Founder Theophile Verbist and engage in dialogue and cooperation with the Peoples Republic

of China (PRC). VF sees Dialogue with China as the first step in a new phase of Mission History in China.

Arriving in China in 1865 CICM Missionaries were seen as intruders

Their Option for China developed Brotherhood with Christians and Chinese people.

Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm



Z. E. H. VERBIST, UIT ANTWERPEN.
Stichter der Zendingcongregatie van Scheut



Learning the Chinese language

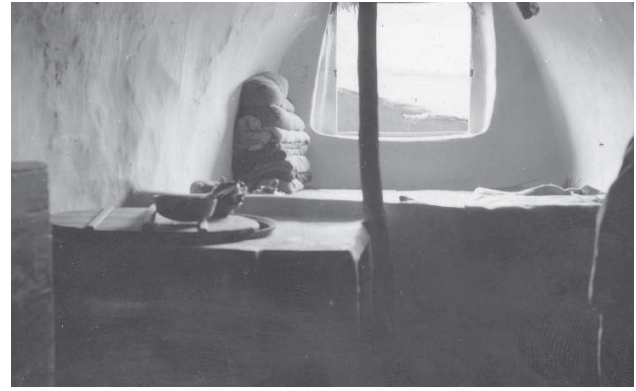
Expelled from China, missionaries grew old in Europe, homesick for China their "second home".

While in China their Christians fondly remembered them. This implies a meaningful message!

The Beijing Treaty between China, Great Britain and France (called Unequal Treaty) ended the Opium War(s) in 1860. It requested Beijing to allow Christian missionaries from the West to enter China for evangelization. That initiated a movement among missionaries in the West to go to China. Also Theophile Verbist, a diocesan priest of Malines Archdiocese in Belgium had a dream to go to China. He founded CICM, the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary¹. In the first article of its Constitutions he wrote that the CICM missionaries would evangelize "by preference (*praesertim*) among the Chinese People. That's what we call in this article the "CICM Option for China". The Holy See sent the CICM missionaries to Inner Mongolia and the whole North of China, a huge underdeveloped region of 4000 by 1100 km with few roads, populated by poor Chinese farmers and Mongol herdsmen. Missionaries travelled on horseback, by mule or by camel over very unsafe roads.

Missionaries could enter China but they were not welcome. Their entrance in China had been imposed by the "Unequal Treaties". Chinese people considered them as *foreign intruders*. Being sons of the West some missionaries may have shown an attitude of cultural prejudice but they all tried hard learning to speak the difficult Chinese and Mongolian languages. Some succeeded to speak them very well, others not so well. They preached the Christian gospel to the local farming people the best they could. All in all, foreign missionaries were rather poor instruments to spread the gospel. Yet preaching the gospel was their vocation. Only for that purpose did they leave their peaceful home town in the European country side, receiving the blessings of their Christian families in a dramatic farewell, knowing that they would probably never see each other again.

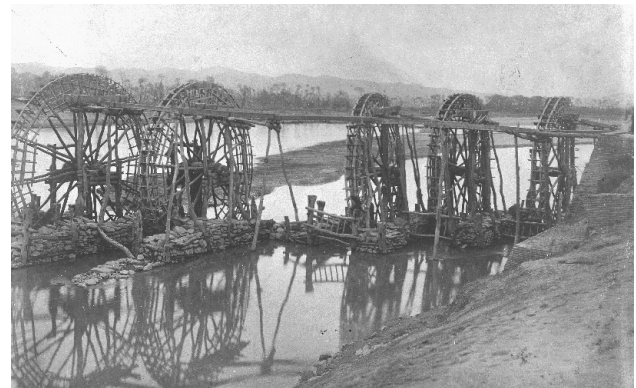
But the Chinese people did not understand that background. They were even suspicious and wondered what in heaven motivated these missionaries to leave their comfortable bourgeois life in Europe of the 19th century, opting to go to faraway underdeveloped Inner Mongolia where even the Chinese avoided to go. Why would they opt to share the life of poor Chinese



View into a cave dwelling



Defensive walls against the robbers



Irrigation works on the Yellow Stream

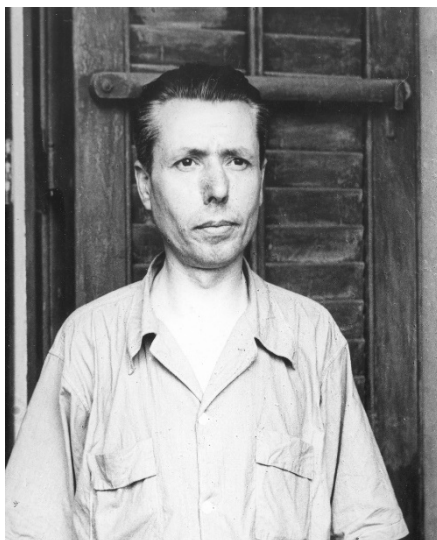
or Mongol farmers without returning to Europe even once in their life! They learned to speak difficult Chinese and Mongolian languages, ate the local food, wore the same clothes, living through winters with -30 degree freezing cold and snow, sleeping at night on a brick-bed (called kang) warmed by fire.

Preaching the Christian gospel was their first concern. But most of their time was spent on improving the livelihood of the people they lived with. They bought tens of thousands hectares of farm land, built canals, several hundred kilometers long, to irrigate the land using water of the Yellow River and making it available to poor farmers at conditions far better than the expensive taxes they paid to rich landowners. This way new communities of farmers settled in dozens of Christian villages where they lived peacefully. The missionaries built protective walls 5 to 6 meter high around the villages to protect them from the gangs of thousands of ex-soldiers turned robbers who came to steal their harvest every year come autumn time. They

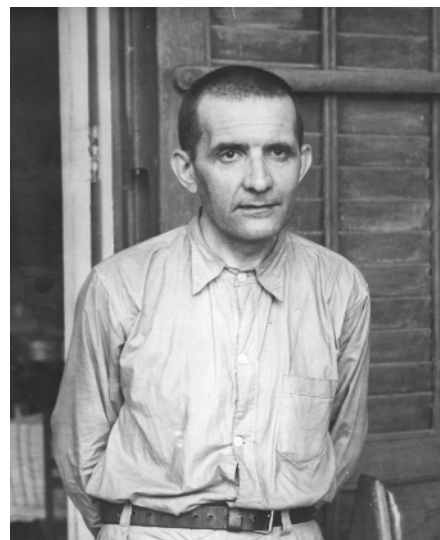
¹ CICM (*Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae*) was founded in 1862 for evangelization "by preference" (*praesertim*) among the Chinese People. CICM missionaries were also called *Scheut Fathers*. The name *Scheut* refers to a district of the city of Brussels. Initially CICM missionaries all originated from the Netherlands (Belgium and Holland). Today CICM is an international congregation with 780 members working in 22 different countries.



Restored gravestones



Fr. Dries Van Coillie and Fr. Ignace Rybens on arrival in Hong Kong after imprisonment in China



built schools for the children, boys and girls, and clinics to care for the health of the people. They fought the pernicious habit of opium use (while imperialists from the West promoted it). That life style of the missionaries itself spoke to the poor farmers a language clearer than any sermon on the gospel they preached. People understood that missionaries were different from the *imperialists & colonialists from the West*. They did not see them as intruders. The opposite happened. Facing together the hardships of daily life developed Christian brotherhood between the farmers and the missionaries.

But the missionaries were expelled from China, condemned as spies and imperialists by the Chinese people, including many Christians, as was reported in all newspapers around the world. The tombs of deceased missionaries were desecrated, their bones burned or thrown in the rivers. Did Christians willingly participate in this? The answer to this question can be seen in the way some old cemeteries of missionaries have beautifully and lovingly been restored since then. The new tomb stones, built by Christians recently to remember priests who died there a hundred years ago, testify about their true feelings about the missionaries. Living with them every day Christians experienced that these men from the West had indeed freely opted to spend their life in China and adopted the Chinese people as their own.

Living as teenagers in Europe in the 1950's we personally saw the old missionaries expelled from China arriving home straight from prison. Some of them had not seen their family in fifty years! Deeply moved we listened to the dramatic stories they told us crying. No, they did not speak with hatred. They were obviously homesick for the country and the people they had adopted as their own. Today with the hindsight of time we realize that there was drama both sides in Europe and China. Expelled from China the old missionaries were back home in the West, homesick for their people in China. At the other end of the world their Christians inside China, who reportedly "*had agreed to expel them*", fondly remember them with love. The "Option for China" of the missionaries had successfully grown into true Christian brotherhood and a human, family-like relation with Chinese people.

First condemned, then released from prison and expelled from China

These same old Missionaries showed CICM the way to Dialogue with Communist China

By creating Verbiest Foundation-Leuven they opened the door to Dialogue and Cooperation with the PRC.

A program of encounters in China and in Europe has put the basis for fruitful dialogue.

Back in Belgium the old China missionaries had a tough time to adjust to the news they learned about the changes in the new China, introduced by the PRC. They sided with Christians inside China who opted for opposition against Communism (the "underground"). Moreover they were confronted with other unexpected drastic changes to which they could not easily adjust. Vatican II requested them to adopt a total different way of presiding at liturgies and to openly dialogue with non-Christian religions. Dialogue with atheists was unconceivable to them. Yet that was now the new line stressed by Vatican II. What also deeply disturbed them was that the 7th CICM Chapter (1967) introduced new post-Vatican II (temporary) Constitutions in which the old traditional *Option for China* decided by CICM Founder Verbiest, was removed from Art. 1. Inside CICM they became very vocal expressing their disappointment and succeeded to elect one old confrere Léon Baudouin to defend their cause at the 8th CICM Chapter. Seen from the hindsight of today that proved to be providential.

Thanks to a motion introduced by Léon Baudouin at the Chapter, three confreres were appointed to study important evolutions that were taking place in the post-Mao China. The work of these confreres led to the organization of a CICM China Study Desk in Hong Kong in 1975 to keep CICM better informed on positive evolutions inside China. Important CICM old China missionaries – Dries Van Coillie, Joseph Spae, Rik Van Boven, Oscar Adriansens, Frans Peeters – took part in a historical CICM China Meeting organized in Hong Kong by the Sinica Province in 1980. They listened for 5 days to the advice of Catholic and Protestant experts on the PRC. Then they discussed two days among them and drew up a report to be presented at the 9th CICM Chapter (1981). It was precisely that



P. Rybens and P. Van Coillie on arrival from China

report – “CICM and its China Mission” – prepared with active cooperation of old China missionaries expelled from China (Dries Van Coillie who spent 3 years in a prison in Beijing) that became a wake-up call requesting CICM to take note of and respond positively to evolutions taking place in China. As a result of that call of the 9th Chapter CICM created Verbiest Foundation-Leuven (VF) at the CICM China Meeting in Rome in 1983 and tasked it to assist CICM in developing a relation of cooperation with China.

This was a remarkable, even historical event. Old China missionaries, 30 years after they were expelled from China as imperialists, put CICM on the way towards dialogue with the PRC. It was of course not so that all old China CICM missionaries happily backed the move towards dialogue with the PRC. Most of them fiercely opposed any dialogue with atheism. But the creation of Verbiest Foundation was the first step of an evolution initiated by a few and in which others joined gradually. VF played a promoting role in that process towards dialogue.

One important initiative – we call it a first step in the process of dialogue – happened when in 1985, VF, in cooperation with Leuven University, invited the *First official Chinese Catholic Friendship Delegation* for a 13-day visit to the university and to the Church in Belgium. The delegation was guided by Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing and included 3 bishops, 1 priest, all of the “official” (government recognized) community and not appointed by the pope and therefore illegal for the Holy See. With them was also a Catholic layman, the Secretary of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association Mr. Anthony Liu Bainian. No permission from Rome was asked because VF knew that the Holy See could not possibly allow this anyway...but Rome was informed through an informal channel. VF took a daring step – in fact a *lonely stand* – in order to break through existing obstacles and open a way towards encounter and dialogue. VF learned later that Pope John Paul II privately followed the event with interest.

The program included a visit to Scheut, the old CICM mother-house in Brussels. When hearing the news of the visit, the old China missionaries were at first unhappily surprised and even



Visit to Cardinal Danneels in 1985



Visit to Scheut in 1985



Bp. Liu assures his visitors of his fidelity to Rome.



Visit to Scheut in 1985



Bp. Aloysius Jin welcomes Fr. Decraene cism and the delegation of CICM (1990)



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



Visit of CICM Superior General Fr. Michel Decraene cism to China in 1990



Fr. Charles Phukuta, CICM Superior General, with the Bishop of Jining, Msgr. Yao Shun (2017)

shocked. They asked for an explanation. *How could VF organize such an encounter? Some were ready for a frank discussion. VF told the old priests: "We will not discuss issues. This is meant to be only a friendly visit. All we must do is to give the guest bishops from China a warm brotherly welcome. Whatever must be discussed Cardinal Danneels will do that when he receives them."* The old priests convinced each other to follow that advice. The result was perfect. There was common prayer in the chapel, an open exchange in a brotherly atmosphere and an

agape? with exchange of gifts. The encounter revealed that their love for the Church in China was greater than their aversion against Communism. The first step on the way towards building a new relation with the PRC was made right there by old CICM China missionaries who had been expelled from China, yet whose love for their adopted country was bigger than the pain of being expelled.

