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Editorial: A double celebration!

Fr. Charles Phukuta cism

Dear reader,

You have in front of you a special and celebratory issue of the Verbiest Courier. Verbiest Foundation Leuven, established in 1982 celebrates its 40th anniversary! As vice-chairman of Verbiest Foundation, and Superior General of CICM, I am pleased to look back, together with you, on 40 years of dialogue with China, inspired by Vatican II, to strengthen unity within the Church. But also 40 years of dialogue with the world, with different religions, and other cultures. Through this dialogue, we want to promote brotherhood, in a world where there are still many prejudices. We are fully aware that dialogue does not always go so smoothly, but inspired by the Gospel and by Vatican II, we understand the misunderstandings we meet on our way, and we continue to build on our path of dialogue. To stress the importance of this spirituality of dialogue, we open this special issue with an article by Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism, in which he clearly demonstrates that our dialogue with China continues, no matter how difficult it may be in today's world! Fr. Jeroom clearly shows that dialogue is part of our history, it is the line that the Church has been following since ages. How the ongoing dialogue between China and the Vatican is being perceived from inside China, can be read at the end of this issue.

The year 2023 also marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of CICM founder Theophile Verbist! Born on June 12th, 1823, he was the one who founded the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary (CICM-Scheut),



Colleagues of Verbiest Institute Taipei

Editorial

together with priests from the local Belgian Church. Verbiest Foundation obviously feels very close to the congregation, demonstrated by a.o. the focus of our research program on the “History of CICM in China”. In this special issue of the Courier we wish to give more attention to that history. A history not only about cism fathers, but also written by cism fathers. A history originated from the local church of Belgium. A lot has been written about cism founder Theophile Verbist, but the writings of Fr. Leon Leloir are remarkable. He clearly demonstrates the intrinsic connectivity between the congregation of cism and their home church. After the early death of Fr. Verbist, the young congregation was in dire need of a sturdy hand. In the article compiled with materials from Fr. Nestor Pycke cism, and Fr. A. Raskin cism we read how Father Van Aertselaer cism proved to be that skillful and wise organizer. Someone called him the ‘second Founder’ of the congregation, and we dare to agree. When writing about several remarkable figures in cism history, it is almost unthinkable to neglect Fr. Joseph Rutten. Innovator in education, cartographer, pioneer in health care, ... The 7th superior general of the congregation was one of many talents, as is described in this article compiled with data from Patrick Taveirne cism, Dries Vanysacker, Albert Raskin cism, and Jeroom Heyndrickx cism. Next year, Verbiest Institute plans a number of publications on a selection of cism fathers. Among them is a biography of Mgr. Alfons Bermyn, the apostle of the Ordos. In an article based on data from J. Van Hecken cism, we become witness of an episode in this man’s life, whose “apostolic zeal and his ardor” became a model for his confreres. Another book which Verbiest Institute very recently published, is the Chinese translation of the biography of Mgr. Hubert Otto cism. We read in this Courier how Sr. Gaby Yang, who is the editor of the translated book, describes her view of this “Good Shepherd”. Verbiest Foundation’s research field on Mongolian Studies is growing. One cannot say Mongolian Studies, with-



Colleagues of Verbiest Institute Leuven

out saying Antoine Mostaerts cism. Fr. Jeroom narrates in a personal article, how he has gotten to know this man as one of the greatest experts in Mongolian studies. We continue our overview with some shorter articles, testimonies, on pioneers in China. Dr. Marc Janssens writes about his family member Mgr. Louis Janssens cism, the bishop of Jehol. We have also compiled an article about Mgr. Carlo Van Melckebeke, who worked relentlessly for the overseas Chinese. Fr. Albert Geusens cism describes in his book “China, Yellow and Red” his experiences in communist China. We publish a small selection of this publication, in which we meet Fr. Tops cism. Fr. Ignace Rybens cism, who established the Holy Rosary parish in Taiwan, is described by Fr. Frans De Ridder cism and in an article we publish thanks to Willy Hertecant cism and Jos Nijssens cism, we meet “the Lion of Flanders”, Octaaf de Vreeze.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas, and a blessed year 2023!

Our dialogue with China continues!

Jeroom Heyndrickx cism

To dialogue with the world is the core of our Mission

Verbiest Foundation (VF) was established forty years ago (1982), not long after China’s Cultural Revolution ended. From the beginning its goal was to dialogue and establish a relationship of exchange and cooperation with the People’s Republic of China. Some of our friends at that time did not understand this option, some even opposed it openly. But VF is inspired by the Gospel and by Vatican II and by *Ecclesiam Suam*, the encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI that promoted dialogue. To meet and dialogue with the whole world is the core of our Mission. To abandon dialogue entering in confrontation and conflict with China and the Chinese people would be unwise and would be a denial our own Christian identity. These thoughts inspire the Church and VF also now that China just prolonged the term of President Xi Jinping for a third term. The following day we

learned that the Holy See had prolonged its agreement with China. A coincidence.

In our time of globalization, intercultural dialogue with all peoples and cultures is a must

For VF that includes of course first and foremost dialogue with China, but also with many Chinese communities worldwide: Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, S-East Asia, USA and Europe. In Chinese it means *Dialogue with Zhonghua (中华) communities*. We are fully aware that we live in a time of globalization. The world is rich with a wealth of different cultures. They can all enrich each other. In fact they need each other. But they can discover cultural values in other cultures only on condition that they get to know each other by intensive communication.

History tells us however that in the past the opposite happened. One culture imposed itself upon other cultures even destroying them as if its own culture was the only valuable one. Today we are alarmed because we observe that the same is happening again in the world today.

Through history the Church has accepted the challenge to enter in dialogue with other cultures

Christian Churches have once upon a time also imposed some of their own cultural values on foreign countries. Still, history shows that Christian missionaries mostly showed an attitude of respect to local cultures. When the Nestorian missionary Alopen brought the Gospel to China in the year 635, he honored the emperor and asked for approval to spread his faith in China. Two years later, after the imperial court had investigated his book, Alopen obtained permission and was even assured of official support. Only then did he start preaching. Johannes de Monte Corvino ofm did the same in the 13th century when he obtained approval from the Mongol emperor during the Yuan Dynasty. As to the Jesuits in the 17th & 18th centuries – Matteo Ricci, Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest – China appreciates their efforts to adapt their preaching to Chinese traditions and culture. That period in history is till today in China marked as “the good time of E-W cultural exchange”.

The trend to dialogue set by the Church was the fruit of an historical document called “*Instructions to the missionaries*” promulgated in the 17th century by the then newly created *Propaganda Fide* of the Holy See. If one wonders what the attitude was of the Church towards various cultures, one must study this long document. In it Rome gave missionaries a stern warning ordering them to respect the culture of the countries where they preached the gospel and to confirm the local people in their love for their country. It shows that the superiors of the Church at that time had some pioneering ideas of openness towards dialogue which they frankly shared with those missionaries who were not ready to adapt to different cultures and to dialogue. Attempts made in that line even caused division in the Church because of which the pope – most unfortunately – had to safeguard the Church’s internal unity and stop the accommodation efforts of the Jesuits in China. The Church leadership was ready for the accommodation and dialogue – as they had approved it – but some missionaries were not. For unity’s sake the Church opted to stop the praiseworthy initiative.

In the past Sino-Vatican dialogue has also been hampered by interference of politics

What stopped the positive trend towards dialogue were the imperialistic and colonialist policies of political leaders in Western countries Britain, France and others. They turned the ongoing dialogue into the dramatic conflicts of the Opium War followed by the Boxer Rebellion which was beaten down by the 8 Western armies that invaded Beijing. That historic trauma remains till today at the bottom of misunderstandings between China and the West. Both China and the West have not been able to grow across that historic drama. Confrontation today between China and the West can only be understood against this background.

Efforts towards dialogue by the Church today is a courageous attempt to contribute towards passing beyond that historic drama. Pope Paul VI and other predecessors of Pope Francis promoted the line of dialogue. Perhaps surprisingly but surely the well-known anti-communist Polish Pope Paul J-Paul II fully supported the line of dialogue. When speaking about China he only sought dialogue in mutual respect, avoiding conflict even though he himself was confronted with several well-known situations of possible conflict. It is generally accepted that the historical letter to the bishops and faithful of China which was promulgated by his successor Benedict XVI had in fact been drafted at the request of Pope J-Paul II and by a team directed by him. That letter remains the clearest call of the Holy See for dialogue in mutual respect with China. Anyone who keeps this whole long historical background in mind understands why Pope Francis today so courageously signed an agreement with the China of Xi Jinping despite opposition and criticism of political leaders and even some





Archbp. Costantini

Church leaders influenced by them. One wonders whether the interference of some Western politicians in the Sino-Vatican relations in the 19th century will not repeat itself today. Open aggressive criticism coming from some political leaders in the US makes us wonder.

After the events of the Opium War and the invasion of Western armies in Beijing, the Holy See made attempts to restore relations with China by setting up a diplomatic Mission in Beijing. Towards the end of the century both Beijing and Rome had even agreed on that and appointed ambassadors, but the French Protectorate managed to block the attempt. Both China and Rome were powerless. It was finally Pope Pius XI who in 1922 – a time when France and Europe were still painfully recovering from World War I – took advantage of that dull situation and quietly appointed Archbishop Costantini as Apostolic Delegate. The decision was even kept secret until Costantini had already arrived in Hong Kong and was ready to enter China. The arrival in China of Archbishop Costantini as Apostolic Delegate proved to be the historic breakthrough for the Church. Liberated from previous political interference from the West the Church in China suddenly made unprecedented progress. Only two years later all bishops in China met in the historical Synod of bishops

in Shanghai (1924). Never before had there been such an openly organized thorough sharing and planning for developing the Church in China. The synod was followed in 1926 by the memorable ordination by the pope in Rome of the 6 first Chinese bishops. Through the 1920's and 1930's new Regional Seminaries were established in China which considerably improved the level of seminary formation in direct response to the urgent request expressed by Pope Benedict XV in his Encyclical *Maximum Illud*. In 1946 Pope XII followed this up by raising the Apostolic Prefectures in China to the status of local dioceses with their own bishops. It meant that the autonomous (not “independent”!) *Local Church in China* was established with Cardinal Tian Gengxin as its first cardinal, also the first cardinal in Asia. This shows what dialogue can achieve if it succeeds in liberating itself from political intervention of political leaders. The Church today will hopefully learn from that experience.

Will politics of certain powerful countries again succeed in blocking Sino-Vatican dialogue?

Pope Francis signed an agreement with the government of Xi Jinping. His courageous decision to dialogue is entirely in line with the policies of his predecessors. Some shepherds and faithful of local Churches in East and West – especially the “underground” in China – have silently voiced out their doubts, even disagreements. They have reasons for it. Pope Francis himself understands and respects those who have objections in conscience. He stands with them even if they are unable to follow his path of dialogue. It shows a Church in agony for its internal unity, confronted with different views yet remaining united in faith. This shows once again how different the religious field is from politics.