This has repeated itself with the many delegations that came from China during the following years: more than thirteen visits of delegations of bishops, three visits of the vice-director of Religious Affairs Bureau, all visiting the old motherhouse of CICM. Just as many delegations went from Belgium to China. Two CICM Superior Generals— each with a CICM delegation – visited the old CICM missions in China, Michel Decraene in 1990 and Charles Phukuta in 2015 and 2017. Cardinal Danneels visited China twice, in 2005 and 2008. Visits of Catholic faithful to encounter Catholics in China happened every year, yielding rich fruits of friendship. These encounters built a foundation to initiate dialogue.

Dialogue with the PRC has become a new Phase of Chinese Mission History

This phase will last long and will be difficult but VF is hopeful and prepared for it. Inspired by the old "CICM Option for China".

We should be reminded that as early as in 1974 three CICM China missionaries – one of them Dries Van Coillie, who spent three years in a Chinese prison – were speakers, exploring dialogue with the PRC at the historical International China Meetings in Bästad (Sweden) and Leuven (Belgium), organized by Pro Mundi Vita and the Lutheran World Federation.² Later the same CICM confreres and several others – some of them having spent months, even years in Chinese prisons – made an important contribution putting CICM on the way to dialogue with the PRC. They were the main participants in the CICM Hong Kong China Meeting in 1980 and they were also present

2 Joseph Spae presented a paper at the Ecumenical Seminar held in Bästad, Sweden Jan. 29 to Feb. 2, 1974. Dries Van Coillie presented a paper, Joseph Spae and Bishop Carlo van Melckebeke presented reports at the Ecumenical Colloquium held in Leuven, Belgium Sept. 9-14, 1974.



Fr. Timothy Atkin, CICM Superior General, at the opening of the Verbiest Conference in 2012.

in the CICM China 1983 Meeting in Rome, which decided to set up Verbiest Foundation-Leuven to develop a new relation of cooperation with China.

What motivated them first and foremost to open the door, was their missionary concern for unity in the Church, to restore the broken relationship inside China between the Christians who opted for confrontation with Communism and others who chose to accommodate (while remaining united with the Holy See). Also to restore the broken relationship of Christians in the West and Christians in China who opted to accommodate with the Communists. The old missionaries were initially not interested in direct dialogue with atheist China. On the contrary they first criticized and opposed it. Interest for dialogue has grown gradually as the *VF Foundation-Leuven* organized visits to old CICM missions in China and encounters with bishops, priests and Catholic faithful from China who came to Europe and visits of Christians from Belgium to the former CICM Missions in China. That's when awareness grew that dialogue and encounter are meaningful positive steps on the way of gospel proclamation.

VF grew into an institute for dialogue with atheist China and with the Church in China.

Step by step the awareness grew that the PRC represented a new China clearly different from the China that allowed Founder Verbist and the old CICM's to evangelize in 1865. To cooperate with this PRC indeed required the development of a new relation by adapting the old *CICM option* for direct evangelization in China and change it into *dialogue with the PRC and with the Church in China*. This could only be realized by developing a broad basis of Vatican II inspired programs of dialogue with all philosophies and religions, seeking common ground even with atheists. In other words a new type of institute was needed. CICM and VF understood that while following this line it needed to be prepared for criticism even from inside the Church. Dialogue with the PRC represents the beginning

of a new phase in Church History of China. VF realized this by developing over the years a wide program of activities. Some examples:

- In 1988, VF organized its first visit by Christian faithful from the West to meet with friends in China. This became the annual VF China visits, promoting friendly encounters and mutual exchanges. The Verbiest Institute at KULeuven (Belgium) organized international academic conferences to study the complex history of the Catholic Church in China.
- CICM and VF also welcomed visits of Christian and non-Christian groups from China to develop friendship and mutual understanding.
- Develop friendly relations of brotherhood and exchange with the Church in China f.e. teaching pastoral theology in Major Seminaries in China. Already in December 1985, VF was invited by Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai to teach pastoral theology in Sheshan Seminary. VF was the first institute from abroad to receive such an invitation. Later on VF even received a work permit from civil authorities to teach theology in the National Seminary in Beijing.
- Many other activities in the fields of cultural exchange, exchange with the Church in China and academic research.

The Option for Dialogue survived crises from both sides

Quite understandably when a Christian institute as VF engages in dialogue with entities in atheist China, misunderstandings can happen. They happened indeed and as a result several times visa applications to China have been refused or remained unanswered even when rather important delegation visits were planned. It caused considerable surprise and disturbance in VF, but VF has never seen this as a reason to interrupt the program for dialogue and cooperation.

At one time there has even been an attempt from inside CICM to withdraw from VF. It caused considerable confusion inside VF and affected adversely its activities. But superiors wisely avoided the issue and quietly even intensified CICM participation in VF China encounter activities. The superior general became member of the CICM Board of Directors. CICM and VF believe in the future of dialogue.

VF, an Institute for Dialogue by Missionaries, priests and faithful from East & West

Dialogue is a key attitude of Vatican II. Pope Francis follows the Vatican II line of dialogue in his relation with China. VF has done that also since it was created by CICM. It has faced criticism and overcome crises to pursue in that line. The Superior Generals of three religious missionary congregations have joined the VF Board of Directors: Charles Phukuta CICM, René Stockman FC Brothers of Charity and Paul Vattamatam CMF Claretian Missionaries. Together they feel able to face new challenges to promote more dialogue with China even though, going by recent evolutions in the PRC, dialogue and cooperation may be difficult. But as Founder Verbist said: *Amanti nihil difficile – For one who loves nothing is difficult.*

Vatican taking right steps toward ‘reconciliation’ with Church in China, says Cardinal Parolin

April 6, 2021, LiCAS.news reporter

An influential official of the Catholic Church said the Vatican is taking the right steps toward “reconciliation within the Church,” including with the Church in China. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said in a radio interview this week that the Church in China “is a fundamental part of the Catholic Church.” He said “everything ... has been tried and is being tried to secure this community, which is still small, but which has great strength and vitality.”

The steps taken so far “are in the right direction toward a reconciliation within the Church ... even if they have not resolved all the problems that still exist and will probably take a long time to address,” he said. The cardinal told Spain’s COPE radio network on April 5 that the Vatican is doing everything “to assure a normal life for the Church in China,” which he said is suffering from persecution.

He said the people’s “persistence” in their faith should give the Church hope for the future, including communion with the pope. In October last year, the Vatican renewed a controversial “provisional agreement” with China, specifically on the appointment of Catholic bishops.

In a statement, the Vatican said the initial application of the deal “has been positive” so it extended it until Oct. 22, 2022. The agreement calls for China to formally recognize the pope’s authority within the Church, while the Vatican in turn will recognize the legitimacy of bishops previously appointed by Beijing. Catholics in China are emerging from more than half a century of division, that saw them split between a state-backed “official” Church and a “non-official” underground Church that remained loyal to Rome. The “provisional agreement,” which was signed in Beijing on Sept. 22, 2018, and went into effect a month later, expired last year until it was renewed.

The Holy See has repeatedly announced that it “intends to pursue an open and constructive dialogue for the benefit of the life of the Catholic Church and the good of Chinese people.” The deal has been highly contested by the US State Department and some Catholics, who say the Vatican has sold out to the communist government. Many believe the accord will eventually lead to diplomatic relations with Beijing, meaning that the Vatican would have to sever ties with Taiwan.

Cardinal Parolin, however, said in previous interviews that the Vatican is “not talking about diplomatic relations” but only about “efforts to normalize the life of the Church.” In a statement, the Holy See said the “primary objective” of the agreement “is that of sustaining and promoting the proclamation of the Gospel” and “restoring the full and visible unity of the Church.”



In a previous statement, Cardinal Parolin admitted that “various misunderstandings” had arisen regarding the provisional agreement. He said most of these issues arose because “unrelated events regarding the life of the Catholic Church in China were attributed to the agreement.”

“It was even connected to political issues that have nothing to do with the actual agreement,” said the cardinal. Cardinal Parolin said he is aware of the existence of various problems regarding the life of the Catholic Church in China, but also that it is impossible to confront all the issues together.

The Vatican noted that some sectors of international politics “have sought to analyze the Holy See’s work primarily along geopolitical lines.”

In the April 5 interview, Cardinal Parolin said the Vatican continues to guarantee “space for religious freedom, and communion because one cannot live in the Catholic Church without communion with the successor of Peter, with the pope.” He admitted that divisions in the Catholic Church are real and it “does a lot of damage to the Church.” “Anyone who sees the situation of the Church today has to worry about these things because they are there,” he said. “There is cause for concern,” said the cardinal, adding that the conflict “probably stems from the fact that the pope puts a lot of emphasis on reforming the Church, and there is a lot of confusion about that.”

He noted that sometimes these divisions and resistance arise from confusion, from the inability to distinguish “between what is essential and cannot change and what is not essential and must be reformed, must change according to the spirit of the Gospel.”

Lest we forget...

A Memorial Garden for China missionaries from the Low Countries in the Chinese College in Leuven

Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm



Statue of Theofiel Verbist, Founder of CICM, in the Chinese College

In 2018, a first part of the Memorial Garden was already inaugurated in the presence of all participants of our 13th International Verbiest Conference and many friends of the Verbiest Foundation. Due to lack of resources, this project was temporarily halted. Now we are planning the next phase. This will consist of a repair and renovation of the garage building that was badly damaged during a storm in March 2020. The restored and renovated building will protect our visitors from the weather in the future and admire an exhibition on the walls about the history of the church in China. They are now being prepared. You already read the meaning of the Memorial Garden in our Courier. On this occasion a brief introduction to the planned garden.

The Low Countries – Belgium, the Netherlands and French Flanders – have a long history with hundreds of China missionaries. Willem Van Rubrouck OFM from French Flanders traveled to Mongolia in the 13th century. Ferdinand Verbiest SJ from Pittem, Antoine Thoma SJ from Namur, Francois de Rougemont SJ from Maastricht went to China in the 17th century. They were followed in the 19th century by 679 Scheutists (CICM) from Belgium and the Netherlands, the ICM Sisters, Flemish and Dutch Franciscans, Dutch Lazarists, Sisters of the Choorstraat (den Bosch), Sisters of Heerlen, the FMM Sisters and others. Among them were famous pioneers, bishops, scientists, martyrs men and women.

The apathy towards religion and mission that prevails in Europe today negates and conceals this unique and curious history. If we don't write down the story of that mission today, everything will soon be completely forgotten. If artists do not paint the faces of those pioneers or carve their image in marble or wood or cast in bronze forever and display these images in our cities, even their very existence will soon be erased from history.

Lest WE FORGET THEM....the Chinese College Leuven wishes to commemorate these pioneers from the Low Countries by transforming our own limited courtyard garden into a Memorial Garden in which we display statues and plaques of China missionaries from every mission congregation of the Low Countries, together with an overview of the history of the



FMM sisters with candidates for the first communion in Xiwanzi (1929)

Church in China, supplemented with images of some prominent Chinese figures from that history.

It is the intention that in the future we will invite visitors from the Low Countries, from parishes and also school children from Leuven for an afternoon briefing about the Mission in China by missionaries from the Low Countries. We wish to inform them how that mission has grown over the centuries from a relationship of “give and take” between East and West to a new relationship of exchange between Churches from the Low Countries and Churches from China. And make it clear that this is still growing and that we all still have a clear task there today.

We are not making this Memorial Garden a “pantheon” of “great missionaries.” Of course, some of the missionaries can be imagined. But we do want to make this a Garden in Leuven with a Message for the Visitors: China Mission is not a thing of the past! Its greatest challenge has just begun, namely: to promote meeting and exchange in faith between the Church in the West and the Church in the East on the basis of equality and mutual appreciation. Churches in the West as well as those in the East both need it!

As a reminder, here are some images that were already inaugurated in 2018:

- The statue of Theofiel Verbist, Founder of Scheut (CICM) was already inaugurated at that time. The bronze statue



Planning for the statue of P. Ferdinand Verbiest sj

was made in China at the Art Center of a Catholic layman in Hebei Province (China).

- At the other end of our garden we plan to place a bronze statue of the famous Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest. We hope - of course with the owner's approval - to make a copy of the oldest statue of Verbiest, which dates from 1792 and now stands in the courtyard of a castle in Sint-Kruis near Bruges. We hope to be able to copy it and present it in its original form, with the four Chinese allegorical figures, each representing an aspect of Chinese art and science. You can still see the originals of those 4 allegorical figures today. They are built into a wall at the entrance of the Gruuthuse Museum in Bruges. To copy these, permission is also required from the city of Bruges. Jean Chou, the artist of our Verbiest Institute, already sketched for us what Ferdinand Verbiest's composition with the allegorical figures would look like.



There is also a bronze commemorative plaque of Jeroom Van Aertselaer, third Superior General of CICM. He was the key historical figure who, after Verbiest's death, guided CICM through his adolescence to adulthood as a religious missionary congregation, with constitutions accepted by the confreres and approved by the ecclesiastical

authorities. Jerome Van Aertselaer was the man who kept the Scheutists together during the entire process, which lasted 30 years. He was the shepherd who gave priority to the "Cor unum et Anima una" in Scheut.



A second memorial plaque depicts Joseph Rutten cicm. He was the 5th Superior General of Scheut but actually much more than that! He was a pioneer in various areas of the multifaceted apostolate of CICM in China. He was the leading promoter of the network of Catholic primary and secondary schools throughout Northern China, for boys and girls.

Unique at the time! In Nanhaoqian (Diocese of Xiwanzi), he built a Catholic Normal School for the formation of Catholic teachers, long before such an official Normal School existed in Northern China.

Joseph Rutten also built the Catholic hospital of Suiyuan (Hohhot) in the 1920s with an associated nursing school. At the time, the most modern and best equipped hospital in all of Inner Mongolia, within a radius of 600 km. He personally traveled to Poland to meet the world-famous Dr. Veil and invited him to come to China to develop the vaccine against Typhoid fever. 88 Scheutists had already died of that disease. After inoculation with this vaccine, this scourge disappeared from the Scheut mission and thousands of Chinese lives were also saved.

We discovered that Van Aertselaer and Rutten were both early forerunners and pioneers of our Chinese College in Leuven. In 1914 Msgr. Van Aertselaer sent Father Joseph Rutten as his delegate to the National Catholic Conference of the Church in China which took place in Jinan (Shandong Province). There he proposed a concrete plan to provide specialized training to

Chinese priests, religious and laypeople at the Catholic University of Leuven. Four years earlier, in 1911, he had already had discussions about this in Belgium with Cardinal Mercier and with Mgr. Ladeuze, the then rector of Leuven. Both agreed to work out this plan together. The realization of the project was prevented in 1911 by the Chinese Revolution and then in 1914 by the First World War in Europe. Fifteen years later, in 1929, Rutten repeated the same proposal in a long lecture during the Missiological Week in Leuven. We think it makes sense that these two forerunners of the Chinese College are honored here by this commemorative plaque, 100 years after they introduced the project.



A third memorial plaque depicts the highly deserving Lazarist missionary from Xiwanzi, Father Mattheus Xue cm. In general, Mgr. Mouly, Lazarist, is named as founder of the Church in Inner Mongolia. However, we also regard P. Mattheus Xue cm (Lazarist) as the pioneer. He already bore great responsibility for the Church in Beijing. During the

persecutions in the 1830s, he was wanted by the authorities. He escaped in secret with all his group of minor seminarians. They sought shelter in the remote mountain village of Xiwanzi (near the town of Zhangjiakou). In caves, hollowed out in the mountains, they opened a small chapel, a sleeping place, dining place for their small seminary. Long afterwards, P. Mattheus also remained the permanent shepherd who helped Xiwanzi grow into a Catholic village in Inner Mongolia.



The fourth commemorative plaque depicts P. Jaak Zhang, one of Xiwanzi's most admired and beloved diocesan priests, a highly deserving pastor and famous writer. He was known far beyond the borders of the Xiwanzi Diocese, especially for his many publications. He was the author of apologetic works. Among other things, he wrote about Con-

fucianism and the relationship of their teachings to the Catholic faith. In addition, he was a counselor to the bishop for decades as well as a beloved shepherd and confessor of many in Xiwanzi. He already has his statue in the ancient cemetery in Xiwanzi. We would also like to remember him here in Leuven.

In agreement with other missionary communities, we hope to unveil other images here in the coming years. Like for example Mgr. Schraven from Broekhuizen Vorst (Ned.) – Franciscan Francis Van Heel – Sr. Amandina from Schakkebroek (Limb. B.), Sister Adolphina from Ossendrecht (Ned.).



For the time being, Corona is still preventing us from making appointments now. But Corona does offer us the opportunity to further develop the Memorial Garden in silence, and to the extent of the resources we find. You will definitely hear more about it....See you then!

An extraordinary life

By Father Steenackers, missionary of Scheut, in *Missions en Chine et au Congo*, 1907



As you can read further in this *Courier*, the Verbiest Institute is publishing the book: "De Belgische Mandarijn. Paul Splingaerd". This book, a translation of the book "The Belgian Mandarin" written by Paul's great-granddaughter Anne Splingaerd Megowan, tells the amazing story of Paul Splingaerd, an orphan boy from Brussels who went to China together with the founder of Scheut. In this *Courier* we also wanted to portrait how the Scheutists of that time saw Paul. Father Jan-Baptist Steenackers (born 1848, Kasterlee,

Belgium) had arrived in China as a young missionary in 1874. In 1907 he published an article about Paul Splingaerd, his close friend, in the Scheut magazine "Missions en Chine et au Congo". We publish below a shortened version of the article that Fr. Steenackers titled "An Extraordinary Life", and that title actually sums up perfectly the whole life of Paul Splingaerd. A unique time document!

Being born as a poor orphan boy in Brussels, having lived through enough adventures to fill several novels, and dying as a high official in the service of China. That is, in a nutshell, the life of a man whose unexpected death the European newspapers announced some time ago. To this man, Mr Paul Splingaerd, this devoted friend of our missionaries, we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude through this brief biographical note. Our readers can only be interested in the particular originality of his character and rejoice at the successes achieved in the Far East by a compatriot who has remained the most jovial of the Brussels people until the last day!

He was born in Brussels in 1840 and, after completing his military service, left for China in 1865, following in the footsteps of our Venerable Founder, Father Verbist. Young Paul had only been to school for a short time, but his innate talents convinced our first missionaries that they had found a very useful lay helper. And they were not wrong! Without having opened a single book, but talking to the locals from early



Monument for P. Splingaerd in Ottenburg.

morning till late at night he was able, in less than a year, to preach in Chinese the sermon that a missionary had whispered to him in Flemish. After that he became a real polyglot, speaking Flemish - his mother tongue - French, English, German, Chinese, with a fair amount of Mongolian, Turkish and Russian. After the death of our venerable Founder, Paul, hired by the German Embassy in Beijing, was entrusted with very delicate tasks, which he carried out successfully. Thanks to the most extraordinary calmness, he escaped precarious situations and even death more than once! Meanwhile, the famous Baron von Richthoven came to China to draw a geological map of the whole Empire. Paul was the only one who could lead the scientist through all the provinces. This life of travel and adventure suited Paul's character perfectly and his temperament defied all fatigue. Father Verlinden, to whom Paul was like a son, said to him one day:

- Paul, your business is going well. You should get married.
- Perhaps, Father, but it would take two people...
- I'll handle this, Paul.

Fr. Verlinden saw in Catherine, then in her early twenties, the ideal candidate to make Paul happy. But Catherine's consent was needed, and the negotiations were long and difficult. One detail was told to me, 25 years later, by one of Paul and Catherine's daughters. I asked her why she wanted to become a sister?

- "Why?" she replied, with that playful smile she had inherited from her father. *I stepped in, in place of mother. When Father Verlinden asked Mum if she wanted to marry Dad, my Mum replied, "I didn't go to boarding school to get married, but I did to become a sister!"* Fr. Verlinden replied, "Bah, bah, soon your daughters will replace you as sisters!" Finally, in 1873, Catherine and Paul married.



But let's look at our friend's professional activities. Paul had met and gained the confidence of the German Commissioner of Chinese Customs, Herr Detring, a confidant of the famous Li Hongzhang. Detring introduced Paul to Li Hongzhang, and not much later Paul was appointed as a mandarin officer of the Chinese customs. In this capacity, he was sent to Sou-tcheou (Suzhou, now Jiuquan, ed.), a city at the western end of the Great Wall, on the border of Turkestan (now East Turkestan / Xinjiang, ed.), 500 miles from the coast. This was in 1881.

The only quiet period in Paul's life was when he lived in Sou-tcheou. This customs post was established to control

Russian trade, but there was actually very little activity. The customs therefore had a lot of free time and Paul made use of this to act as a doctor for the local community. His many patients expressed their appreciation for the reliability of his diagnoses, and even more for his charity, as he did everything on a voluntary basis. Our impromptu doctor, however, attached little importance to all these compliments. His popularity, however, gave him the opportunity to baptize many dying children. During his stay in Sou-tcheou, Paul heard in 1892 that I (*Fr. Steenackers, ed.*) had been appointed procurator of our missions in China and Mongolia, at Shanghai in the European concession. He immediately wrote to me asking me to take care of the European education of his children, who until then only spoke Chinese. I had known him since 1874, and what followed only confirmed his confidence in me.

Upon receiving his letter, I went to the Marist Brothers, who had an important school in Shanghai and to the Sisters Auxiliatrices, who ran two large institutes for European girls, both Protestant and Catholic. In a third institution, two miles from the city, in Sikawei, they gave free education to hundreds of young Chinese girls. I was warmly welcomed by both and it was agreed that Paul's five eldest children, three daughters and two sons, would go to Shanghai. The others would come later. When I informed him of this, my friend Spingaerd had no more doubts. Instead of sending me only the five eldest, he sent all his children and their mother in addition. What a confidence! From the border of Turkestan and after four months of travelling, this caravan, nine girls and three boys, reached us, having crossed the whole Empire from West to East. I received them, together with a dozen large parcels of luggage, at the landing. This "new breed" of Chinese men and women, with their big red riding trousers, aroused the interest of many bystanders.

Paul had transferred all his fatherly responsibilities to me. It was up to me to give them permission to marry, and I had to decide whether the girls would move in with the sisters. The nine daughters and their mother were immediately introduced to the Auxiliary Sisters. The three sons were temporarily accommodated in our mission procure. Catherine Spingaerd stayed in Shanghai for eight months and when she saw all her children transformed into Europeans, she set off for Mongolia,



Li Hongzhang

to visit her Paul and tell him about the wonders... of Europe... that she had seen in Shanghai. And I stayed... as a father of a family, father of twelve children! But children from whom I received an enormous amount of love in return!

The following year, Paul Spingaerd appeared again in Shanghai, to act as an interpreter between the Chinese government and the Defourny mission, during

the negotiations on the railway from Beijing to Hankou. He then also allowed his three eldest daughters to join the sister Auxiliatrices. The sisters sent them to Paris and Jersey to do their novitiate and complete their education. At present, the eldest, Mother St. Jerome, runs the embroidery workshop in Sikawei. The next two, Mother Rose and Mother Claire, teach European literature and handicrafts at an institute for Chinese girls. The fourth is doing her novitiate in Sikawei. The eldest son was an interpreter in the Belgian legation in Beijing. The second son worked in Kaiping. The third son is studying at the Saint Boniface Institute in Brussels. Two of the youngest daughters have finished their education, two others are still in boarding school. Poor little Suzanne had already died of cholera when her father came to Shanghai in 1896.

Through concerted action by European powers, the Chinese government had laid down its arms in 1900. The massacres and plundering of the Boxers had come to an end. But what ruins to rebuild! Some mandarins obstructed the recovery plans, promised by China. Our missionaries considered asking for the help of Mr. Spingaerd, a man who was so dedicated on the one hand, but who was also very highly regarded by the Chinese authorities. But the contract that kept Paul in the service of His Majesty Leopold II had not yet expired. But permission for our friend to go and help the missions was quickly obtained. Only one man, our Paul, could help our missionaries. It would be unjust to minimise, even indirectly, the merit of our missionaries, or not to mention their heroism in defending their Christianity against the plunderers, their devotion in searching for the lost sheep of their flock. It may be said, however, that Mr. Spingaerd's skill in dealing with the Chinese and his unbridled zeal for religion produced results that were possible for no other. It took our travelling judge several months to resolve all the conflicts. He travelled through the two vicariates of central and south-western Mongolia, stopping only in Lan-tcheou, the capital of Kan-sou province. In a straight line - and this was far from the case - the journey amounted to more than 300 miles. Everywhere he succeeded in carrying out his delicate mission to the full satisfaction of the missionaries and the Chinese authorities.

In Lan-tcheou, Paul learned that English agents were harassing the Viceroy in an attempt to start exploiting the mineral and other resources of the province. Paul's contract with His Majesty Leopold as a diplomat had come to an end, but our friend, out of patriotism, nevertheless offered himself to the Viceroy, offering to go to Belgium, to bring back experts to whom the Viceroy could confidently leave this exploitation. The Viceroy, who had been friends with Paul for many years, decided to leave the exploitation to the Belgians. Paul received from him a confidential mission, with the authority to act in his name,



to engage an engineer to investigate oil mines, a man capable of setting up and running a cloth factory, a chemist to analyse minerals, etc.