Synod of Bishops in Shanghai



Le Pape Pie XII et le Cardinal Tian Gengxin

Today the Church, just as it happened in the 19th century, is challenged to avoid interference of political powers in its Sino-Vatican relations. Objections of some local Chinese communities against dialogue are understood and respected by the pope and the Church in general, but the criticism against the pope's agreement voiced by some politicians of Western powerful countries are politically motivated. They only serve their own country or political party while causing havoc to the Church by sowing division. Among their victims are known leaders of local Churches

Keeping the line of dialogue open is the most efficient way to support the Church in China

Thanks to 40 years of dialogue VF built up a rich program of exchange and cooperation with China in the fields of academic

research, formation, and cultural exchange. Changes in China's religious policy before 2020 reduced already several activities of exchange inside China, and as of 2020 Covid-15 virtually paralyzed the formation and cultural exchange programs. In 2022 China elected a new direction for the Chinese Bishops Conference (CBC) and Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA). VF accepted the proposal of the Bishops Conference to reactivate all previous ongoing activities of exchange as soon as the situation of Covid-19 allows it. Concretely this may imply that VF welcomes in 2023 a Church delegation from China to visit the Church in Belgium and perhaps organize a delegation from Belgium to China.

VF also accepted the proposal of the Bishops Conference to plan, even during the Covid-19 period, to organize a conference online on Sinicization. It is commonly known that China has its own interpretation of "Sinicization". Rather than refusing to dialogue on it without knowing what is meant by it, VF opts to listen first try to understand and then express our own understanding of what we understand by 'inculturation'. This implies a double challenge: first listen and ask for clarification of what we do not understand properly on *Sinicization*. Then find qualified scholars to explain the attempts of the Church during the past 400 years towards *Inculturation* and the new vision of Vatican II about it. If no mutual agreement is reached now, we will patiently continue to dialogue in the hope of reaching that point one day.

Crucial in all this is that we keep the dialogue line open to everybody. We may not exclude anybody from our friends in China, in Taiwan or the various Chinese communities, nor friends in Rome and Europe. If the Church community is divided, we go out of our way to communicate with all sides. The moment we exclude one side we betray our option for dialogue. Crucial is that we learn to listen to each different viewpoint and find the words and the courage to also express our own expectations clearly and friendly. We carefully stick to our field of religion and culture and avoid being lured away from it into the political field by those who constantly try to confuse the communication. To do all this implies a lot. It means that we must learn a spirituality (or if you prefer an *attitude*) of dialogue. That will take us some years, but it is the best way to serve the Church in China and serve the Chinese people.



Concelebration of Chinese Bishops with Cardinal De Kesel, in Mechelen, 2019



Cardinal Danneels in dialogue with civil authorities, Beijing, 2005

Theophile Verbist, Founder of the congregation of Scheut

Fr. Léon Leloir



P. Théophile Verbist

Fr. Léon Leloir was a Belgian White Father, who was in the 1930s the responsible editor of the magazine *Les Grands Lacs*. It produced a dozen issues a year, focused mainly on North Africa and the Belgian missions. Leloir became a national figure giving regular talks on the radio. The text hereunder is based on his description of Theophile Verbist, and the congregation of Scheut. In his talk - first on the radio in August 1938, and later published - he gave several characteristics of the congregation, namely: Apostolic, Marian, and National. After briefly explaining what he means with the first two characteristics, we focus on how Scheut grew out of the Local Church of Belgium and could count on its support:

An Apostolic congregation

As a first and essential character, the Congregation of Scheut bears that of being apostolic, it is an exclusively missionary Congregation. From Theophile Verbist's correspondence, we can clearly see how he attached great importance to the qualifications of his missionaries. He wrote from Si-wan-tze to the confreres who had remained in Scheut, "I think it prudent to advise you not to precipitate the acceptances... Believe me, you need a lot of virtue, and love of suffering for the good Lord; otherwise you will be completely disillusioned. Please send us only men of proven virtue".

A Marian congregation

How could it have been otherwise for a Congregation born on this soil of Flanders, where Mary is prayed to as perhaps nowhere else? How could they not have invoked her especially those future apostles who would soon greet in her the Star of the Sea and the Queen of Martyrs? The chance of circumstances - or rather the conduct of Providence - gave this young Congregation an external Marian stamp which Fr. Verbist's will had already marked internally: the care of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace, in Scheutveld, at the gates of Brussels, was entrusted to him in 1862, when their residence was not yet established in the shadow of the ancient pilgrimage.

A congregation supported by the Belgians and Belgian Church

One of the most striking characteristics of the Congregation of Scheut is however that it is a national congregation. The Congregation of Scheut is Belgian by its origins, its first nucleus was a group of young vicars from Brussels, and by the support it received since the beginning from the Belgian royal family. Yes, the Congregation of Fr. Verbist is essentially Belgian and national, but it never altered its Catholic character or entailed, either in fact or in the mind of the founder, anything exclusive or untoward. Verbist left us a lesson to meditate on by all those who are afflicted today by the chauvinism of some, the antipatriotism of others. Once again the founder of Scheut had found the wise middle way.

Scheut originated from the diocesan clergy

To this national character, the Congregation of Scheut adds another note that distinguishes it and completes its own physiognomy: it comes from the diocesan clergy. All that it has, all that it does, all that it is, it received it from the secular priests and the hierarchy of our old Christian countries. The diocesan priests are in fact the ones who, thanks to their courses in the colleges and the parishes, and thanks to their leadership, have prepared the missionaries for their important work.

But there is a more intimate collaboration between Scheut and the clergy than elsewhere. The first priests that joined the congregation were secular priests who were already trained and exercised by a few years of ministry. The Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary owes something to this intimacy (which is easier to see than to analyze) between its own spirit and the spirit of the clergy. It has always retained a special sympathy for college professors and parish priests, which has contributed in no small measure to the abundance of its recruitment. Let us note here that unlike what is usually done, no religious order presided



The chapel of Scheut (1863)

over the formation of the first novices. Their spiritual heritage is directly inherited from the clerical education reviewed at the Major Seminary of Mechelen by the first Scheutists.

Fully supported by the Bishops

It can be said that the Belgian bishops did not collaborate as effectively and as perseveringly in any other missionary foundation in our country.

On August 1, 1861, on the occasion of the annual assembly of the Belgian bishops, the founder and his first companion, Louis Van Segvelt, entrusted their project to the episcopate. This first opening was the beginning of a long correspondence, filial and trusting on the one hand, reserved and cautious, but soon warm and encouraging on the other, between Fr. Verbist and Cardinal Sterckx, then Archbishop of Malines. We cannot quote everything; but we pinpoint this sentence of the Cardinal writing to the humble founder on July 19, 1861:

Fr. Aloïs Van Segvelt

“I will let you go with pleasure, convinced that Divine Providence will give me other excellent priests in place of the one I am deprived of.”

Fully supported by the Belgian Catholics

On August 22, 1863, at the eighth session of the first Catholic Congress held in Malines by the Belgian Catholics, Theophile Verbist addresses the members of the meeting. Present were Cardinals Sterckx and Wiseman, the future Cardinals Dechamps, Mermillod, Vaughan, Prince Albert de Broglie, the Count of Montalembert, Charles Woeste, Guillaume Verspeyen, Auguste Cochin, Edouard Duquetiaux, Prosper de Haulleville, and a number of other “personalities”.

Mr. Verbist soon appears at the tribune. He is a tall and strong priest, red-faced, with a head framed by a profuse chestnut hair that comes down in curls on the nape of his neck. He looks like a colonel in soutane.

Perhaps no other congregation met, from its birth, as many authorized sympathies as the Congregation of Scheut. It is really hand in hand with the Belgian bishops and the Roman authorities that the military chaplain Theophile Verbiest founded it in 1862.

In contrast to some initiators who believe that they can better realize their so-called apostolic plans by maneuvering behind the scenes rather than playing fair, by hiding rather than obeying,



The first house of cicm. From here, the first group left to China.

the founder of the missionaries of Scheut carried out his work and made it God's work by opening up widely about his plans - as soon as they had reached a certain maturity - to Cardinal Sterckx, archbishop of Mechelen, and to Cardinal Barnabo, then Prefect of Propaganda. If this sincerity and this spirit of submission forced him to modify a little the first conception of his work, they gained him at first in the high ecclesiastical spheres that quasi-official patronage that a Superior often and willingly grants to the one who is before him like an open book. Then they created in the general public around the foundation of the Scheutists that atmosphere of sympathy that always arouses in the same man the conjunction of heroism and balance, enthusiasm and reserve.

What happened was to be expected in a man of his calibre. Chaplain Verbist, perhaps the first propagandist of the missionary cause in Belgium, soon found that there were better things to do than to send out circulars, give lectures, and go from door to door and from class to class. A man of one piece, logical and loyal, he soon became convinced that a missionary at the front leads better by his example than a missionary at the back by his words; and he took up again with new acuity his already old dream of leaving himself for those lands where the little Chinese whom the Holy Childhood helps live.

In April 1863, Fr. Verbist and his first companions inaugurated the common life in a small house on the Ninove road, which today bears the number 361. They waited there until July 12, 1864 (one year and three months) for the arrival of a fifth confrere: Jacques Bax, then vicar in Montaigu, who would become the first bishop of Scheut. The Dutchman Hamer was to follow closely. Alas! We have said it: he embarked on September 19, 1865, arrived at Si-wan-tze on December 7, 1865, and died in the heart of Mongolia two years and two months later. Verbist was one of those men of God of whom Scripture says that because they lived in Christ, their fruits would endure.



Cardinal E. Sterckx

Mgr. Jerome van Aertselaer: the co-founder of the CICM congregation

Nestor Pycke & Albert Raskin



Jerome Van Aertselaer was born in Hoogstraten on November 1, 1845 and was one of four sons who all became priest. His brother René was for some time Provincial Superior of the Redemptorists. After his humanities studies in the minor seminary of Hoogstraten he studied philosophy in Mechelen. As an exceptionally gifted student Jerome presented himself at Scheut and was immediately sent to Rome in order to continue his studies. There he witnessed both the first Vatican Council as well as the taking of the papal States. After being ordained priest in 1870 he returned to Scheut, left for Xiwanzi in 1873 and stayed there until 1885.

During this period Father Van Aertselaer showed his readiness to be available for everyone and everything: teacher and director of the seminary, mission procurator, parish priest among the Mongols at Boro Balghasu, founder of a teacher's training college and liaison agent in the Blue City (Suiyuan) ...Wherever he came he started working: setting up constructions, already at that time sharing responsibility with laymen and even suggesting new and daring plans to the Bishop. But the most he felt at home in the seminary where he served in a dedicated way. About this readiness Father Jerome himself testified in a letter: "Our only concern must be to go joyfully where we are being sent..." According to father Albert Raskin cism, whose texts in CICM profiles are the basis for this article, Father Van Aertselaer "kept his good humor, did not dramatize difficulties, and in spite of everything, still could narrate his experiences with a speck of humor..." And one of the difficulties occurred in 1884 when a typhoid epidemic threatened his life. Father Van

Aertselaer escaped by an inch but Father Jeroom François, only one year in the mission, didn't survive. This unforgettable experience marked the life of Father Van Aertselaer.