In January 1906, Spilingaerd arrived in Brussels, 41 years after his departure from Belgium. The newspapers spoke at length about the Belgian mandarin, the brigadier-general in the service of China. His return journey did not go as hoped. The previous years had affected his once strong health. When he said goodbye to his daughters after a doctor's visit in Shanghai, he was convinced that he would never see them again. With his wife and two other daughters, he went to Beijing to see Alphonse, his eldest son. From there, he continued south-west and rejoined his European travelling companions.

Unfortunately, when he arrived in Si-ngan-fou, Paul had to stop his journey. He sent a telegram to his son Alphonse, but when he arrived in a hurry from Beijing at his father's sickbed, Paul drew his last breath... He died peacefully on 26 September, assisted by the missionaries of the nearby residence. The next day, a funeral service was held in the presence of his family and fellow countrymen who had travelled with him. On 28 September, the caravan led by Alphonse Spilingaerd left Si-ngan-fou to take his mother and his two sisters back to Beijing, with the remains of his father. General Spilingaerd, a dutiful man, carried out his task to the point of total exhaustion. He, the eternal traveler, died in the presence of his beloved wife, and a handful of devoted countrymen. A Christian and intense life deserved this consoling end, the promise of a reward as great as the many services rendered to the cause of God.

The persecution of Catholicism by the Gelaohui in Southwest Hubei.

The death of Fr. Victorinus Delbrouck ofm.

Joseph

The rise of Xenophobia and Nationalism in the Diocese of Southwest Hubei



R. P. VICTORIN DELBROUCK
FRÈRE-MINEUR

Since Christianity was first introduced in China in 635 CE, it has been through many ups and downs in contact and collision with Chinese culture, religion and politics. But their fourth encounter, after the First Opium War in 1840, was one surrounded by wars and the Unequal Treaties, which made Chinese people identify Christianity with "Imperialism". This was especially true during the years between the beginning of the First Opium War in 1840 and 1900 when there were five major conflicts between China and foreign countries¹.

All of them ended in failure for China, and resulted in the imposition of the Unequal Treaties, a source of frustration for the Chinese. As a result, xenophobia and nationalistic feelings quickly grew. The anti-Christian movement, caused by this nationalism, reached its peak between 1890 and 1904, and manifested itself in an extremely bloody way. In China, organ-

ized and unorganized harassment and persecution of foreign missionaries and Chinese believers became common. Many Western missionaries and Chinese Christian believers became victims in this movement.

This kind of nationalism still affects Chinese people today and has become one of the most important obstacles for evangelisation in China. The Catholic Diocese of Southwest Hubei was no exception. In 1872, this diocese had been under the care of the Belgian Franciscans and there were constant conflicts with local anti-foreign and ultra-nationalists fractions. The anti-Christian feelings caused by the aforementioned wars and unequal treaties, were even more stirred up by exclusivism, cultural conflicts, and religious contradiction.

The Diocese of Southwest Hubei is located in the mountainous area, at the junction of Hubei, Sichuan, Hunan, and Guizhou provinces. Traditionally, this geographic region has been historically ignored by the government authorities. Therefore, during times of religious persecution, the faithful hid in these areas for safety, while at the same time continued to develop the local church. This terrain was also an ideal place for the survival of Secret Societies as well anti-government and illegal organizations. The Elder Brothers Society (Gelaohui), was the largest secret society active in this area, and was also the only group in southwestern Hubei that continuously harassed Christians. Many Belgian Franciscan missionaries and local faithful were killed by Gelaohui in this period. Father Victorinus Delbrouck was the first Belgian Franciscan to be killed by the

¹ Namely: the first Opium War against Britain (1839 to 1842); the second Opium War, the French-British invasion (1856-1860); the French-Chinese war for Vietnam, which was formerly China's tributary area; The confrontation between Japan and China (1895); finally, the Western powers invaded China because of the Boxers.

Gelaohui. However, with regard to the missionaries killed by anti-Christian movements, there are different accounts and comments found in documents from the local officials, the local Catholic Church, and in church documents from outside China.

What kind of organization was the Gelaohui?

It is said that the Gelaohui originated in “GuoLu”² in the Sichuan province, and later contacted and exchanged with the Tiandi Hui, Bailian Society, etc., and then developed into a branch of the “Hongmen”.³ It was an active secret organization in China with great influence along the Yangtze River. The Gelaohui in Sichuan and in Chongqing are called “Brother Pao” or “Hanliu”.⁴ The anti-Christian activities of the Gelaohui started around the 1870s, intensified after 1890, and reached a peak in 1898. In the records of the Qing government, accounts involving anti-Christian secret societies only appeared after the 1870s. In 1874, French officials began to complain that Shinanfu had anonymous anti-Christian slogans.⁵ Apart from the slogans and rumors, anti-Christian incidents had also begun to appear frequently. The anti-Christian activities of the Gelaohui in this area of Hubei increased sharply after 1890. In October 1898, the Gelaohui began to attack Catholics in the southwestern Hubei. There were probably three main reasons for this.

Natural disasters

In the spring and the summer of 1890, famine occurred in southwestern Hubei due to heavy rain. Some people were homeless and had to sleep on the streets. The extremely unstable social environment led to the rise of secret societies.

Cultural conflict

Delbrouck was killed because of e.g. contradictions in the concept of marriage. During the Qing Dynasty, China still followed the system of polygamy, and it was difficult for people to accept the new concepts of monogamy and equality between men and women as taught by the Catholic Church. The Gelaohui of Southwest Hubei just abused this point as the excuse to recruit members to attack the Church.

Revolutionary parties

Since the establishment of the “Xingzhonghui” organization, revolutionaries had carried out anti-Qing activities with the

help of various secret societies. The Gelaohui is one of the main secret societies to cooperate with revolutionaries. Since then, the Gelaohui has led many major anti-Qing and anti-foreign uprisings, such as the “Pingxiang Uprising” in Jiangxi.⁶

The early nationalists pointed out that most of the anti-Christian incidents that occurred, were directed by the Gelaohui during the Tongzhi and Guangxu periods of the Qing Dynasty and located along the Yangtze River Basin: the anti-Christian incident in Southern Anhui in 1876, the Li Hong incident in 1889, the Yangtze River anti-Christian movement in 1891, and the Yu Dongchen uprising in Dazu County of the Sichuan province in 1890 and 1898. All these anti-Christian incidents were all organized and led by the Gelaohui.⁷ Their activities made them the internal enemies of the Qing government and caused a lot of troubles to the emperor.⁸ Xue Fucheng, a diplomat of the Qing Dynasty, considered the Gelaohui as most dreadful⁹ and he blamed them for burning churches and killing priests.

The official records on the murder of Delbrouck by the Gelaohui

It was common for the Chinese government to label foreign missionaries as “tools of imperialism” because they participated in the “infringement on China’s sovereignty, occupying land, pursuing lawsuits, extorting, killing and enslaving people. “ On the other hand, those who killed foreign missionaries and Catholics were seen as patriots with a positive image. They were national heroes who resisted imperialism that was dividing China.¹⁰ On the murder of Delbrouck by the Gelaohui, the official record is as follows:

“(…) September of 1898, the Gelaohui in Lichuan destroyed a lot of churches, and persecuted injudicial catholics.¹¹ In October, in Changle County (in today’s Wufeng County), Xiang Ce’an, the leader of the Gelaohui, organized an uprising of thousands of people. They destroyed the churches and killed Bi Kai-Bang, an injudicial Catholic, who forced others Catholics to send their wives away¹², and the Belgian missionary Delbrouck(…) After the anti-Church uprising was suppressed, France demanded the Qing government to pay an indemnity. At the end of 1898, “the Negotiation Clause of Yichang Religious Cases “ was signed: 55,500 taels of indemnity. The Qing government continued to oppose to the people who “attacked churches”, and raised funds to build a Catholic Church in Lichuan city. (…).¹³

2 “Guolu”, in Sichuan dialect, means robber.

3 He Yimin “On the Origin and Characteristics of the Gelaohui”, Chengdu Press, 1992. Zheng Chenggong organized and led the uprising of “Anti-Qing and restore Ming Dynasty” in Taiwan. After the failure, these righteous men became monks, continued to secretly organize anti-Qing activities, and developed into two secret organizations, the “White Lotus Sect (Bailianjiao)” and the “Hongmen”.

4 Tao Chengzang “Church Origins”, via: http://www.360doc.com/content/14/0713/20/99504_394180098.shtml (July 13, 2014)

5 Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, “The Archives of Church Incident”, Volume 1, Issue 2, p. 985-1003; Volume 2, Issue 1, p. 997-1044.

6 Editorial Department of Modern History Materials, Institute of Modern History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Modern History Materials (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1988-) No. 55, p. 77.

7 XIANG Hongyan “Missionaries and the Secret Society during the Anti-Christian Movement, Franciscan missionaries in Enshi, 1890-1930”, 2009, p. 89-101.

8 Song Zhongkan, Tang Buqi, Liu Zonglie, “Discussions on the Improvement of the Gelaohui in Sichuan, A Qing History” (Taipei: Guting Bookstore), p. 3.

9 China’s First Historical Archives, “Religious Cases of the Late Qing Dynasty”, p. 480-481.

10 Mou Anshi, “History of the Boxer Rebellion against the Division of Powers”, Aug. 6, 1996, p. 87. Retrieved from <https://www.doc88.com/p-5731683476078.html>. Mei Zanwu, Mei Xingwu, “Journal of South-Central Nationality University”, Issue 6th, 1991, “A Brief Account of the Tujia Nationality Army and People’s Fight Against Foreign Aggression”, p. 44.

11 Refers to some official documents, they consider most Catholics as bad and injudicial.

12 Bi Kai-Bang was the leader of the local parish, he followed the Church’s doctrine: one man can have one wife.

13 Mei Zanwu, Mei Xingwu, “Journal of South-Central Nationality University”, Issue 6th, 1991, “A Brief Account of the Tujia Nationality Army and People’s Fight Against Foreign Aggression”, p. 46.

Xiang Ce'an, from Qingcaochang in Changle county, Qing Zhusheng (a scholar), who used to run a school, and Li Ceqing, a prodigal man, and a member of Tingjun (the Qing Army) in Sichuan, joined the Gelaohui in 1898 to fight against foreign religions, both shocked and motivated by the fact that Bi-Kaibang, the leader of the Catholic church in Zhongxi, and Delbrouck, the Belgian missionary forced men to send their wives away. Xiang Che-An took the opportunity to raise the flag of exterminating foreigners. The latter led more than one thousand people to revolt and was promoted to be marshal. Li Ceqing served as military advisor, and Li Shaobai was a deputy. The Rebel Army went straight to destroy the Zhongxi church, then killed Delbrouck and Bi Kai-bang. The rebel army quickly grew to reach tens of thousands.”¹⁴

Mgr. Theotimus Verhaeghen describes the death of Father Delbrouck

Information on the death of Delbrouck can be found in many books and sources in the archives of the Belgian Franciscans. What follows is a summary of the “*les derniers jours d'un martyr*” written by Mgr. Theotimus Verhaeghen, the bishop of southwest Hubei. This book is the result of an on-the-spot investigation by Mgr. Theotimus Verhaeghen and several Franciscan priests, at the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the death of Delbrouck. The book also contains a testimony of the death of Delbrouck by three Catholics who were arrested together with Delbrouck, but were lucky enough to escape. Therefore, it is my opinion, that Theotimus Verhaeghen's records reflect the real process of Delbrouck's martyrdom¹⁵.

“In 1897, Fr. Marcel Sterkendries served in Shekoushan. As he was old and sick, and was being harassed by the local Gelaohui, Monseigneur Benjamin Christiens appointed Fr. Delbrouck as his successor. In 1898 and uprising was organized by Yu Dongchen in the Sichuan province, which influenced the Gelaohui in southwestern Hubei to attack the Catholic Church. During their meetings they swore to eradicate the Catholic Church.

After the Yu Dongchen uprising, anti-Christian propaganda spread throughout the whole Shinan Fu. Fr. Delbrouck learned from this news that the Gelaohui would burn down churches and kill many missionaries in Sichuan and Hunan. On Nov. 10th, the Gelaohui were as close as a 5 or 6 day walk from Fr. Delbrouck's residence. The Padang local official Kong Lizong strongly advised Fr. Delbrouck to leave Shekoushan and go to Yichang city or the parish of Xishahe or Mazhaping, nearby Shekoushan¹⁶. Delbrouck was aware that he was in danger and tried to save the church. He wrote a letter to local officials in Badong, and to Yichang Diocese to seek protection, but to no avail. On Nov. 14, the three major leaders of the Gelaohui: Xiang Che-An, Li ShaoBai and Li CeQing issued an edict, calling upon



The monument stele of Fr. Delbrouck in Xiaotang. The stele was demolished during the Cultural Revolution. It was found when the church was repaired in 2019, and rebuilt here.



This is Xiaotang church in Badong, before it was burned by the Gelaohui. Later it had been restored. It had been partly destroyed again during the Cultural revolution. It had been used as a government office after liberation, and was repaired in 2019.

their different local branches to start persecution of the Church. On Nov. 29, Delbrouck left Shekoushan with four lay people¹⁷ to Xiaomaitian church, more than 30 miles away from Shekoushan. He continued to serve and encourage the faithful. On Nov. 30th, the Gelaohui attacked Zhongxi church. Most of the faithful had already escaped. They caught two catechumens and Bi Kai-Bang and killed them. The Shekoushan church was burned down by the Gelaohui. Delbrouck hid in the home of the Catholic Li-Takuin. He did not want to put this family in danger and decided to leave immediately. Before his leaving, he wrote the last two letters: one to his mother and one to the bishop of Southwest Hubei. He gave the letters to Li-Takuin¹⁸. Afterwards, they left with three Chinese faithful. They followed the advice of one of the faithful Li Daren and they went to a cave in a nearby mountain. Unfortunately, they were found four days later. They had to escape at night. In order not to be found, they walked along the river. The next morning, they found that they were trapped. Delbrouck asked one of his Christians to go ahead to find a route, but unfortunately, he got arrested and never returned. Soon the Gelaohui found Delbrouck. He was arrested on December 5th and taken to Shekoushan on Dec. 7th, where he was held captive. One day earlier, on December 6, 68 Christians were burned alive in a cave near le-K'i-t'ang by the Gelaohui. Delbrouck was tortured for three days and beheaded on Dec. 11th. Before he was killed, he saw seven Catholics being killed in front of him by the Gelaohui.

Tchang-chou-ouen, a Catholic doctor from Xishahe parish, was also captured by the Gelaohui. His medical experience was enough for the Gelaohui not to kill him, since he could still be usefull. He was witness of the last three days of Delbrouck. Later, the doctor managed to escape to Xishahe “

14 “Manuscript of Hubei Provincial Chronicles”?<https://www.027.cn/%E5%90%91%E7%AD%96%E5%AE%89>

15 The Franciscans who were with the Bp. Verhaeghen were Florent Robberecht, Seraphin Melissen, Damien de Wallef, Thaddee Jacobs and Hubert Adons.

16 Fr. Verhaeghen was in that church during this time. See Natalis Gubbels, OFM, “Monsignor Theotimus Verhaeghen, OFM. His Life and Martyrdom”?Mechelen, St Franciscus printing-shop, 1924.

17 Four Catholics are: cooker lang-ta-pin, servant Ouang-tao-K'I and his nephew and porter Tcheou-Kouan-pin.

18 Li-Takuin kept these letters in his home; later when danger came, he hid the letters under a rock. After the persecution was over, they were found to be well preserved, and they were kept at home, until the catholic Tchou-kouan-pin brought these two letters to Yichang.

The Diocese of Yichang considers Fr. Delbrouck a martyr

The records of the martyrdom of Fr. Delbrouck in the Diocese of Yichang (Southwest Hubei) are quite limited and due to political reasons, it may be inconvenient to write the Church history. Bishop Zhang Mingqian of the Yichang Diocese briefly described the martyrdom of Mgr. Theotimus Verhaeghen and other missionaries in his book “A Brief History of Yichang Diocese,” but he did not mention the martyrdom of Fr. Delbrouck. He mentions only that “Fr. Delbrouck, a parish priest in Xiaotang of Badong, was killed with 68 Catholics by the Gelaohui.” However, the local faithful consider



Fr. Delbrouck is called a Saint of Beatification among all the martyrs in the Yichang diocese.

Fr. Delbrouck as a saint. After interviewing local Catholics, the information they know is basically the same as that described in the book “Les derniers jours d’un martyr” by Mgr. Theotimus Verhaeghen. It is obvious that the murder of Delbrouck and the persecution of the Church had been executed by the local Gelaohui.

The three great pillars of Chinese Catholicism

Jean E. Seah
ChinaSource

Chinese intellectuals were eager to hear from the priest-missionaries who came their way. “A spiritual nature is God’s gift to man and it is the greatest gift of all... benevolence, righteousness, social etiquette and wisdom are all indeed of this nature. These things that God has given us are what we’ve had all along. The bible calls it morality and Confucius calls it conscience”, Yáng Tíngyún wrote in *The Light Emitted by Heaven*.

Christianity arrived in China through Nestorians in the sixth century from the Assyrian Church of the East.

A Nestorian monk from China, Rabban Barawma, met with the first Franciscan pope, Nicholas IV, in 1288. The Franciscans are the first recorded Catholic missionaries to China, with Archbishop John of Montecorvino establishing a mission in Khanbaliq (Beijing) in 1294, during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. He translated the New Testament and the psalms, and received several thousand people into the Church.

Jesuits began to arrive in the subsequent Ming Dynasty, bringing western science and mathematics. They made a thorough study of Chinese culture and made efforts to respect social mores, assuming local hairstyles, clothing and etiquette. Chinese intellectuals appreciated this and were eager to learn from the missionaries. Chief among them were Xú Guangqi from Shanghai, Li Zhizao and Yáng Tíngyún, from Hangzhou. These men became known as the Three Great Pillars of Chinese Catholicism, literally “the Holy Religion’s Three Pillar-Stones”, a title derived from Galatians 2:9, where St. Paul referred to Ss. James, Peter and John as pillars.

Li Zhizao (1565 to 1630) was a government official. In 1610, he fell gravely ill in Beijing. With no family or friends to care for him, he almost died. However, Father Matteo Ricci met him and nursed him back to health at the Jesuit mission, which was established in 1601. During Li’s convalescence, Father Ricci taught him western science, mathematics and Catholicism. Li



was later baptised Leon and swore, “As long as I live, all that God has given me, I shall put to good use for him.” Li gave Father Ricci 100 taels of gold to build a church in Beijing and brought the missionaries Father Lazzaro Cattaneo and Father Nicolas Trigault back with him to Hangzhou for his father’s funeral. In 1625, Li published the Chinese text of the Nestorian Stele, a Tang Dynasty stele which entails 150 years of Chinese Christian history. He also translated many works on science and mathematics.

Yáng Tíngyún (1557 to 1627) was the scion of a devout Buddhist family. Appointed to the post of inspector at the age of 35 after passing the Imperial Examinations in 1600, he met Father Ricci and began working with the Jesuits on China’s first global atlas. Yáng accompanied Li to his father’s funeral and saw that Li had discarded the Buddhist statues and images from his family home. Li had the missionaries celebrate the funeral, with the Chinese monk, Zhong Míngrén, explaining the rite to assembled relatives and friends. Yáng was impressed by Li’s faith and left his concubine a month later, receiving the name of Michael

in baptism. Yáng's willingness to sacrifice status symbols, like his concubine, made a great impact on his family and friends. Yáng brought over 100 people to Christ. He invited the Jesuits to use his estate as their base in Hangzhou and purchased land for the first church in his city, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Refugees from a 1616 persecution of Christians in Nanjing were moved there, after being housed in Yáng's and Li's homes.

Xú Guangqi (1562 to 1633) was also a devout Buddhist and public official, who met Father Ricci in 1600, after four years of studying Catholicism. Xú concluded that Christianity was not contrary to Confucianism, but contained what was lacking in it. In 1603, Xú was baptised with the name of Paul and catechised his family. He invited Father Lazzaro Cattaneo to evangelize Shanghai. Xú and Father Ricci translated classical western texts into Chinese, including part of Euclid's Elements, and Chinese Confucian texts into Latin. Like Cicero, Xú was extremely interested in agriculture, experimenting with western-style irrigation systems and introducing the sweet potato to Songjiang and Shanghai. During the May 1616 persecution in Nanjing, Xú wrote to the emperor, Wanli, following a petition from a civil servant, Shen Que, to expel missionaries. Xú's Petition on the Discernment of Real Knowledge was an eloquent defence, guaranteeing the missions with his own life. He referred to the collaboration between Chinese scholars and missionaries, stating, "This task is the result of putting into practice the divine commandment of love, but it is also a means of promoting prosperity and peace in the country." The emperor accepted Xú's petition, but he spent the next nine years fighting Shen Que's continued persecution of Catholics. Xú went on to become the minister of rites, managing matters of culture, education and foreign affairs and he was later appointed



deputy senior grand secretary, equivalent to the current office of chief minister of China. Another Jesuit missionary, Father Johann Adam Schall von Bell, accompanied Xú during his final illness and death. The tomb of Xú Guangqi is the centrepiece of Shanghai's Guangqi Park, near St. Ignatius Cathedral.

The beatification causes of Paul Xú Guangqi and Father Matteo Ricci are underway, their holy friendship remaining an enduring testimony to their lives of profound faith.

Pastoral Workshop on “Catechesis in the field of Communication”

Encounter with Christ is to ignite the dynamism and motivation of Catechesis

Joseph Lim

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Verbiest Association Taipei had successfully launched a pastoral workshop on “Catechesis in the field of Communication”. Thanks to the Lord that the course, from March 3 to May 5, finished right before the ‘Level-3 Covid-19 alert was declared by the Taiwanese government. The workshop lasted 10 weeks, with two hours of class per week, and was based mainly on the book written by André Fossion SJ “Catechism in the Field of Communication-The Importance of Faith Inculturation”, of which the Chinese translation was recently published by Verbiest Foundation. Most of the 20 students enrolled for the course were from different parishes of the Archdiocese of Taipei. Four of them were Chinese priests and sisters who are currently studying at Fujen Robert Bellarmine Faculty of Theology

Joseph Lim, the course instructor, guided the students to understand the rich content of the book. He made a great effort to explain the content, which at first seemed rather academic to the students, by using common terminologies and expressions of daily life. He also took this opportunity to introduce the content of Directory for Catechesis published by the Vatican in March 2020. Joseph specifically pointed out that the church has issued three editions of this directory since the second Vatican Council, respectively in 1971, 1997 and 2020. The 1971 and 1997 editions were published by Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, while the 2020 edition of New Directory for Catechesis was published by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of New Evangelization. From the publishers, it implies that the Church has shifted its views on the role of catechism. In other words, the church now emphasizes the mis-



sionary function towards evangelization of the Catechesis, and emphasizes that every baptized Christian should take up the role of disciple to spread the gospel. Christians must look for a new language to convey their faith to their neighbors. The role of catechesis is no more limited to passing down the faith from one generation to the other. It is certainly not limited to the Sunday school which is a stereotype many people have. Catechesis must be fittingly implemented in various ministries of the church, in order to level up the mission of evangelization to be more dynamic!

Recapturing the vitality of Catechesis

If we carefully review the various teaching materials existing in the church, one would, rather effortlessly, observe that there is always a left-out of historical context in the syllabus. As a matter of fact, it is necessary for us to experience the development of faith transmission throughout the course of history. In the early church, “Kerygma” (the preaching or proclamation of

the Christian gospel in the early church), was the most direct way to spread the gospel of Christ. With the passing of time, the method of preaching developed together with the pedagogical techniques of other disciplines, and began to include domains such as psychology and anthropology. The integration and development of catechetical pedagogy has induced to various teaching models and categories, namely: “Model of Kerygma”, “Model of Catechumenate”, “Model of Anthropology” and “Model of Historic Prophet” etc. The workshop clearly explained the evolutions and logics of these teaching models, by analyzing among the models of their consensus, contradictions, conflicts, and tensions. The analyses of the models brought us to focus on “the cultural environment in which our faith is located.” Therefore, the topic of ‘inculturation’ is inevitable part of discussion in the workshop. Based on the guideline and recommendations of the book, Joseph engaged the students to reflect upon the ‘possibility’ as well as ‘urgency’ of Catechesis in society today.

Inculturation of Catechesis

Catechists of today must think about the fundamental question: “How can faith be communicated and expressed in a diverse and secular society?” There is no simple, standard, or definite answer to this question. However, we should always take a closer look at our society and find the most suitable and efficient way to spread the gospel through “observation,” “judgment,” and “practice”. The course proposes these 3 basic concepts to analyze and study the possibility of catechetical inculturation which include: “inculturation of places”, “inculturation of content” and “inculturation of pedagogy”. Without a doubt, society is full of resources, elements, and value systems for people to know God. Inculturation is a way to constantly recognize the will of God in our daily life.

Catechesis is to convey the fragrance and taste of faith

The concept of communication is clarified at the beginning of the course. Students were motivated to analyze the problems of ‘communication’ and scrutinize how the mission of catechesis as well as evangelization within the church/parish they belong to can be concretized. Through our own personal theological reflections, life experiences, stories and metaphors, we are able to think about making “Christ who lives in me” and “the story of my encounter with Jesus” present in our daily life and also church life; by delivering the “color, fragrance, and taste” of our faith in the invisible God. Therefore, catechism can be seen as banquet, where people can come to share and celebrate.

Before leading people to Christ, Catechists should first encounter with Christ

Catechists must return to their own personal spirituality, after all the foundation of encounter with Christ should not be broken. Catechesis does not emphasize on fancy activities, but rather means to accompany and guide the seekers of Christ. Catechists do not forget to listen while speaking. The listener and the speaker should experience, breathe, and meet Christ together in the words of God during communication. Undoubtedly, “meeting with Christ” is to ignite the primordial dynamism and motivation of catechesis.