Superior General

In 1885 he was elected to become Assistant of the Superior General. Consequently he made himself ready, although it was painful for him to abandon

his mission in China. Together with father Albert Guely, he assisted and advised the Superior Vranckx, a challenging task. At that moment the statutes were not yet solid enough to build a new congregation upon. And even more, Rome had not yet handed corrections to the first texts. According to Albert Raskin "...the Superior General had a tendency to procrastinate and looked up against renewals. Finally, Father Vranckx resigned

at the advice of the Archbishop. As he said himself, he felt tired and preferred a less heavy task."

Sometime after the former Superior had left, the by Rome revised CICM Statutes arrived at Scheut and for the first time they were named "Constitutions". They still had to be discussed and accepted by the Scheut members. And of course these new Constitutions stipulated the rules for electing a new Superior General. The interim direction of the Congregation was entrusted to Archbishop Goossens of Mechelen, who sent in 1886 a positive report to Rome: "no particular financial worries; discipline at the motherhouse was excellent; the amended Statutes will henceforth give the mission more solidity and will prevent frictions such as unfortunately occurred in the past..."

Mgr. Goossens asked the congregation to organize a General Assembly in China where the amended Statutes would be discussed, a new Superior General would be presented and the question of starting a new mission in Congo would be dealt with. The Assembly took place in May-June 1887 at the mission of Ehrshisanhao and towards the end of the discussions, Father Van Aertselaer was elected Superior-General. Although Rome still had to confirm this choice, the Archbishop of Mechelen had already entrusted the direction of the Congregation to the Superior-elect and to his Council: the Fathers Albert Gueluy, Adolf Van Hecke - the delegate from Kansu - and Karel Sante, an Ortos-missionary.



Mgr. Van Aertselaer amidst his missionaries in Xiwanzi (with Fr. De Smedt at his side)

Constitutions

In 1888 Rome approved both the Constitutions in their corrected form - and this for ten years - as well as the choice of the Superior General. Pope Leo XIII confirmed this in a decree of May 23, 1888 and now the new Superior General, together with his council started to give the Congregation a solid base. The missionary Congregation needed to be reorganized in order that the missionaries would be inspired with a true religious spirit. Because, as Nestor Pycke cicm writes: *"...In fact, numerous missionaries were living like secular priests..."*



VAN AERTSELAER Jeroom
方濟眾 恩洛 1845-1924 Xiwanzi

One of the strong convictions of the new elected Superior General was that without perpetual vows by the majority of CICM fathers, both the Congregation as well as its apostolic works would never gain stability. After all up to 1887, twenty five years after the foundation, no one had yet taken perpetual vows. To set the example Father Van Aertselaer, together with Father Guely, his first General Councillor, committed themselves definitely to the Congregation on November 21, 1887.

Organising missions and congregations

In the by Rome revised Constitutions the preferred option was to split the authority - distinction between provincial superior and bishop - in the missions. As a consequence the new general superior Van Aertselaer together with this council implemented this rule and so four religious provinces were erected in China, each with his own administration. *"Shortly before, Ili, a territory in Chinese Turkistan which had belonged to Kan-su until then, had been declared an independent mission. Later, China had its own CICM's procurator's office in Shanghai (1892)"* we read in CICM Profiles by Father Albert Raskin cicm. The general superior gave a lot of attention to the organization of the novitiate and to ecclesiastical studies. Together with his team he correctly carried out the directives of the Constitutions. He also felt the need of more missionary propaganda. Implementing one of the recommendations of the General Assembly, he started a periodical of its own to make the work of the congregation known and appreciated. In 1889 the first issue of the CICM annals appeared separately in the two national languages: "Missions in China and in the Congo". One of the reasons that this missionary periodical came, was the acceptance of a new field of apostolate: the Independent State of the Congo. Convinced by the Fathers Gueluy and Van Aertselaer the General Assembly at Ehrshihshannhao had reacted positively to King Leopold II his repeated request that CICM should take over this mission.

Back to China

When his term of office as Superior General was almost expired both the confreres in China as well as the Councilors proposed him to succeed the late Mgr. Bax. Rome confirms this choice in 1898 before the opening of the General Chapter.

In 1898 Father Van Aertselaer was ordained bishop in the collegiate Church of Anderlecht in Brussels and then he left for China. As he had not been in China for ten years he had to get accustomed to new situations. When the bishop arrived in his vicariate of Xiwanzi, he had little time to reaccustom himself. In 1899 mgr. Van Aertselaer could visit his vicariate in peace but the Boxer rebellion became a steadily growing threat; which in 1900 came at its peak. Father Raskin sums up Mgr. Van Aertselaer his heavy cross, brought about by this rebellion: *"...5 of his already so few missionaries and about 2000 Christians killed; in certain villages, rows of houses devastated; many churches and chapels destroyed..."*

Mgr. Van Aertselaer needed a difficult time to claim the damages which the Chinese government had promised as a repair-payment. And then the bishop started with the reconstruction and the development of the mission work in his vicariate. To write down all his initiatives would be an endless work. Let's mention some important features: the formation of seminarists and catechists; his innovations in the field of education for the girls, increase charitable institutions, founding new mission statements, erecting congregations and fraternities...the many letters the Bishop wrote in the course of all these years. Father Raskin evaluates the letters of Mgr. Van Aertselaer as follows: *"...One is struck by the close contact he maintained in this way with his missionaries as well as with his Chinese priests, a proof of the fatherly interest he showed in them...Then there was the great pain of heart every time one of his missionaries died: more than 30 times he had to bear this sad news. And how often was it a young Father, another victim yet of typhus! In spite of everything, he remained serene, trustfully abandoned to the Lord...With the same serenity Mgr. Van Aertselaer put his fate in God's hands when his turn came to take leave of his life..."*

The bishop died on January 12, 1924. Because of his admirable talent, an unlimited generosity, and all his achievements Father Van Aertselaer proved to be a skillful and wise organizer 'in multa patientia' and someone called him the 'second Founder' of the congregation. This allegation is for sure correct and during time evolved towards the name co-founder.



Celebration of Mgr. Van Aertselaer's 25 years as a bishop in Tchagar, in 1923 surrounded by cicm missionaries such as Fr. Verhaert, Fr. Raskin, Fr. Conrady and others, and Chinese priests

Fr. Joseph Rutten: The multi-talented seventh superior general

The redaction, based on Albert Raskin cism, Prof. Dr. Dries Vanysacker, Patrick Taveirne cism and Jerom Heyndrickx cism



Joseph Rutten was born in 1874 in Clermont-sur-Berwinne (near Liège, in Belgium). His father was mayor of the village and leader of the Catholic party of the region. Young Joseph attended primary school at Clermont and finished his secondary studies in the nearby city of Sint-Truiden. He entered CICM in 1894. Four years later, he was ordained to the priesthood. In consideration of his brilliant talents, he first taught philosophy for three years, and then left for the vicariate of Xiwanzi in China.

Pioneer cartographer

At the end of 1902, he was appointed secretary of Bishop Van Aertselaer. To carry out his task, he not only had to write reports and letters, but also had to accompany the bishop on his tours around the vicariate. These journeys were no pleasure trips: they were often made in winter, in Arctic cold, and on roads that the snow hardly made passable. Under these circumstances, Father Rutten had to carry out an extra task: to take topo metric data of the whole vicariate of central Mongolia in order to publish a faithful map of this region which was still partly unknown.

During the months at home at Xiwanzi, Father Joseph also taught canon law and sciences at the seminary. That was no easy task, for, owing to the lack of suitable text-books, he had to write the courses almost all by himself.

An innovator in education

In the course of his many journeys in the vicariate, Father Rutten had come to the conviction that knowledge of Mongolian could be of considerable help for the apostolate. In the meantime, he himself started this study, insofar as his other occupations left him the time for it. Bishop Van Aertselaer however appointed him as parish priest in Nanhaochan. Father Rutten set up a school in Nanhaochan conceived along modern lines: a teachers' training college for boys and one for girls. This college was to supply the missions of Mongolia with competent and well-educated

school masters and mistresses. During meetings and synods, he would miss no opportunity to call attention to the absolute necessity of modernizing the schools, and even establishing secondary and university education.

Undoubtedly, Father Rutten's plan had something to do with his contacts with Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Mechelen, and Msgr. Ladeuze, chancellor of Louvain University. He had asked if young Chinese Catholics could come over to continue their studies there. The best among them could then become professors in Peking. The two prelates had given their whole-hearted support to the project, but unfortunately, the Chinese revolution in 1911 and the first World War hindered the implementation, at least in the form planned

A bold pastor

In the apostolate also, Father Rutten showed himself to be resourceful. While creating his teachers' training college in 1905 and running it until 1920, he governed the parish of Nanhaochan which covered an immense territory. His name became legendary in the whole district, owing above all to the fact that during the troubled years of robbers' bands, he had organized, in agreement with the civil authority, Christian citizen militia. Thus he managed to keep the associated villages in relative peace and security.



Fr. Rutten (center) at the college of Nanhaochan

Seventh Superior General

By the end of May 1920, he was at Scheut, where the Chapter was to begin



Fr. Rutten met Dr. Tchang, met de Chinese dokter Tchang, bij auto van de Blauwe Stad is gekomen om de inspectingen te doen tegen de typhus. Rechtsaan de kamer v. O. Provinciaal; O.B. Molle (besjelede auto) en O. Jansen (achter de auto) staan voor de kamer te kijken.

P. Rutten with Dr. Tchang, who arrived by car in Suiyuan to administer vaccines.

soon. The third General Chapter began on June 16, 1920, and ended a month later. At the sixth ballot, Father Joseph Rutten obtained the absolute majority of votes and thus became the seventh Superior General. During Father Rutten's generalate, the limits of the mission territories entrusted to the Congregation underwent important changes.

Daring initiatives

The initiatives that Father Rutten took in mission territories show him particularly as an energetic man with insight into the future. First, there was the language school at Peking for young CICM members. This example was followed by the Jesuits, the Franciscans and other orders or congregations. Another initiative of his which proved to be extremely fruitful was the erection of the regional major seminary at Tatung, the first of its kind in China. The pooling of efforts of talented men guaranteed the quality of priestly formation. In 1927, the first CICM novitiate for Chinese candidates opened in Tientsin. There were three novices: Philippe Wang Yuanchin, who was a priest in Pingliang, Joseph Chang Shouyi, who was in the prison for many years, he died in 1991 in China, and Peter Chang Wenchao who, in 1948, paid with his life for his heroic courage under the Communist terror.