Voices of new converts

Faith through Art

Dorothea

2020 was a difficult year for the entire world. We have all experienced the raging pandemic and the consequent global economic instability. In the Chinese traditional culture, the Year of the *Gengzi* (Rat) is destined not to be an ordinary year. However, everything in the world has its wonderful way of working and we know that the night is never eternal. Several Chinese sayings reflect ideas such as: “things will develop in the opposite direction when they become extreme” and “the turn of fortune represents the escape from desperation”. For me, this turning point occurred in the last month of 2020, during the cold winter.

At the end of November, I was sitting in the classroom listening to a professor, a historian of western arts, explaining religious paintings during the Renaissance. I was touched by the work of Fra Angelico. Looking at his “Annunciation”, in which the image of the angel and the Virgin Mary are both gently and humbly displayed, a feeling of joy in my heart emerged. The rich symbolism in the work evoked a vivid interest in its meaning. During that afternoon in the classroom, I saw a lot of frescoes and altarpieces from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, causing the same emotions again and again.

In addition to the exquisite color and structure of the works, I heard the stories behind these paintings. Although they were interpreted from an academic perspective of art, I immersed myself in the classical biblical stories. After further exchanges with the professor, I realized that in these paintings and this classic way of painting, the theme of “Love” was expressed. From that day on, I began to realize the unique meaning of “Love”.



That art class made me walk into a church and learn with an open heart about religion. I entered the RCIA process. From the beginning, I really felt strong emotions when I encountered those medieval artists, their works of art, and the classical biblical stories. Every priest, teacher, sponsor and catechumen made me experience the fullness of love. This kind of love brought me peace, but also a feeling of strength. “Love” is eternal, beautiful, and inexplicable and needs to be felt and practiced in the heart. I have felt and learned a lot in the Church. As a newly baptized, I also hope that I can release myself to share more and more Love with those around me, with those in need, with those who care about me and with all those who know God or who don’t know God yet.

Faith through Music

Gabriël

I am Gabriël, a college student studying classical music. Early in my professional studies, I was introduced to religious music and art and became interested in them. In the beginning, I only studied the aesthetic and historical perspectives as a way to appreciate them. Before Christmas in 2020, I visited the Xishiku church in Beijing. However, due to the pandemic, the door of the church was closed and not open to the public. Just as I was feeling desperate and ready to leave, the door of the church suddenly opened. Maria, a sponsor from the church, walked out and invited me to participate in the RCIA process.

reason and science alone. Instead, we need to be more metaphysical: open to the revelation of the Word.

From the beginning of January 2021, I participated in the online RCIA program. The title of the first session was “the Credo”. Before joining the RCIA process, I was confused about the relationship between religion and science. Once we started actively discussing this topic, I felt amazed when I suddenly understood this relationship!



Science can only allow us to see the Lord’s creation. If we want to know the Lord and understand Him, we cannot do it with

After the RCIA gatherings, I always felt how my mood had become more relaxed and my life became calm and joyful. Before I knew the Lord, I heard people say that people who believe in the Lord found peace of mind. During the RCIA process I came to see this reality.

During our meeting of the RCIA group in Lent, I discussed with the catechist Liang some Western religious classical music and works of art. On the one hand, I re-understood these works of art with the Bible as background. I discovered the true theological significance of these works. They are not only a symphony, a chorus and an oil painting, but are a way for artists to use art to spread the Gospel. One of my favorite paintings is Caravaggio's "The Calling of St. Matthew".

I was baptized during Easter Vigil of 2021. I was nervous about whether I was a real follower of Christ. But I also thought of a sharing by catechist Ma in the RCIA group. She was baptized six years ago. During the past six years, she has been learning and growing. She said that we don't need to wait until we are good enough to be baptized. It is precisely because we are not good enough, that we need God.

The evening of my Baptism, was also the first time I participated in the Chinese Mass. In 2019, I participated in the Sunday Mass at the Cologne Cathedral. Because I didn't understand the language at that time, it was more about visiting and experiencing art, and I didn't get to the level of knowing and

understanding the Lord. On the contrary, this time of receiving baptism, I truly felt the Lord's light illuminating each of us. He is the good shepherd.

After a short night sleep, I met Father Zhang who gave me good news. I was given the opportunity to participate in the Easter celebration of mass. I was really excited when I was sitting next to the organ in the church. Just twelve hours after my baptism, I had the opportunity to play the pipe organ to participate in the process of praising the Lord so "loudly" and to have the opportunity to serve the Church, that warmed my heart. The Lord sent so many people to accompany me and help me approach Him. Why should I not follow Him? What were the reasons to be nervous and hesitate? I was called not only to follow Him, but to follow Him firmly and joyfully. I was warmly received, now I am a Church member and I want to warmly receive others. This is the Lord's teaching that I learned from Father Zhang.

Although I am baptized, the catechumenate journey has just begun. The Lord has so much truth for me to discover. He is the treasure house of truth and the source of joy, which will never dry up. Since I have joined the Church, there is no reason not to continue to study the Lord's doctrine and spread the Lord's Gospel. His door is always open to us, just as I will always remember, on December 17, 2020, the moment when the door of the Sishiku church was opened to me, the moment when I was about to turn around. Amen!

Three Chinese priests ordained in Chengde diocese

On April 11, 2021 the Diocese of Chengde celebrated the ordination to the priesthood of 3 deacons. Father Paul Li Bingbing and Father Peter Xue Zhiyong graduated from the Hebei Catholic Theological and Philosophy Seminary. Father Paul Li Pengju graduated from the Beijing National Catholic Theological and Philosophical Seminary.

This was a great joyful event for the Diocese of Chengde, and even more for the universal Church. Bishop Guo Jincai of Chengde Diocese was the celebrant for the ordination mass. All priests and nuns from the diocese as well as the parents, relatives and friends of the new priests and members of their parishes witnessed this sacred moment. The bishop invited Catholics to pray for vocations of the Church. God has chosen us. Today, the vocations to the priesthood and religious life are still too few. There are "more crops than workers". The Church needs more people to consecrate their lives as priests and religious as a way to follow Christ.

On September 22, 2018, the Holy See and the People's Republic of China signed an agreement concerning the appointment of bishops. At that time, the Pope established the Diocese of Chengde to promote the pastoral care of the Lord's flock and to attend with greater efficacy to its spiritual good.



The new ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Diocese of Chengde is in the province of Hebei. Its territory is defined by the current civil boundaries of "Chengde City", which include eight rural Districts (Chengde, Xinglong, Pingquan, Luanping, Longhua, Fengning, Kuancheng and Weichang) and three Administrative Divisions (Shuangqiao, Shuangluan and Yingshouying zikuang). The diocese covers an area of 39,519 km² with a population of about 3.7 million inhabitants, of whom, according to recent estimates, includes about 25,000 Catholics, living in 17 parishes some seminarians.

A relic of St. Damian came to China

Sr. Maria Wu



Chinese bishops in the crypt of Fr. Damian, with , Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism and Fr. Frans Gorissen ss. cc

In July 2019, the Verbiest Institute invited Bishop Du Jiang of Bameng Diocese, Inner Mongolia, together with four other bishops from China to visit Belgium, make a pilgrimage, and celebrate mass in the crypt of Saint Damian in Leuven. Bishop Du was deeply moved by Father Damian's spirit of serving the lepers and specifically asked for a relic of Saint Damian, to encourage the priests and faithful of Bameng Diocese to learn the spirituality of Saint Damian.

Thankfully, when I was in Leuven, I got great help from the venerable Father Jeroom J. Heyndrickx, the founder of the Verbiest Institute in Leuven, in translating the Bishop Du's application letter for the relic of Saint Damian and to communicate with the priests of Saint Damian's Congregation. Father Patrick Jaspers, a very kind and generous man, is in charge of matters concerning Damian relics. He expressed willingness to send the spirit of Saint Damian to China. He accepted Bishop Du's request and satisfied the Bishop's wish to receive a relic.

On August 2020, Sister Maria Wu, who is also from Bishop Du's Diocese, was studying in Belgium. When Sister Wu finished her studies and returned to China, she successfully carried the relic of Saint Damian with her from Belgium to the Bameng Diocese in China and handed it to Bishop Du Jiang. She painted a Saint Damian icon. This is a copy of an 80cm x 60cm oil portrait that took her one week to paint on linen. In the icon Saint Damian seems to be looking at and contemplating a faraway place, perhaps the place is China where he was willing to go.

Bishop Du is very grateful to receive the Saint Damian relic. On November 24, 2020, the relic of Saint Damian was solemnly

and reverently placed in the Shanba Cathedral, on the right side of the altar, under the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. A Catholic made a very exquisite Wooden niche for the relic. Under the niche is written in Chinese "Saint Damian, Pray for us". Bishop Du Jiang, presided at the installation ceremony with the Vice-Bishop Duan Yong kun and parish priest Yang Zhen jie. More than 70 parishioners attended the ceremony. (The number of participants limited by the corona pandemic). The whole ceremony created a sacred and joyful aura. It was the first time for the Bameng Diocese to venerate the relic of a Saint. The clergy and faithful of the Diocese are very pleased and cherished the opportunity. They often come to give a gesture of respect to Saint Damian's relic. The faithful distributed among each other the biography of St. Damian, *To Resemble Christ in Fasting* and watched the movie about "Dead Island". These materials were provided by the Chinese College. When the faithful learned about Father Damian's mission, they were deeply moved by Father Damien's spirit of service of love. They try their best to learn the spirituality of Fr. Damian and ask for his intercession.

They are really grateful to the merciful God for giving the relic, a source of grace, to the Bameng Diocese, and both for the generosity of Father Saint Damian's Congregation, as well as for the great help of Father Jeroom Heyndrickx.

Although Father Damien did not visit China in his lifetime, his spirit will live and benefit China. We hope that Fr. Damian's spirit of service and love will inspire and spread in the Bameng Diocese and the whole of China.



Sr. Gaby Yang, Fr. Patrick Jaspers ss cc, Sr. Maria Wu and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism

The prayer to Damian

You touched the heart of the whole world

When you as a leper died among lepers on the island of Molokai.

You gave friendship and your health to those

Who had been banished and had been expelled from the society.

You became their priest, their father, their brother.

As a Flemish farmer takes the plough by the hand, you did not look back.

You were as Jesus and did the same as he, your Lord and great example:

You gave your life for your people, and so we call you holy, Damian.

You make us realize that all people are children of the same Father.

You show us the way to the poor and the small.

You teach us selfless love.

Pater Damian, pray for us to the Lord. Amen.

In Memoriam

Vincent Hermans

The redaction, with info from de Kleine Compagnie (February 2021)



Meeting Bp. John Fang Xingyao in Leuven, July 2019.



Vincent Hermans with Belgian and Dutch pilgrims, together with the statue of Mgr. Schraven, during the China visit in 2017.

Vincent was born on 8 September 1944, as the seventh child of Frans Hermans and Maria M. Coenders, on the farm 'Op Wis' (North Limburg, Netherlands), into a family with a long religious missionary tradition. For many years, Vincent intended to study that family history "when I retire, I'm going to see if I can find out more about the murder of Mgr. Schraven. My father had always said: 'We will never find out why they were murdered.'"

In 1957, Vincent went to the minor seminary Wernhoutsburg of the Vincentians in the municipality of Zundert. Vincent himself said that he "had no vocation", but the priest told his father: "That will come naturally". On September 7, 1964, he started the novitiate, but six years later he decided not to renew or maintain his ties with the Congregation, but he made it clear: "Hopefully I will be able to put my acquired knowledge and experience in the service of the Church in the future". He tried studying economics, but eventually chose to do voluntary work in Amsterdam. Through this network, he came into contact with the World Council of Churches. In 1975, he travelled to Nairobi to accompany the participants of the Assemblies of the World Council of Churches. After the congress, he took the opportunity to get into contact with the local population as much as possible. For 15 weeks, he travelled through Africa and experienced at first hand the difficult situation in which the local population lived in, among others, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Sudan.

After his return from Africa, he worked for 7 years at the Missionary Centre in Heerlen. But Vincent wanted "to experience for himself what being in solidarity with the people you live with, among whom you work, means" and travelled around the Philippines and Indonesia from 1983 to 1984. He was exposed to situations in which Filipinos find themselves under the Marcos dictatorship.

Back from the Philippines, a position as secretary awaits him in Breda. In the summer of 1984 Vincent meets Marja Grim again and they marry in 1985 and have three sons. In addition to the position of secretary, a position of pastoral worker for Church

and Society in the deanery of Breda became vacant. Bishop Ernst appoints Vincent.