A pioneer in health care: Suiyuan Hospital and the battle against typhus

At the request of Fr. Rutten, Fr. Leo Vendelman cicm (Gierle) started building the Catholic Hospital at Suiyuan (Hohhot) in 1921. Rutten's intention was threefold: (1) to build a hospital of several pavilions and adapted to the climate, where a maternity was also provided, (2) to establish an attached Catholic

school for male and female nurses (3) and to set up a microbiological laboratory to prepare vaccines against epidemic typhus. From 1922 on, a Chinese hospital in the same street turned out to be highly competitive, since local people distrusted western medicine and physicians. Only through the work of a small dispensary during its construction could the hospital upon its completion in 1924 gain the confidence of the local people. Rutten's suggestion for the doctors to speak the Chinese language and learn the local customs without a doubt contributed much to this.

Within a circuit of 600 km, it became the only hospital that could provide specialized medical help: 120 beds – equipped for surgery, radiographic and ophthalmic examination, obstetrics – electrotherapy – pharmacy – laboratory and a training school for male and female nurses. In total, 400 Chinese priests and missionaries and as many religious worked in 212 remote villages in Inner Mongolia and served 600 substations. They attended to wounded persons and sick people among the local population. Gravely sick people were brought to the hospital in Suiyuan.

In his report at the 1930 Chapter, Father Rutten voiced his concern about fighting typhus. 72 confreres had died of exanthematous typhus, most of them young. In September 1930, thanks to a papal audience with Pius XI, a former papal nuncio in Poland, Rutten got to know a Moravian biologist Dr Rudolf Stefan Weigl (1883-1957) at Jan Kazimierz University (1919-1939) in Lwow (now Lviv in Ukraine) who had developed the first effective vaccine against the epidemic typhus. In January 1931, with the help of his former student Dr Joseph Tchang and a team of medical doctors, Rutten established a microbiology laboratory in Kalgan, later moved to Fu Jen University in Beijing, for the development of a Chinese vaccine. Two Chinese doctors and four nurses vaccinated hundreds of missionaries annually in northern China from 1933 to 1936. In February 1936, Rutten was finally able to prove the effectiveness of the Weigl vaccine.

Rutten did not believe in the idea of a priest-doctor, but a priest had to keep abreast of medical developments. From the end of 1933 to 1939, he was a member of the Synodal Commission in Beijing and was appointed to inspect seminaries and medical work, such as the prevention of the spread of diseases and infections, the improvement of hygiene and the organization of health services in Catholic missions. He was also appointed director of the Catholic Medical Service in Beijing, from 1935 to 1940.

In 1947, he returned to Europe. He died on March 18, 1950 at Pau, in France, not far from Lourdes, where he had spent the winter months in a presbytery. His mortal remains rest at our cemetery of Zuun: the first CICM member to be buried there.

Fr. Alfons Bermyn, the apostle of the Ordos

Based upon J. van Hecken

Alfons Bermyn was born in St. Paul de Waes, Belgium, on 3 January 1853. He was ordained a priest on 10 June 1876. He joined the CICM Missionaries on 4 March 1878. He went to Mongolia to preach in the same year. In April 1901, the Holy See appointed him as Bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Suiyuan to replace Ferdinand Hamer, who died in the Boxer Rebellion last year. He was consecrated on 26 January 1902. He died on 16 February 1915, aged 62.

Father Bermyn left for China in 1878, became District Superior in Siao-k'iao-pan (Klein Brugge) in 1886 and in 1891 Provincial. In April 1901 he was appointed Apostolic Vicar as successor to Monsignor Hamer, assassinated by the Boxers in July 1900. Here follows a presentation - According to Jozef Van Hecken, Bishop Alfons Bermyn. Document over het Missielevan van een Voortrekker in Mongolia. Eerste Bundel, pp. 154-186 - of an episode in the life of Father Bermyn, since his return in China after the General Chapter in 1898, until his appointment to the episcopate in 1901. We see at work an energetic and enterprising missionary, faced with enormous difficulties, after the Boxer Rebellion, when the vicariate and the Christians knew extreme destitution and disarray.

By his apostolic zeal and his ardor for work Bermyn is for his confreres a model and a stimulus. He knows no peace. His efforts are constant to win catechumens. In October 1899 he prepared confirmands for the sacrament of confirmation. On the day of the Epiphany four young confreres arrive at Poro Balgason, Bermyn will take care of their initiation. The days are busy, the future is bright. But ... !... It was precisely on these days that trouble broke out in the city of Ning-t'iao-leang. The military mandarin founded a section of the Boxers. Posters appear proclaiming: "Support the dynasty! Death to Christians!" The Mongols are also beginning to stir. The main ruler of Tjoengar has been ordered by the imperial government to exterminate Christians and missionaries. The Otok, the Woesjin and the Tjasak call their soldiers to arms. Quite unexpectedly a courier arrives at Poro Balgason, it comes from Eul-che-se-k'ing-ti, sent by Monsignor Hamer. The Bishop summons the Provincial for consultation. It is necessary to deliberate and take important decisions because the situation is dramatic: everywhere threatening posters against Christians and missionaries, catechumens are driven out, Christians murdered...Bermyn leaves on July 15 with two Mongols. He leaves reluctantly but the Bishop calls him! On July 22 he is already in Siao-noor. There he learns startling news: the destruction of the episcopal residence, the imprisonment of Bish-

op Hamer and the martyrdom of many Christians. Survivors of Eul-che-se-k'ing-ti assure him that the mission of Siao-noor will be attacked at night. But Bermyn still needs a bit of a rest, having completed a 20-hour stage! Christians are well disposed, they declare themselves ready to die for their faith. But Bermyn orders the Chinese priest to leave without delay with his Christians.



Bermyn was the leader of the fortified mission against the numerous and fanatical enemies. In total there were 342 people there, including 14 fathers (including 5 Italian Franciscans), a hundred children and more than 200 Christian refugees. Food supplies were sufficient for a month. It took great confidence to endure the impending trial...A serious fact was the death of Father Jaspers, killed by an enemy bullet. His confreres buried him hastily, without the knowledge of the Christians, to prevent discouragement. By all means the mandarins tried to get the Fathers to leave the fortified mission. They made nice promises saying that they were not their personal enemies and that they would assure them of a safe return to their country. But the Fathers understood well that once outside

the walls they would be delivered without the slightest doubt to the arbitrariness of their enemies. Their response was firm: "We are not leaving!" The following days, September 8 and 9, the mandarins are there again, eager to begin negotiations. The conditions are the same, and so is the answer: "We are not moving from here!" How to explain this determination? Bermyn had amazing fortitude, he found it in prayer. His confreres often found him in the church, kneeling before the tabernacle. One day when the Mongols were in retreat half an hour from the mission, Bermyn had left the rampart and was walking alone in the fields when he suddenly noticed a troop of 60 enemy horsemen at close range. He began to wave his arms and shout very loudly, supposedly to call his men to the assault. The horsemen, seized with panic, fled at full speed...

September 29 was the day of liberation for the besieged. The hostilities ended, now they could leave the stronghold and

move around safely. A Te Deum was sung but several victims were mourned: Father Jaspers and eight Christians killed by bullets, and the loss of a girl from the Holy Childhood on the night of the flight. In the neighborhood eight churches had been pillaged and destroyed by fire; the helpless Mongol Christians were scattered and abandoned among the pagans. In the district of San-tao-ho it was no better: ten churches demolished or burned down; fleeing missionaries. What had become of the Christians, the nuns, the orphans? San-sjeng-ko-eng was occupied by the Alasjan Mongols, and the lamas had made the beautiful church a temple of their worship.

In the eastern district the ravages were most serious. All the churches, seven in number, destroyed by fire. The Chinese priest Loe drowned in the Yellow River, thousands of Christians murdered, hundreds of women and young girls of the Holy Childhood deported to the west at 3 p.m., and sold to Muslims. Monsignor Hamer put to death in atrocious suffering! The vicariate had lost its Bishop. To Bermyn now fell the task of directing the vicariate in ruins.

Was all his labor useless? Nope ! He had toiled, suffered and struggled, not for himself, but for the glory of God and for souls. The next day, in this dirty shed, he celebrated his jubilee: the 25th anniversary of his priestly ordination. In his heart he sang a song of thanksgiving for all the blessings received from the Lord during these years, and he renewed his vow to consecrate himself for life, in the mission of Ortos, for the salvation of his dear ones. Chinese and Mongols.



BERMYN Alfons
 閔玉清 1853~1915 S-w Mongolia

A few days later he heard the news of his elevation to the episcopate. On April 15, 1901 he was appointed Bishop of Stratonice and Vicar Apostolic of Southwestern Mongolia. "I hope," he wrote to his superiors, "that you will pray for me and for the mission. The Lord is almighty and a loving Father. With his grace I will fulfill my duty. I will do what I can to respond to his grace." He chose as his motto "In Cruce salus": it is in the cross that we find salvation.



Mgr. Bermyn with his confreres in 1904 in San-tao-ho

A Belgian missionary who loved the Chinese people - Bishop Hubert Otto

Gaby Yang Aikun



Bishop Otto, picture taken in 1931

The recent years, I regularly read the biography of Bishop Otto. His words and actions seemed to come alive before me, because in his words and actions, I could experience that he brought the gentleness and exuberant fire of Christ to China. Bishop Otto took care of others at all times in order to bring the Chinese to the Lord, even those who cheated his money. He lived in China for 62 years, and was ordained a bishop on January 11, 1891, by Bishop Bax Jaak, a CICM missionary, at Nanhaqian Church (南壕壑教堂), in Zhangjiakou (張家口). He dedicated his entire life to his beloved China and never returned to Belgium.

He treated the Chinese as his own people and never looked down on their thoughts and behaviour, instead he tried all his best to learn the Chinese language and culture. He considered the Chinese people “gentle, easy-going and hardworking”. He said: “We Europeans, who are often proud of our civilization, should also be humble enough to learn from the Chinese.” Thus, during his busy life in spreading the Gospel, he managed to translate the Chinese classics: the Four Books (四書), The Book of Songs (詩經), Chinese Classical Studies (中国经典研究), and promoted and encouraged other missionaries to read these books. He said to the Belgian missionaries: “If you read these books, I will give you free cigars as reward”, and from this small action, one can perceive his love for the Chinese. He lived more than a hundred years ago in a time of political turmoil, wars, religious disasters, famine, and plague, and he was strong, optimistic, courageous, and active in dealing with all

kinds of challenges, never backing down. As Mencius (孟子) said: “Thus, when Heaven is going to give a great responsibility to someone, it first makes his mind endure suffering, labor his muscles and bones, starve his body, and empty his body.” I believe that Bishop Otto lived all his life with the spirit of “total sacrifice, true love, constant joy, and always positive” advocated by Fr. Vincent Lebbe. His total life is a book, an example for us all, and I share with you here a small part of the picture of his life.

From an early age, Bishop Otto embraced the idea of “love for all and kindness for all”.

He was born in Brussels, Belgium, into a devout Catholic family with eight brothers, and he was the fifth son. He received his entire education in the Catholic school. His parents led them in Vespers at home every day and on Sundays, the family attended Mass in church. Tao was a naughty boy who often caused trouble in class and was once asked by his teacher to stay alone in the coal cellar as a punishment. He had changed schools for four times. Otto’s mother was then asked to see the priest principal, “Madam, your son is extremely gifted and talented, and has a good and honest character. If he cooperates with the grace of God, he will become a saint in the future. However, if his education is neglected, I wonder what he will become.”

Otto’s father was a businessman and his mother was a religious and charitable woman who always shared one tenth of her income to the poor. When he was a young man, Otto often accompanied his father and brothers on trips to visit the poor, living in the slum communities. The kind words and good deeds of the family, were indeed the small seeds planted in the heart of Otto, for his future missionary career in China.

Vocation of Otto

One night, when Otto was in the fourth grade, he was punished with after-school detention, being locked in his classroom with only dry bread and water. When the priest, superintendent in charge of the school, talked to him, he noticed the sincerity of Otto’s remorse and handed him two beautiful apples, which Otto recalled as the best apples he had ever eaten. A few weeks later, he told the kind priest that he had been longing for becoming a priest. Because of his young age, the priest told him that if he wanted to become a priest, he must first be an exemplary student and pray more to Our Lady and this conversation inspired him greatly and strengthened his desire for vocation. From then on, he studied hard and excelled in studies, and punishment became a thing of the past.

In 1865, shortly after Father Theophile Verbist founded the CICM, Fr. Jérôme Van Aertselaer, a close friend of Otto, told him his plans to become a missionary in China. Thus, one day during the Christmas holidays in 1865, Otto finally rang the doorbell of the CICM. That evening he announced to his fam-

ily that he wanted to become a missionary to China, and his mother readily agreed to dedicate him to God.

He studied theology and ordained in Rome. In the morning of February 21, 1876, he made his first vows at the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary in Brussels. On that same day, Fr. Otto and his companions, Van Sante Karel and Van Watberghe, set out for China from Brussels. After a journey of 68 days, they arrived on April 30, 1876 in Xiwanzi, where the main church of the CICM mission in the district of Inner Mongolia was located.

Great Effort in Learning Chinese

The mission areas of CICM were in Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Gansu and all the way to Xinjiang. They were facing with toiling people who were suffering in lives. In order to better integrate into China and evangelize among the Chinese, he began to spend seven or eight hours a day learning Chinese in his cave dwelling (see picture). He often held a textbook in his hands during the journey and on horseback. When he got tired, he would sing "Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary". Once when he was sitting on the horse and dozing off, the horse suddenly stumbled and fell to the ground, Otto dazed and mumbled "Please pray for us!".

After two years of intensive study, his progress in Chinese was still slow. In order to reach out to the Chinese community, Fr. Otto placed three benches in his small, simple room in order to be ready to receive visiting parishioners and lay people. When the peasants rested in the fields, he sat next to them, brought them fine tobacco from Canton, and blended into their conversation, taking the opportunity to end up by giving them a piece of Catholic doctrine.



陶福音 (17-18岁)

A young Otto, age 17-18

Missionaries on horseback - tirelessly spreading the Gospel

The missionaries of CICM carried out vigorous evangelization work in northern China (the region beyond the Great Wall), spanning 4,000 kilometers from Jehol and all of Inner Mongolia to Gansu and to Ili in Xinjiang. Otto preached mostly to farmers and he kept on visiting the local people in the Mongolian steppes. He travelled to 146 villages in Inner Mongolia, spending three months each winter training parishioners, giving retreats, and running catechism classes. He said, "For almost two months of the year, I could not even relax and sit down for a few hours and whenever I went out, I could not know the exact date of my return." He rode 60 or 80 miles to bring the holy communion to people, to anoint the sick. After visiting the sick he used to have dinner with Catholics and non-Catholics and this was a normal for him.

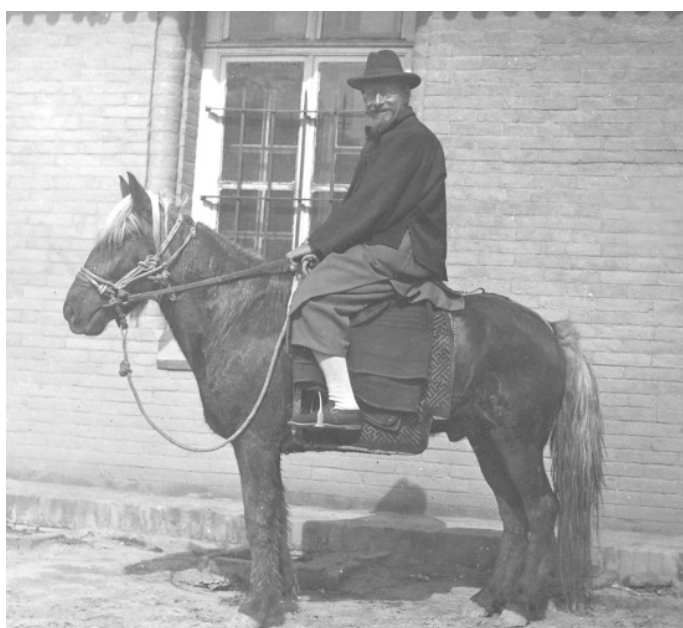
Although the days were hard, his face was always filled with immense joy when he saw the conversion of a village to Catholicism! He also helped an old woman, who had not received the sacraments for seventy-one years, by providing a hospice care to her.

All the people living in the village, became his friends

When Otto was working in the parish of Xiyingsi, the last pages of each of his notebooks contained lists of the parishioners he visited in different places. As a form of almsgiving he often carried five or eight coins in his pocket, and quietly slipped them to the poor and the needy when he was chatting with them. Bishop Otto said: "For me, to know the Chinese people is to love them. I love China, which is one of the most promising countries for conversion among the foreign countries. To sanctify these people through spiritual formation, they can



Cave dwelling of Bishop Otto



become very good Christians. If we love them sincerely, they will love in return". Thirty years later, many of the baptized are proud to call themselves "Christians of Fr. Otto".

In his old age, Otto continued to care regularly for a dozen of elderly people: those with hemiplegia, with bouts of cough, those with eye problems, and those who were lame. Since there were not enough funds to build a shelter, Bishop Otto had to house the elderly men among them in a farmhouse and the elderly women in a room in the orphanage. Among them was a terminally ill man who recalled the pain and misery and failures he had experienced throughout his life, and Otto spoke to him enthusiastically about how heaven would be his happy home, where there would be no more pain and misery! Otto asked him, "What do you want at this moment?" The dying man replied, "Bishop, please give me a large bowl of very spicy noodles." The bishop went to the kitchen and immediately and asked the chef to prepare for him a large bowl of "spicy noodles".

Affirming the evangelization work of Chinese clergy and lay people

During the period of formation session for the catechumenates in Nanhaoqian, he worked side by side for six years with a Chinese priest, Father Ignatius Zhao, whom he called him as "a comrade" in evangelization. He wrote: "Frankly speaking, we would never have been able to achieve what we did without Father Ignatius Zhao". His enthusiasm and talent led him to be called with nickname "King of sermon", "King of doctrine", and even "King of missions". Fr. Zhao was a kind-hearted man, a man of strong faith, and a man of great eloquence, who solved the difficulties of many catechumens on their way to conversion." He was tragically martyred in 1900.

The conclusion of his 44 years of missionary life in China was: the first step in developing new Catholic community was "the



陶福音在李家讲要理

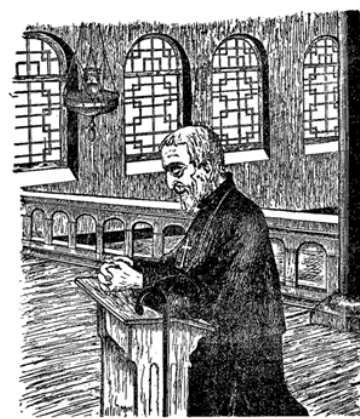
Bp. Otto teaching catechesis in the Li family

establishment of friendship between the catechists and the lay people." He added: "These people simply lacked an understanding of "God is love". His kindness to the local Chinese was more of understanding and respect rather than of sympathy and compassion. Thus, he does not find excuses for the conflicts between the local customs and the Western ideas, because he wisely and sensitively understands their reasons and values of the Chinese people. He described in a praising tone: "Gansu people are kind by nature, gentle, simple and honest, they are faithful to marriage and take good care of it, they have a sense of justice and practice justice. In fact, we only need to incorporate the faith of Christ in their natural qualities."

The ethnicity of Chinese is "Take your time, take your time, and please take your time!" The Chinese are never in a hurry, whether they are going to heaven or weeding potatoes. Although these people are hesitant before conversion, few of them will give up once they make the decision to be baptized. Once they have made a profession of faith, their faith will be deeply rooted. Their commitment will be more in their hearts than in their minds.

A man of prayer

He prayed the way of the cross every day and said the morning and evening prayers and the Rosary in the church with his parishioners daily. Bishop Otto said besides his weekday prayers, sometimes during the day or night, when he had great difficulty in meditating, he would stay motionless in front of the tabernacle worshipping the holy communion, for one hour, two hours, and longer. In a letter to Bishop Goffredo Frederix, Otto mentioned: "I am slow in movement, but my health has not regressed significantly, and I cannot do anything except doing my best to say the Rosary. Every day, I give some spiritual instructions to the nurses and visit the sick, and my mental condition has declined. I also prayed a lot for you, and I waited for that moment, 'for it is almost evening and the night is coming,' when my life is approaching the end."



陶主教长时间的跪拜圣体

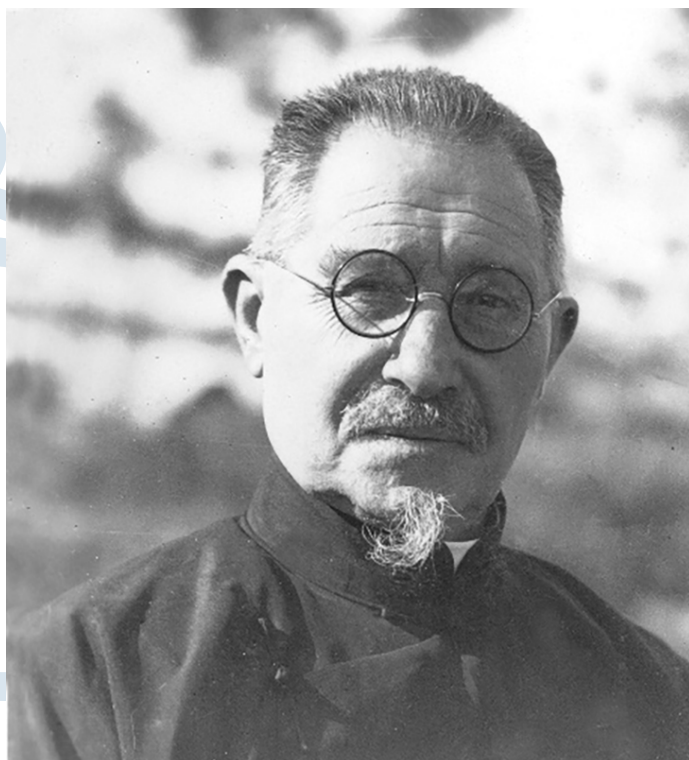
Bp. Otto worshipping the Holy Communion

The whole journey of his life swept through my mind, and now he reached the final point of his life: baptism, vocation, priesthood, episcopacy, China, Mongolia, Gansu, Xiaomiaopan, Ningxia, Hohhot. Bishop Otto is gone, but his spirit of loving God and loving the Chinese people will live in my heart forever. Bishop Otto has become a good teacher and friend in my life, a fireplace of my memory, and a guiding light on the road of my life.