In July 1993, Vincent and Marja move to Simpelveld with their three small children and he starts working as head of the administration of the *Gerardus bell* and the *Gerardus calendar* and follows the two-year Clinical Pastoral Formation in Utrecht. In 1997 he was asked whether he would like to become a pastoral worker for mentally handicapped people. Vincent would like to do something with people again. He felt at home there. The doctors say: "We always know when Vincent is away or on holiday: that's when the doctor's visits increase." Vincent worked there for seven years until his retirement.

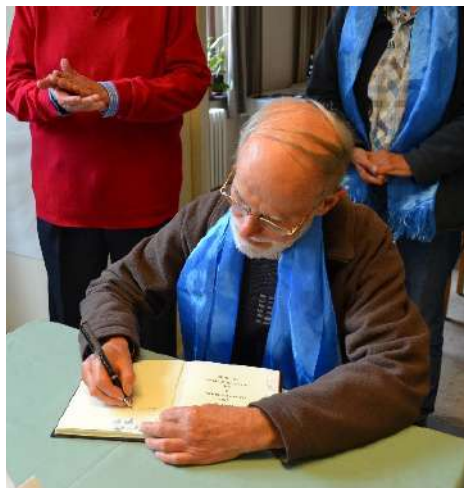
From then on he devoted himself with heart and soul to the cause of Mgr Schraven. Safeguarding memories and memorabilia that are in the family, establishing a Mgr. Schraven Foundation and so much more. He got Archbishop Savio Hon Tai fai, then secretary of the Propaganda Fide, to preside as the main celebrant on 14 October 2012, the Remembrance Sunday of the murder of Schraven. Even the Japanese bishops sent a delegate to apologise on their behalf. A memorable day in that church, from which Frans Schraven left for China in 1899. For the cause of Bishop Schraven, he was a true lay missionary. In 2020, however he was diagnosed with cancer... But slowing down was not an option. Besides the Schraven activities, he takes the initiative in Simpelveld for a fair trade market, an Amnesty writing club, a language café for asylum seekers and refugees and an exercise route. Last summer he sat more often and for longer periods of time by the pond with Marja, trying to imagine the unimaginable. "I have had a beautiful life, and have found peace with whatever that may com. I am not tired of life, I want to live". "I am not afraid of death, only of the road that leads towards it. It is not easy, but it is doable. And know, when the winter of your life has set in, I myself will write the last chapter in gold".

Also here at the Verbiest Institute, Vincent has left a deep

In Augustus 2009 Vincent participated in our 10 th International Conference, organized together with the Institute for Study on History of Modern China of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Vincent presented, in the presence of 40 other researchers, a paper on the murder of Mgr. Schraven.



impression. Readers may remember his slogan “Moed Moet!” (*Courage is a Must*), with which the editorial of our *Courier* opened during the corona summer of 2020. Together with Vincent, his wife Marja and friends of the Schraven Foundation, we organised several China pilgrimages, worked together on our research about the presence of missionaries from the Low Countries in China and he always participated in our activities in Leuven. We were also able to welcome Vincent and Marja several times in the Chinese College, where they were very welcome guests. At the beginning of April, we could welcome Vincent again in Leuven. We knew then



Signing our book of Friends, at the Chinese College

that it would be the last time we would see each other. Actually, we could only hope to welcome our friend one last time and it turned out to be a day full of warm, unforgettable moments. We offered Vincent and his wife Marja a painting of the Chinese character “Ai” (Love), and a “hata”, a long white scarf that people in Mongolia traditionally give to their guests to honour and welcome them.

Wiel Bellemaekers recently described Vincent as: “I don’t know anyone who was so diaconal or caring for people, whoever, or wherever they were”.

Sr. Rosa Marchand

Sr. Rosa Marchand of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary passed on to eternal life in Heverlee, Belgium on February 6, 2021, at the age of 92 (1929-2021). It is as if the readings of the liturgy today (*on February 7, when a commemoration for Sr. Rosa was held*) were chosen to commemorate Sister Rosa. We hear St Paul say to the Corinthians, “Woe is me if I don’t preach the gospel!” In the gospel, we hear how Jesus brings and proclaims his message “with authority” from village to village, and how he is ready from morning to night to heal the sick and listen to their needs. Then he isolates himself to pray somewhere alone.

But all that was what Rosa has done all her life! She had worked in education for some years before becoming a missionary of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (ICM Sisters). She arrived in Taiwan just after Vatican II, inspired and ready for an innovative preaching of the gospel. Renewing the message, adapting to China and to the times, she has done that all her life from then on. Rosa first learned to speak Chinese well and clearly. She spoke her Chinese slowly, but all Rosa was slow and all her life was like that. She took her time for everything, even when she told a story. She wanted to be understood, whether she spoke Dutch, English or Chinese. It was slow, but clear. And so her whole life was a slow but clear proclamation of the Lord Jesus.

We have known her in Taiwan mainly as a committed catechist in several parishes, especially in collaboration with the Pastoral Center and usually aimed at the youth. Rosa’s most famous program was *Quan Gei Ren* (傳給人- Preach it to them), which she translated into Chinese, distributed and used in her catechesis to young people. Rosa was primarily a publisher, a missionary to the youth. She tried to understand them and to formulate an answer to the questions that occupied them. And she was constantly looking for new ways to get her message across clearly. All her life she strived to polish her Chinese and she did not hesitate to constantly ask each of her Chinese



Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm

friends for corrections. “Woe to me if I don’t preach the gospel,” that word of Paul is fully applicable to Rosa and all of her missionary spirituality. It could pass off as a motto that marked her life.

But just as Jesus, she often withdrew and isolated herself in prayer, so prayer was a major program in her daily life. She sought her way in Eastern spirituality. Inculturation, adaptation of preaching, liturgy and prayer into Chinese traditional culture was a major concern of the missionary Rosa Marchand. And so she became a true missionary for our time: inspired by Vatican II, she brought the gospel to China in reverence and respect for the Chinese people and its culture. In the footsteps of the great ICM missionaries who worked in North China, Inner Mongolia and Taiwan. Rosa is probably right now telling her story to St. Peter.... That will happen slowly, but clearly and perhaps even partly in Chinese, because she had mixed Chinese with Flemish all her life. Saint Peter must have known it. And whatever he brings in, Rosa will not let herself be done... The nobility that she presents are those of a China missionary pure karat. We are grateful for the beautiful testimony of her devoted missionary life and continue to pray united with her for the eternal peace for Rosa with the Lord Jesus that she proclaimed in China.

Bishop Joseph Zong Huaide

Agenzia Fides, February 23, 2021

On January 5, 2021 at 8 p.m., His. Exc. Mgr. Joseph Zong Huaide, Bishop emeritus of Sanyuan, in the province of Shaanxi died.

He was born on June 16, 1920 in a village in Wuguanfang, in Sanyuan County, the fourth of five children to a Catholic family. He entered the Minor seminary of Tongyuanfang in 1935. After completing his theological studies, he was ordained a priest on June 5, 1949.

Later he carried out the pastoral ministry in Fuping and in Tongyuanfang, as parish priest and then in the Cathedral of Sanyuan. From 1961 to 1965, he was forbidden to exercise the pastoral ministry, which is why he retired to his house and began to cultivate the land there. He was arrested for his belief in 1965 and sentenced to forced labor in 1966. In February 1980 he was released and returned to work as a priest in Tongyuanfang.



On 9 August 1987 he was secretly ordained bishop and after a few years he was officially recognized as such by the civil authorities. On 23 December 1997 he was able to make a pilgrimage to Italy, where he was received by Pope John Paul II in the Vatican. In 2003 the Holy See accepted his resignation. Since then, Bishop Zong Huaide spent his time in prayer and charitable service. His loving and delicate character made him popular with everyone. Numerous memories and praises for his

testimony were shared on social media after his death.

From January 5th to January 10th, the body of Bishop Zong was exposed to the faithful in the church of Tongyuan: on January 11th, the funeral was celebrated there and the prelate was buried. Currently, the Diocese of Sanyuan has about 40,000 faithful, with 46 priests and the presence of various religious orders for men and women.

Bishop Andrew Han Jingtao

Bernardo Cervellera, AsiaNews, December 31st, 2020

A 'giant of culture and faith' of the underground Church

A great scholar, he spent 27 years in a forced labour camp and later taught at a university. He was also appreciated by prison authorities. Upon becoming bishop in 1982, he divided his time between academic and pastoral work. After 1997 he was under constant police surveillance. He was a supporter of the Legions of Mary and founder of the Women's Congregation of Mount Calvary.



Described by some faithful as "a giant of culture and faith" of the unofficial community, Bishop Han was a great scholar from an early age. His first studies took place under the direction of Canadian missionaries from Quebec, to whom the apostolic vicariate was entrusted. His great culture was even recognized by the authorities of the forced labor camp, where he spent 27 years (1953-1980) for refusing to join the "independent and autonomous" Church, following Mao Zedong's directives.

Once free, the authorities hired him to teach English at Changchun University. A few months later he became associate professor at the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilisations at Northeast Normal University. He taught undergraduate, master and doctoral students and introduced many Chinese to the study of classical cultures and languages (Latin and Greek).

In 1987 he retired from teaching, but not from his Church and missionary work. Even before his imprisonment, he had focused on educating the laity through the Legions of Mary,

pushing them to pray, proclaim and engage in charity work. At the same time he had started a congregation of nuns, later called "Mount Calvary".

He said that in the 1950s, the regime tried to "get rid of the Pope's interference and expel foreign missionaries. At that time, I realised that the Church was facing a great challenge and needed great strength to resist otherwise, she would not be able to stand up. This is why I decided to establish a religious congregation."

In 1982 he was appointed bishop of Siping, but his ordination took place in secret in 1986. For several years, he had to divide his time between pastoral work and university commitments. In the early 1980s, the government unified all ecclesiastical districts in Jilin province into a single diocese, that of Jilin. The Diocese of Siping, still recognised by the Holy See, covers sections of Jilin province, Inner Mongolia and Liaoning.

Starting in 1997, his home came under constant surveillance making his ministry difficult. Even the congregation of nuns he founded, went through a difficult time: convents shut down, members dispersed, secret reopenings, members living in various underground communities.

According to the latest figures, the diocese has about 30,000 members, including 20,000 in the unofficial Church and 10,000 in the official one, with 20 priests and a hundred religious Sisters. The diocese also offers some social services, including an orphanage and a medical centre.

Photo report

Postal stamps of Our Lady of Fatima



Authorities in Macao have decided to publish postal stamps of Our Lady of Fatima to honor the long-held tradition of devotion to Mary by Catholics in the Chinese-ruled territory. The special series was published on May 13, the day of the feast of Our Lady of Fatima. The feast has become a signature annual Catholic event for Macao Diocese. Every year, many people from various parts

of China and abroad flock to Macau to participate in the event that also features a colorful procession. Catholics in Macau number about 30,000, spread across nine parishes and Catholicism bears the legacy of Portuguese rule from 1557 to 1999.



News from China

At the end of the academical year, the National Seminary Beijing was proud to share this picture of their graduation class.



Fr. Siriguleng celebrating Holy Thursday in Poro Balgasu, Mongol Mission in Inner Mongolia.





In the north cathedral in Beijing 95 catechumens got baptized on Sunday, July 25th. Among them one American girl who is studying at the Beijing Qing-hua University.

Father Anthony Li Hui is ordained as coadjutor bishop of Pingliang diocese in China's northwestern Gansu province on July 28. Chinese Catholics witnessed the consecration of the fifth bishop under a deal that China's communist government agreed with the Vatican three years ago. Father Anthony Li Hui was ordained as the coadjutor bishop of Pingliang diocese at Gansu province in northwestern China on July 28, approved by both the state and the Church.



The 49-year-old Bishop Li is the fifth bishop ordained under the China-Vatican provisional agreement signed in 2018, church sources told UCA News.



Chinese characters (中国汉字)

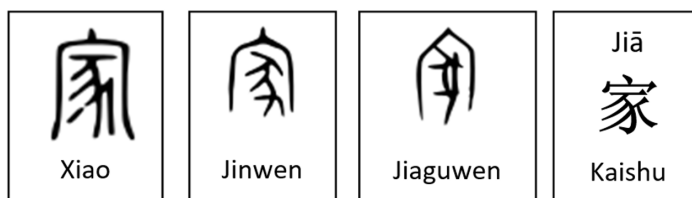
A “豕(pig)” under the roof “宀” gave man his concept of home (家). Domesticated, the pig brought man no domestic trouble and was allowed freedom to wander about in the house”¹



After establishing settled -down lives, people began to think of family, and in fact the idea of family must have appeared very early. The shape of the character “家Jia (house)” is very strange. But nevertheless a true record of the situation as it was during the emergence of ancient households and their occupants’ knowledge of how to build a home.