Antoine Mostaert cism, internationally praised as dean of Mongolian studies

Jerome Heyndrickx cism

We still owe him a biography



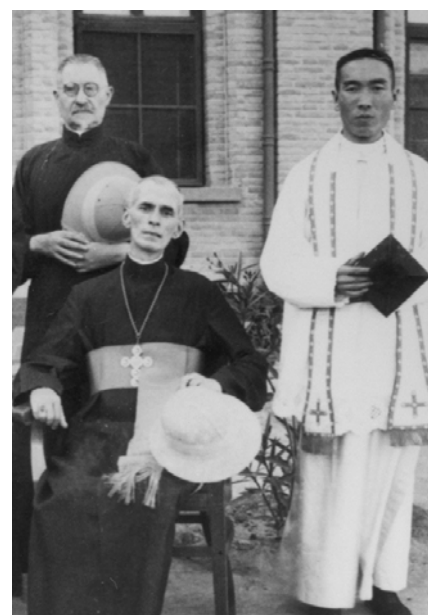
CICM Founder Verbist personally initiated the first CICM China Mission in Xiwanzi (then Inner Mongolia-China). He decided that CICM missionaries should preach the gospel *by priority among the Chinese people*. By this he meant among the people of Inner Mongolia, the mission which was assigned to CICM by the Holy See. Soon after their arrival in Xiwanzi (1865), Verbist and the other CICM pioneers decided that, even though they worked among the Chinese, then the majority of the local inhabitants, they intended to move also into the region where the Mongols lived, namely in Ordos, the area enclosed in the curve of the Yellow River. That's where Remi Verlinden and Alfons Devos went in 1874 with their caravan of camels to start the *CICM Mission among the Mongols*. After weeks of travel through desert land they stopped in a place called Poro Balgasu and decided to make this into their home among the Mongols. That turned out to be a decision of historical importance because Poro Balgasu became the very first Catholic community of Mongols in the history of the Catholic Church. Ever since the twelfth century – 600 years earlier– famous Italian, French, Flemish and other missionaries, sent by the Pope or by the King of France, travelled from Europe as far as Mongolia to spread the gospel: Piano di Carpini, Guillaume of Rubrouck, Joannes di Monte Corvino and others. In the 17th and 18th centuries Jesuit missionaries, Grimaldi and others accompanied Chinese emperors on their visits to Inner Mongolia. They learned the Mongolian language and preached to the Mon-

gols. In the 19th century the French Vincentians (Lazarists)— Bishop Mouly and the famous fathers Huc and Gabet -- took charge of evangelization in Inner Mongolia and did excellent missionary work. They made some Mongolian converts and trained even the first Mongol priest Pierre Tschinglejab. But all these efforts never resulted in the growth of a permanent Christian community of Mongols. Even the Mongol community of Kambalic (Beijing) founded by Joannes di Monte Corvino ofm in the 13th century disappeared after Ming China expelled the Mongols.

Only Poro Balgasu, founded in 1874 by Verlinden and Devos grew into a permanent Catholic community of Mongols. It survived after the invasion of several armies and saw its school, clinic, and church buildings -- all put up at the cost of much pain and efforts -- destroyed and burned down. Poro Balgasu survived it all and is fully alive today as a Christian community with a newly-built church in the middle of the Ordos Desert with 5 Mongol priests (more than ever before) and about 4000 Mongol Catholics in Ordos (also more than before).

Scheut Fathers were admired for their work in the whole of North China but perhaps most of all for their work among the Mongolian people in Ordos.

In the 17th century Chinese immigrants moved into Inner Mongolia even into Ordos where they lived as farmers. The CICM fathers found them more open to evangelization. Most of their converts were Chinese. Evangelization among the Mongols was more difficult and challenging. Mongols lived in their tents spread and scattered across the desert, their language was difficult to learn, and people were socially and culturally hard to reach. As a result only a minority of the CICM fathers worked among the Mongols and learned their language but they succeeded to develop a close and friendly relation with the Mongolian people. Better known among them are Mgr. Alfons Bermijn, Antoine Mostaert, Louis Schram, Albert Desmedt, Florent



Mgr. Mario Zanin, Fr. Mostaert and Fr. Ma Yuan Mu (In Mongol: Mongkedjirghal, the first Mongolian priest from Ordos)



Prof. Weng Dujian and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx, Beijing, 1984

Clayes, Joseph Kler, Jan-Teo Braam, Frans Maertens, Jozef Van Hecken, Remi Van Hyfte, Willy Wammes. Among them Antoine Mostaert undoubtedly stands out as the greatest scholar and pioneer missionary adored and loved by the Mongols, admired and deeply respected as well by scholars in China, Mongolia and worldwide.

In CICM we all learned to know the big name of Mostaert since we entered the novitiate. But besides his great name, his reputation, and some vague notions about his work most cism fathers knew nothing about him. Only after I started to visit China and Inner Mongolia, meeting the local people there and speaking with scholars did I discover step by step how great, but also how humble this confrere was. I hereby share how I learned to know Mostaert. The Christians looked up at him as to a loving old father who understood them and their culture and spoke their language well. Scholars showed deep admiration for Mostaert, great as scholar, kind human and humble as a person.

In May 1982 I met in Beijing Professor Ma Yong, expert in Altaic and Mongolian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In 1981 I had accompanied him during 5 days in Italy after a conference in Trento. He gave me good advice and we became friends. In 1984 he informed me that the old (Chinese) Professor Weng Dujian, a friend and cooperator of A. Mostaert, was the most highly considered expert in China in Mongolian Studies and was still alive. I learned that he was living in Nancizi, within the wider compound of the Imperial Palace, a proof of his high status. I wanted to meet Weng Dujian, went to Nancizi Nr 45 and knocked at the door. I excused myself to the lady for coming without appointment and explained that I came from a Belgian foundation at Leuven University. I was invited inside and before I knew I stood in front of a healthy old professor coming towards me with his walking stick. My brief introduction as cism father and a mention of Antoine Mostaert was enough for old Weng Dujian to reply "Ho, my good old friend Mostaert! The greatest of all Mongolian scholars!" To which I answered: "Ho no, professor you are known as the greatest!". But he insisted replying: "If Mostaert had not decided to leave China in 1949, I am sure the Communists would not have expelled him! He was a man of great merits! I truly consider him as the greatest Mongol scholar". Weng Dujian died only a few years later. The highest Chinese communist leaders attended his funeral and paid tribute to him. I took note of the

friendship and testimony expressed by this great scholar for our future biography on Mostaert.

In 1984 I also visited Hohhot (Inner Mongolia-China). Traveling freely in China I was advised better not to make myself known as a priest. So I rode through Hohhot City on a bicycle among the hundreds of Chinese on their bicycles. This allowed me to communicate with people and obtain some information on how to find places where cism had been active. Unannounced I entered the Inner Mongolian University and was kindly received by vice-rector Baoxiang, a Mongol. He introduced me to the university. As we entered the library, I saw at the wall a row of big photos of the most famous international experts on Mongol language and culture: French, Japanese, Russians, German, Hungary, Finland. Baoxiang pointed to the big picture of our CICM confrere Antoine Mostaert as one of these world-famous experts. At that time all foreign missionaries were criticized as imperialists and colonialists. I was impressed to hear this university vice-rector proudly introduce Mostaert's exceptional contribution to the study of Ordos language and culture speaking of him with great admiration and praise and I thought...*what a pity that we in Belgium and even in CICM ignore this!*

I also found the Institute for Mongolian Studies, in which I freely entered and knocked at the door of an office I chose at random. A Mongol scholar named Qiaoqi sitting at his desk looked surprised when he saw a foreigner walking in. He was visibly relieved when he heard me speak Chinese and invited me to sit down. After introducing myself as member of Verbist Institute KULeuven I asked whether they still remembered Antoin Mostaert. His face cleared up and he pointed to the books on his desk. He was precisely at that time using the Ordos dictionaries of Mostaert. The rest of our conversation was like a chat among old friends exploring ways of possible exchange in research. Only mentioning the name Mostaert was the key that opened the door to friendly exchange. Every conversation with Mongols increased my limited knowledge on the research of Mostaert. It increased my admiration for him as well and my curiosity for learning more about him.

I had the same experience in 1991 in Ulaanbaatar (Republic Mongolia) where I was sent by CICM Superior General De Craene to prepare the new CICM Mongol Mission. I gave priority to meeting scholars in Mongolian Studies as I saw this as a friendly link with the CICM history among the Mongols in Inner Mongolia. Visiting the Academy of Social Sciences I met with Prof. Birra, the head of the International Association for Mongolian Studies. As soon as I mentioned that I was a CICM priest from Belgium he quite spontaneously mentioned the names of Antoine Mostaert and Henry Serruys scholars



Prof. Cleaves

he highly respected. He praised them for the scholarly work done by them and by other CICM fathers. From there I went to the University of Mongolia, Department of Mongolian Studies. Meeting with the direction and with Professor Chagdarsuren the same conversation repeated itself. That was in 1991 when Ulaanbaatar had just been liberated after 70 years of communist rule as part of the Soviet Union. Before I could come up with my prepared proposal about future cooperation

both Prof. Birra and Prof. Chagdarsuren independently from each other voiced out their wish that *if cicm started a new Catholic Mission in Ulaanbaatar we should set up a "Mostaert Center" for promoting cooperation and exchange in Mongolian studies.*

I was also received by vice-premier Minister Dorligjav. It appeared that he had been duly briefed on the CICM scholars. The very young vice-premier first spent ample time to express the hope that the cicm missionaries coming to Ulaanbaatar would contribute

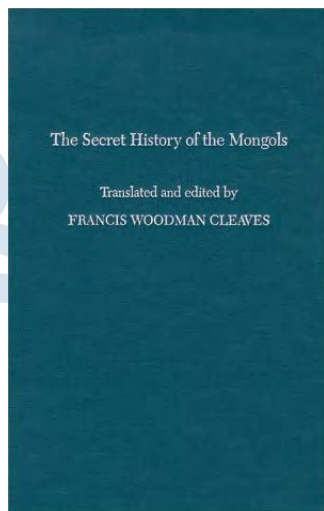
to Mongolia's urgent needs in the social field. Then he referred to what he learned about the CICM experts and added that Mongolia would highly appreciate if CICM could engage also in that field f.e. by *starting a Mostaert Center in Ulaanbaatar.* That Mostaert Center now exists in Ulaanbaatar and is directed by CICM.

All these conversations with Mongol scholars and their evaluation of Mostaert were for me like a general introduction on Mongolian Studies. I learned that Mostaert was famous not only for the dictionaries he published on the Ordos language but also for his research on *"The secret history of the Mongols"* which is the most difficult and specialized field in Mongolian research. It's an old Mongolian document about the ancient history of the Mongols. While writing the 'secret history' the authors still wanted to keep it secret to outside-readers. They invented a cryptic script by writing the sounds of the Mongol words in Chinese characters. Reading that written text makes no sense at all. Only an expert in Chinese and Mongolian -- entirely different languages -- could, at the cost of much research and guessing discover its meaning and translate it back into Mongolian. As a result, no correct and understandable translation had ever been made of the document. Antoine Mostaert knowing both languages so well was one of the few experts able to translate it. Francis Cleaves, an American Harvard

expert on Mongolian Studies had cooperated with Mostaert in Beijing. After the Communist take-over both of them went to the USA. Mostaert lived in the CICM house *Missionhurst* in Arlington (Va) while Professor Francis Cleaves was teaching at Harvard from where he continued to work on the translation of the *Secret history of the Mongols*. But he almost entirely relied on the advice which Mostaert sent him by post. I was told that they exchanged about 500 letters which all were in the hands of Francis Cleaves who, after retiring in the 1980's, lived like a Mongol all by himself raising horses like on a farm far outside Boston.

As director of the newly established Verbiest Institute at Leuven University I felt that we needed documentation on this important aspect of Mostaert's work. Being in the USA in 1988 I obtained advice from Harvard University and went to find the kind old Francis Cleaves to ask whether we could make copies of the letters for our archives and for our future study on Mostaert. He firmly promised to allow it but just as kindly asked me to wait patiently *till he would finish his research.* But I knew he had retired and stopped all research, putting all his time in raising horses. I made a second attempt two years later but again failed to obtain the copies. The many Mostaert letters and several unfinished manuscripts were left in Cleaves' archive and library when he died... Still, my visits and long conversations with good old Cleaves left on me a deep impression of these two exceptional scholars and their love for the Mongol people, their language and culture. I kept wondering...*the greatest experts in China, in Mongolia and in Harvard highly praise and appreciate our dear old Mostaert. We must initiate formal research on Mostaert before it is too late...we owe it to him to write a good biography.*

Our intention to promote research on Antoine Mostaert was already written in 1981 in the very first memo of the CICM Chinese Province about our intention to establish Verbiest Foundation. That project delighted the old CICM missionaries from



Prof. Walther Heissig in the old City Hall, Bruges, 1993.



Prof. De Rachewiltz and P. Dr. Patrick Taveirne cism, Verbiest Symposium 1993

Inner Mongolia who were then still alive. Henri Serruys hearing about it replied: *Finally! Happy to hear that CICM is still interested in China!* It motivated him and his brother Paul to donate their libraries – including books of A. Mostaert, Louis Schram and others – to our foundation. A few years later the famous Mongol expert Igor de Rachewiltz (University of Canberra, Australia) offered his personal library to Verbiest Foundation saying (in a letter to me personally) *“Believe me father, these are scholars who – as researchers as well as human persons – are of a level that we do not find any more in our days. My library belongs together with the books of Antoine Mostaert and Henry Serruys.”*

In 1993, Verbiest Institute Leuven organized its 4th International Conference. None of the old CICM Mongol experts could participate and none of the younger CICM still spoke the Mongolian language but many famous old international scholars, friends of Mostaert, were still alive. Moreover, CICM had just initiated its second Mission among the Mongols, in Ulaanbaatar (1992). CICM Superior General Michel Decraene had called on Verbiest Foundation to actively join that new CICM effort to start a 2nd CICM Mission among the Mongols. We saw that as the revival of an old CICM dream and decided to dedicate our 4th conference to *Antoine Mostaert, CICM Missionary and Scholar*. International famous Mongol scholars understood and responded by participating personally. That made the conference into the main contribution so far of Verbiest Institute Leuven to Mongolian Studies.

Verbiest Foundation hoped that a formal delegation from Inner Mongolia could be allowed to travel to Belgium to participate in this academic event. We even organized an encounter with then Governor Zhao of Inner Mongolia. Our hope was that the governor himself, or a delegation appointed by him, together with the Catholic Mongolian bishop Joseph Ma Zhongmou of Poro Balgasu could be allowed to attend. But the time for that was not ripe.

Some of the scholars honoring the conference by their presence and contributions were a.o.: Walther Heissig (Universität Bonn), Klaus Sagaster (Universität Bonn), Françoise Aubin (CNRS, Paris), Fujiko Isono (Latimore Institute, Tokyo), Igor de Rachewiltz (Australian National University, Canberra), Tsevel Chagdar-suren (National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar), Eerdunmengke (Normal University, Hohhot, China), Jacqueline Thevenet (Université Paris X, Nanterre), Veronika Veit (Universität Bonn), Alice Sárközi (University of Budapest, Hungary), Patrick Taveirne cism (Verbiest Institute KULeuven).

The papers they presented were published in volume IV of *Leuven Chinese Studies*. Volume V included publications by Antoine Mostaert: 4 translations and 16 research

works. As scholars presented their papers the atmosphere was marked by the repeated esteem and high respect expressed by all speakers. This reached its peak when Fujiko Isono invited the audience to listen to the registered voice of Antoine Mostaert speaking Mongolian. There was a silence in the room as all waited to hear the ‘great master Mostaert’ himself speak Mongolian. After the conference the participants visited Bruges, the hometown of Mostaert to honor him at the academic session organized by the city government at the old city hall.

The 1993 conference on Antoine Mostaert, CICM Missionary and Scholar was not the only contribution of Verbiest Institute to Mongolian Studies. In 2004 the institute published the doctoral dissertation of Patrick Taveirne CICM on *Han-Mongol Encounters and Missionary Endeavors. A history of Scheut in Ordos (Hetao) 1874-1911* (Nr XV of *Leuven Chinese Studies*). A third academic contribution was the International Conference in memory of Henry Serruys in Nanjing. The papers were published in *The Mongols and Sino-Mongol Relations 14th-20th Centuries* in Nr XXXVI of *Leuven Chinese studies*.

We are aware that we must fill an important void in our research. CICM and Verbiest Institute owe it to Antoine Mostaert, one of our most prominent scholars to write and publish his biography making him known for what he was: a great friend of the Mongols, a missionary who cared for them and an outstanding scholar of Mongolian language and culture. Maybe that can be undertaken by the efforts that are underway between CICM, Ulaanbaatar Diocese and Verbiest Foundation Leuven to revive Mongolian studies and reactivate cooperation between the Chinese Memorial Library at Verbiest Institute Leuven, Ulaanbaatar Diocese and A. Mostaert center (UB Mongolia).

Mgr. Louis Janssens, the bishop of Jehol

Marc Janssens

Lodewijk was born in Stabroek, near Antwerp in Belgium on October 24th, 1876 as the third son of Josephus Janssens, a farmer, and Maria Josephina Verbist. Lodewijk was 12 years old when his father passed away. While his brothers ran the farm, Lodewijk (everyone called him Louis) went to the minor seminary in Hoogstraten, and afterwards joined CICM. He studied philosophy in Scheut and theology in Leuven and became a priest on 14 July 1901. There he learned in full detail the atrocities of the Boxer uprising against missionaries. It did not deter the young priests and they praised the courage of their confreres.

After a short period of teaching philosophy in Scheut, he left on 15 September 1903, along with 15 other young missionaries, by train for China, via Siberia and Manchuria. With four, they disembarked in eastern Inner Mongolia, 500km northeast of Beijing. There, Louis was given his Chinese name Nán Fú Min or “He who enriches the people”. He would remain closely associated with education at all levels throughout his life. “Enrich” in his Chinese name therefore means enrich with knowledge. After studying language, the young missionary soon became a professor at the Sung-shu-tzui Mayor Seminary (SSTT) or “Our Lady of the Pines”, the episcopal mission post of the church province. After the dramatic drowning of Father Albert Breyne, he became the director of the “Episcopal College Our Lady of the Pines “ in 1906. As the need for good local teachers was great, he founded



the “Congregation of Chinese Brothers of the Sacred Heart” in 1910; his life’s work. He made efforts to raise education to a high standard and meet the rapidly changing demands of the Chinese government. On several occasions, this threatened to make the courses impossible. Educating young people was one

of the focal points of Christianization. Christian education from childhood was the best guarantee of a deeply religious community in a country growing up with Confucius and Taoism.

In 1912, he narrowly escaped death from a typhoid infection. More than a quarter of the Fathers in eastern Inner Mongolia, later Jehol, died of the disease until a vaccine arrived in 1931.

Louis had not come to sit safely in the strong-walled parish to smoke pipes and drink tea. In 1918, Bishop Koenraad Abels finally appointed him parish dean of Hata (Chifeng) district in the province’s harsh north. These were the four happiest years of his life. He toured around and baptized in the poverty-stricken area. On one such tour, he was involved in an exorcism. A thrill-

ing story he detailed in a letter to his sister, Berta. She carefully kept every letter, more than 200. The collection is archived at KADOC in Leuven.

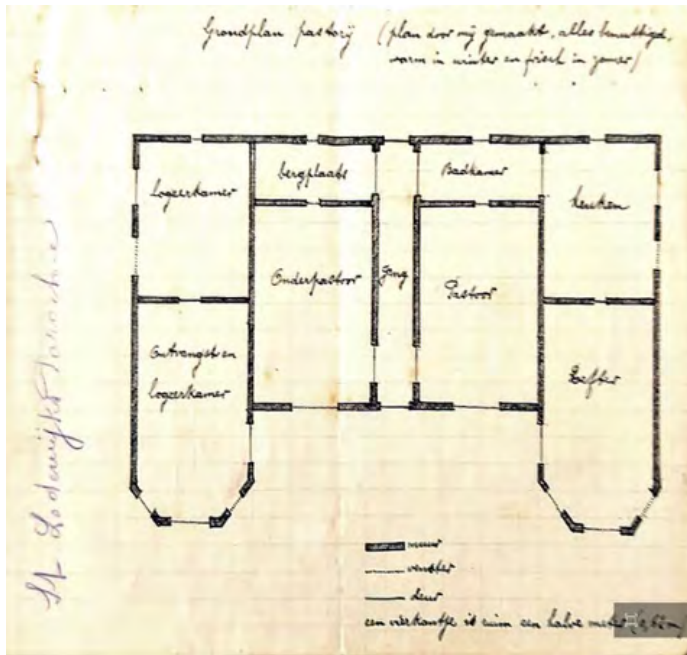
Bishop Abels fell ill and asked Rome for an auxiliary bishop. By a large majority, Louis was nominated as a candidate by the Jehol chapter. The Holy See appointed Louis Janssens bishop of Faustinopolis and auxiliary bishop to Bishop Abels, with the



Mgr. Janssens, Mgr. Abels and confreres



Consecration of Mgr. Janssens



Building plans for St. Louis parish church

right of succession. The consecration took place on November 26, 1922, 100 years ago. He chose as his motto: "In omnibus Caritas" or "Love in all".