“家” is also an old character. When we look at the shape, it is an ‘associative-compound’ character. Back in the days when people had only just started to establish settled homes and families, hunting, and agriculture became more sophisticated, resulting in an abundance of game and grain, and people began to raise animals. They raised pigs, cattle, sheep, dogs, chickens and horses,

and these are the “six livestock” as referred to by ancient people. Pigs were both the most prolific and the most important of these livestock, being both a major food source and a symbol of wealth and social position. In Chinese museums you can see that very often pigs bones were included in the graves of ancient clan heads, and those occupying very high positions might have had dozens of pig buried alongside them. At that time, by having a house and raising pigs, people could live and had “家”. archaeologists have discovered many houses in the ruins of remote antiquity, and the upper part was for people and the lower part was for raising pigs, these combined dwellings for both people and livestock might be represented as “家”²



Evolution of the chinese character 家

¹ 陈火平 Tan Huay Peng?, Fun with Chinese characters, the straits times collection, 1983, p. 7
² 韩鉴堂 (Han Jiantang), Chinese characters, 2016, pp. 125-126

God or the Emperor? Pater Ferdinand Verbiest in China.

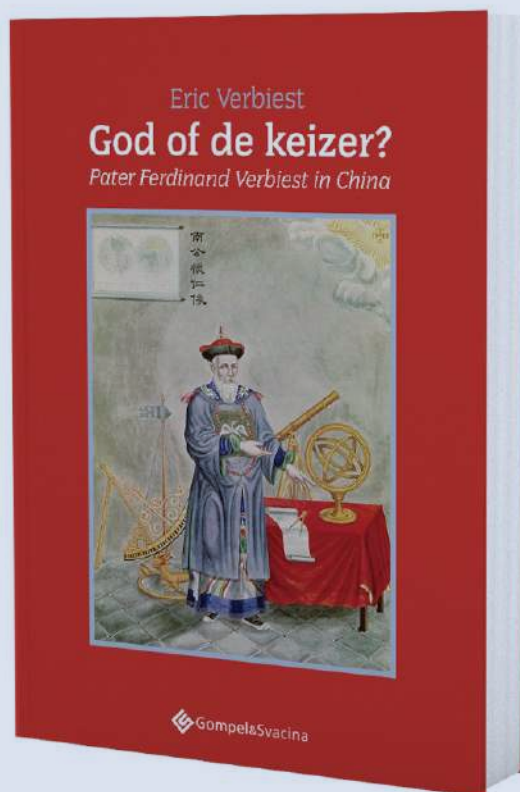
Hugo Vanheeswijck

These days it is a common cliché to talk pitiful and in a negative way from a haughty point of view about the so-called 'Western imperialism' of the missionaries, who were at the time sent by the Church to proclaim the faith elsewhere. So it was a welcome relief when the publishing house Gompel & Svacina edited the book "God or the Emperor?". It is not the first time that this publisher has followed so-called strange but authentic and original paths in the world of editing.

The author Eric Verbiest studied andragogy, philosophy and school organizational development. He taught at Fontys Highschools and the University of Antwerp. He currently works and publishes in the field of educational innovation and leadership development.

The reader gets to know the mission to and in China of the world-famous priest, Ferdinand Verbiest, through 'invented' letters from his contemporaries. "... *The setting in the story (is) formed by events that actually took place, such as the change of dynasty,... the persecution and trial of the Jesuits in Beijing with the redeeming earthquake,... the contacts with the Tsar's ambassador and Verbiest's travels with the emperor. With this as a background, I felt free to invent situations and dialogues, expressing Verbiest's statements in his letters in conversations he had, sometimes attributing the statements of certain characters to others, sometimes at a different time, etc.* ." (p. 289) thus the author. So this book is not a scientific biography, but a biografiction consisting of 10 fascinating letters written in such an exciting, narrative style, so that at the end of one letter you quickly turn the page to start reading the next one.

That there is nothing new under the sun - also in the Church - is evident from, among other things, the theological debate on missionary and inculturation - those who are pure in the doctrine vice versa the flexible ones - between the Dominican and Jesuit missionaries in China five centuries ago. The epilogue is followed by an informative 'explanation' about persons often mentioned in the book, a list of superiors in the order of the Jesuits at the time of Ferdinand Verbiest and an explanation of the hour indication in China during the seventeenth



century, a Chinese measure of length and currency. The author concludes with a justification and words of gratitude, in which he writes: "... *What was initially nothing more than curiosity about my famous namesake, grew into a comprehensive attempt to better understand the life and work of Father Ferdinand Verbiest ...*" (p. 289). As far as I am concerned, Eric Verbiest succeeded in this attempt with the greatest accolades and congratulations from the reviewer.

Verbiest, Eric, God or the Emperor? Father Ferdinand Verbiest in China.

Oud-Turnhout / 's Hertogenbosch Gompel & Svacina, 2020, 290pp, 34.00 €

A Belgian passage to China (1870 – 1930)

Unique and never published documents, letters and photos.

Between 1870 until 1914 the Belgians – at that time one of the most important financial and industrial powers – built hundreds of kilometers of train and tram connections in five continents. The western feeling of superiority and the urge of colonisation of King Leopold II, were the pushing power of these enterprises. In China this adventure was concretized in the construction of the railway line between Beijing and Hankou and a tramway line in Tianjin.

A Belgian passage to China (1870-1920) brings two projects into the limelight. Francis Nuyens left in 1905 from Gent to Tianjin, where he built an electric power station and a tramway line. In a well-documented journal Nuyens writes down his impressions about his stay in China between 1905 and 1908.

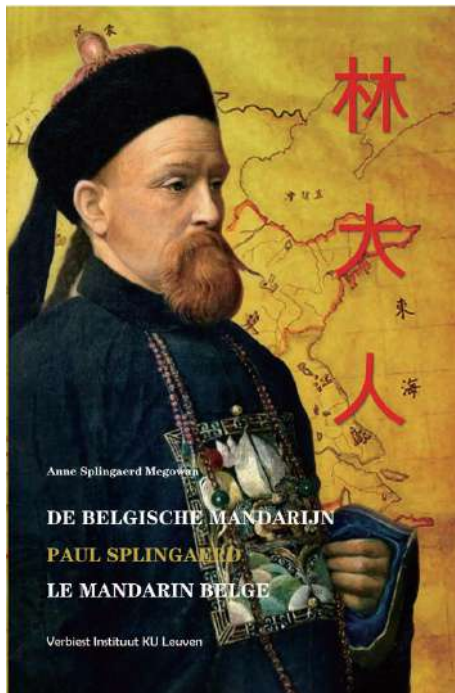
The brothers Philippe and Adolphe Spruyt, both medical doctors, travelled to China to ensure the medical service on the construction plant of the railway between Beijing and Hankou. They returned with an amount of Chinese antiquities. Their correspondence of more than 1200 photographic glassplates give a unique vision of daily life in China at the beginning of the 20th century.

Dr. Johan J. Mattelaer is a urologist. At the publishing company Sterck & De Vreese he published *Roma intima. Love, life and lust*. Mathieu Torck is lecturer at the University of Gent (Department Languages and Cultures) and a postdoctoral assistant at the Catholic University Leuven (Department of History).

45 Euro – English – 306 pages – Publishing Company Sterck & De Vreese



The Belgian Mandarin – The Life of Paul Spilingaerd



The historical presence of the Belgian Scheut Fathers in China “Beyond the Great Wall” deserves particular attention, even today. The book “The Belgian Mandarin” appears in the series “Encounters beyond the Great Wall”, in which publications on this topic are collected by The Verbiest Institute KU Leuven.

The book “The Belgian Mandarin”, of which this publication is a translation, counts the story of Paul Spilingaerd, an abandoned child from Brussels, born in 1842. When in 1865 the Scheut Fathers invited him to accompany them to China he didn’t hesitate a moment. Together with his Chinese wife, he contributed significantly to the foundation and the development of the Scheut Mission in China and he rose in the Chinese bureaucracy to the level of mandarin. In doing so he followed in the footsteps of the famous Flemish Jesuit and astronomer, Ferdinand Verbiest, the “first Belgian Mandarin”.

This publication is the result of the investigation by Anne Megowan Spilingaerd, Paul’s great-granddaughter. His work as an interpreter of the famous geologist and explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen, shows how good he knew the Chinese language and culture. In this book Anne Spilingaerd Megowan describes her great-grandfather as a native Flemish, whose second life began and flourished “beyond the great wall”: in Mongolia, China and along the legendary silk road.

In spite of some publications about Paul Spilingaerd’s personality and life, his importance for Scheut and China are scarcely known. The Verbiest Institute hopes that this publication may cover this deficiency.

30 euro – Dutch / French – 400 pages – Verbiest Institute KU Leuven.

2021 Fundraising drive

Dioceses in China are eager to care for the poor and the needy in their area. In this regard, Verbiest Foundation constantly receives appeals for help. One of the ways to answer these appeals for help is assisting dioceses to raise funds and search for sponsoring for pastoral or social projects.

In 2020, 4 organizations and some benefactors gave a positive answer to our request of assistance to support some of our projects (support visit to families of the community, taking care of the elderly, providing the community with free health consultation, and sponsoring scholarships for students from poor families). Some Verbiest friends had asked us in the past how to help our activities in Mainland China, and so we will continue to offer each year a project where we can invite our friends from all over the world, to join hands in raising the funds for a project.

Fund-raising project in 2021: renovating a nursing home in Shaanxi(China)

Renovating a nursing home in Shaanxi (China)



In March 2021, we received an application from a female religious congregation in Shaanxi, requesting a subsidy for the project of renovating their old sisters nursing home. Currently, there are 9 seriously ill sisters and a dozen old sisters living in the nursing home. Some of the sick and old sisters are in wheelchairs and need dedicated care and attention. The religious congregation has 246 sisters, and there will be more elderly sisters who will need to be admitted to the nursing home in the future.

Since the nursing home is in quite a poor state and the weather is very cold in the area, the nursing home doesn't meet the conditions for adequate care of the residing sisters. They are truly in need of a warmer environment that suits their nursing needs. Two years ago, they completed a first renovation stage by installing heating facilities, waterproofing the roof, repainting the peeled-off walls, and tiling the floor. This year, they will continue with the renovation of the kitchen, replacing electrical wiring, purchasing the new bed frames and beddings, curtains, closets... as well as renewing the kneeling stools in their prayer room.

The total budget for the renovation is €10.000. We believe this project is useful to the nursing home, and sincerely invite you to help us support this project. Verbiest Foundation will be responsible of the project execution by following up with the sisters, making sure that your help is exclusively used for this particular project. Your concerned prayers and economic support for their request is very much appreciated.

For more info, feel free to contact the Verbiest Foundation using the details at the back of this issue, where you can also find our bank details. The name of the diocese and religious personnel involved in the project have been omitted on purpose.

What is the Ferdinand Foundation? What is she doing?

- CICM (Congregation of Missionaries of Scheut) was founded in 1862 by Theofiel Verbist (Antwerp). Between 1865 and 1955 679 missionaries worked in North China: in Inner Mongolia, in Jehol, Datong, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Qinghai. They evangelized, they built schools, hospitals and developed agriculture. Some Scheut missionaries became famous around the world through their research on the Chinese and Mongolian language and culture. Having been banished from China, after 1949 by Mao Zedong, they opened missions in Taiwan, Hong Kong, in Singapore and later in Republic of Mongolia.
- When China opened again to establish collaboration with the West, Scheut created with the Catholic University of Louvain, in 1982, the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, bearing the name of the famous Jesuit missionary eighteenth-century Belgian astronomer, teacher of Emperor Kangxi. His Eminence, Cardinal J. De Kesel (Mechelen) chairs the Foundation. Board members represent different congregations of missionaries: the mission of Scheut, the Franciscans, the brothers of Charity.
- The Verbiest Foundation wants to develop a new relationship with the Church of China. Similar to the age old collaboration of missionaries of our countries with China, she wants to stimulate a contemporary collaboration between the Church Belgium and China. This should be based on equality and mutual appreciation.
- The Foundation sponsors the activities of the Institute Verbiest KULeuven (Naamsestraat 63, bus 4018, 3000 Leuven), those of the Chinese College in Leuven (Vlamingenstraat 1) and those of the Institute Verbiest in Taipei. Through these institutes, the Foundation wants to develop research on the history of the Church in China as well as developing there pastoral collaboration with the Church.
- To help the Church in China most effectively, It is better to invest in the training of ministers of the Church. For this purpose, the Foundation offers scholarships for the formation of priests, of nuns and lay people. Note that a formation, insured in China, is preferred. The foundation also aimed at higher institutes in China. Likewise, there are priests, nuns and lay people who are invited to receive special training abroad. After their studies, it is advisable that they return to China to serve their own Church. Colleagues from the Foundation are in touch with bishops and religious communities in China. They make sure that the support is used good and correctly.
- In addition, the Foundation also responds positively to requests for help for (small) development projects in the dioceses of North-West China: Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, etc.
- Financial support can be sent to: the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, Vlamingenstraat 1, 3000 Leuven - Current account: 735-0183437-95 (KBC Bank NV, Mgr Ladeuzeplein 19, 3000 Leuven, Belgium (BIC: KREDBEBB, IBAN: BE76 7350 1834 3795) If you wish, you can always take up contact with our secretariat via verbiest.inst@kuleuven.be

courier
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