After 20 years, he came home for the first time. He went for an audience with Pope Pius XI and received relics of St. Therese for his mother. The latter had been waiting for his arrival, so she could die in happiness. During his leave in 1923, he delivered the opening address at the first Missiological Week in Leuven, and on his way back to the mission he participated in the First National Council in Shanghai. These two events were turning points in missionary activity in which a desire was expressed for the Chinese clergy to take the lead of the local church. Back in Mongolia, he was tasked with the long and distant confirmation journeys during bitterly cold winters down to -30°C. In a donkey cart, among robbers, warlords, communists and Kwomintang (republicans), who made the neighborhood unsafe and fought each other, he travelled all over the province. The only weapon he took with him were the relics of Saint Theresa, and they always helped.

With the financial help of his sister and sympathizers, he had St. Louis parish founded at Ljoefinnti near Hata in February 1929. Father Emiel Mommaerts became the first titular priest. Louis drew the plans for the church buildings himself and was proud of the result.

In 1935, he founded the Catholic Action in the vicariate. Christianization would henceforth be carried out by the local Christians under Louis' leadership. Meanwhile, the Japanese had occupied the area and they suspected Louis of espionage and anti-Japanese actions. Especially the Catholic Action meetings, which he did together with Father Octaaf De Vreese, were targeted and suspected of conspiracy against the regime. The police followed him closely and knew better where he was than his confreres knew.

Jehol was annexed to the Archdiocese of Manchuria and separated from the other Scheut provinces. Louis brought Father

Tagutchi, a Japanese in Manchuria, to Jehol in an attempt to please the Japanese government. Maintaining political relations with all governments was crucial. Taxes, education regulations and building permits could thus be turned to one's advantage. In 1939, he undertook a trip to Japan to seek Japanese Catholic education for the brethren.

Christmas Day 1941, at the declaration of war after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Bishop Janssens was arrested and thrown into prison in Jehol (Chengde). Together with quasi all other Jehol Fathers and Canadian friars (La Société des Mission Etrangères de la Province de Québec (SME)), the Japanese interned him in the Siping concentration camp.

During their internment, Bishop Abels died lonely in the Pines on 4 February 1942 and Louis became Bishop of Jehol. The young Fathers then had a hard time in the Moukden concentration camp. Older Fathers, including Louis, were put into exile in the Pines or in Ling-Yuan.

After the war, China was immediately thrown into the conflict between communists and republicans. Once again, Louis was *persona non grata*. He had to flee several times and organized the shelter and evacuation of his sisters, confreres and brothers from Beijing. Our Lady of Pines was completely destroyed and a severe ordeal followed for the fathers, resulting in death for some. Fully immersed in the conflict, and devoted to his diocese, he came in disagreement with the congregation and the Holy See on how to handle things, and resigned as bishop of Jehol. Louis was appointed bishop of Acarasso. With the communists at Beijing's doorstep, he had to flee from a certain death. He returned to Belgium on 7 December 1948. Monsignor Janssens remained in intense contact with his faithful, confreres and brothers from Jehol. He gave lectures throughout the province of Antwerp to obtain donations for his mission. Weary, but active to the last moment, he died at his sister's house in Antwerp on 12 April 1950. He was buried in Zuun, in the private cemetery of the Scheutists, among his confreres.



JANSSENS Louis
南阜民 1876-1950 Rehe

Bishop Carlo van Melckebeke and the overseas Chinese Catholics



Carlo Joseph van Melckebeke was born in 1899 in St. Joosten-Noode, Belgium. At age 17, he joined the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) in the middle of the First World War (1914-1918). Ordained to the priesthood on 24 September 1922, van Melckebeke served as a missionary in China for about 30 years. After learning the Chinese language, he served in three parishes on the Loess Plateau in North China for a decade (1924-1933). Upon his second arrival in China, he became the rector of the Catholic Hospital in Guisui (capital of Suiyuan province, later renamed Hohhot) for a further decade (1936-1946), which overlapped with the difficult time of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). This is elaborated by Bibiana Yee-ying Wong in her lecture on 'Making disciples of All Nations: Bishop Carlo van Melckebeke and his Apostolate to the Chinese Overseas': "In March 1943, he was among the approximately 200 Belgian and Dutch missionary priests and sisters in the four vicariates north of the Great Wall seized by the Japanese troops and sent to the Weixian internment camp in Shandong province. Thanks to Archbishop Mario Zanin 蔡寧 (1890-1958), Apostolic Delegate to China, who succeeded in negotiating with the Japanese military authority, five months later the Catholic missionaries were transferred from the camp to church premises in Beijing, where they were put under house confinement, but with relatively more freedom of action, until the surrender of Japan in August 1945."

After being named the First Bishop of Ningxia when the vicariate was elevated to a diocese, he received his episcopal consecration from Archbishop Morel cicm, on 30 May 1946. In 1952, the Communist takeover saw him being expelled from China. We read in the already

mentioned lecture the lecture of Bibiana Wong: "...In the first year following the Communist "liberation" of Ningxia in September 1949, Bishop van Melckebeke was able to manage his diocese normally, including making tours to visit various parishes and administering the sacrament of confirmation. His bishops house in Shaanba (Shenpa), however, was largely occupied by Communist officials setting up a grain warehouse in early 1950. "The occupant became more and more demanding, and we had to struggle to keep a few rooms available," he recalled. His last pastoral journey was undertaken smoothly from May to August. According to a Communist report, about 300 people of Sanbian (abbreviated name for the three counties of Jianbian, Dingbian and Anbian) in northern Shaanxi province brought their livestock and travelled a long way to meet the bishop. Local officials looked on and took no action against his visit. The higher authorities regarded it as an abuse of the policy of religious freedom, and therefore from September onwards all foreign missionaries were ordered to apply for a pass in advance of any tour. As Bishop van Melckebeke commented, the new regulations made it "practically impossible" to go out. Nevertheless, he could maintain contact with his priests. They organized the Legion of Mary, a lay apostolate association that yielded tangible results in vitalizing enthusiasm and devotion of Catholics. They distributed prayer books, pamphlets, religious images, and medals, as well as publishing a guide for catechists in parishes without priests. Meanwhile, the Communist authorities stepped up their efforts to take control of the church. When their agents had collected the necessary material to convict the Belgian bishop, he was arrested in April 1952. After five months of inhumane prison life, he received a "humiliating but perfunctory public trial" in mid-September, in which neither the clergy nor the Catholics of Shaanba took part. The bishop and his secretary, Father André van den Eerenbeemt 德隆教 C.I.C.M. (1912-1958), were then escorted to the port city of Tianjin. On October 6, the Communist police officers left them on a vessel, which was sailing southward to Hong Kong the following morning. The voyage took five days. At that time, fourteen Chinese priests of



Bishop Carlo Van Melckebeke and Chinese priests



Mgr. van Melckebeke, Singapore 1970, with Fr. Alfons Labaere

his diocese were in prison, but some twenty priests that still had relative freedom were determined to perform their duty to the end..."

In 1953, the Holy See appointed him to be the Apostolic Visitor of the Overseas Chinese. Bishop van Melckebeke then set up his office in Singapore where he established the Singapore Catholic Central Bureau (now called Carlo Society). The aim of the Bureau was to maintain links and promote and coordinate activities among the dispersed overseas Chinese Catholics, as well as to oversee the welfare of priests and seminarians from China who could not return home. Most of them ended up serving in Malaya and Singapore, contributing to the rapid development of parishes between 1954 to 1976. Fr Paul Tong, aged 94, of Sacred Heart Church, who recently passed away, was the last surviving member of this group. Bibiana Wong explains: *"According to the directives by Propaganda Fide, the Apostolic Visitor was responsible for the care of all the Chinese seminarians and priests outside China, who had been placed under the jurisdiction of Propaganda Fide, until they could return to their home diocese and place themselves there under the immediate dependence of their respective ordinaries. In addition, the Apostolic Visitor was to coordinate and promote the Catholic apostolate to "provide for the spiritual good of the Chinese in Southern and Eastern Asia, whether they are already converted to the Catholic faith, or that they still had to be brought there."*

Between 1953 and 1969, the number of Catholics in the Chinese diaspora grew from 200,000 to around 750,000. Bishop van Melckebeke's most enduring legacy through the work of the Bureau was in establishing more than 100 Catholic libraries in 42 countries, as well as 90 Chinese Catholic primary and secondary schools across Southeast Asia. An Education Foundation reached out to more than 14,000 students with financial assistance.

The Bureau was also responsible for the diffusion of Catholic literature in South East Asia and the bishop initiated several Chinese publications, including the Hai Sing Pao, which until today serves as our Chinese language archdiocesan newspaper. When it was launched in 1955, it was to serve as the Chinese-language equivalent to the Malayan Catholic News.

Today, Carlo Catholic Society is registered as Carlo Catholic Services Ltd and it still runs the Chinese-English bookshop at Queen Street (Carlo Catholic bookshop) next to Church of Saints Peter and Paul. Again Bibiana Wong: *"After his ailing health caused him to fall twice, Bishop Van Melckebeke requested Propaganda Fide to allow him to retire from the office of Apostolic Visitor at the age of 79. He nominated Archbishop Peter Chung Wan-ting DDD (b. 1928) of Kuching, Malaysia, as his successor in September 1977. Three years later, however, Archbishop Chung decided to resign from this post, as he could no longer administer both the apostolate to the Chinese overseas and his episcopal responsibilities—he was serving as the president of the Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, as well as rector and professor of the archdiocesan major seminary at the same time."*

Bishop van Melckebeke passed away on 26 August 1980, aged 82, just one day after his lifelong friend and fellow CICM missionary, Father Anthony Schotte. Inseparable in life and death, they were buried side by side at Choa Chu Kang Cemetery. Nearly 30 years later, on 30 September 2008, their remains were exhumed and on 24 October, interred at the columbarium of the Church of the Holy Spirit which was founded by Fr Schotte, following a Requiem Mass as part of the parish's 50th anniversary celebrations.



VAN MELCKEBEKE Carlo
王守禮 1898-1980 Ningxia

Fr. Geussens and fr. Tops in prison

The redaction



Father Albert Geussens was born in 1915 in Zundert, a small town in the East of Belgium. He went to school in Hasselt and entered CICM in 1934, where he started the formation of novice. He was ordained as a priest in 1940. Because of the World War of 1941, he was not able to go China. Therefore he was sent to the Catholic University Leuven. He obtained a master degree in classic philology in Leuven. During the second world war he was teacher at the college in Hasselt.

In February 1947 he went to China, where he was appointed assistant priest at Ershihsekingti (The 24 village).

During the Chinese civil war, both the Chifeng and Jehol dioceses of CICM were occupied and the missionaries were forbidden to enter China, while their confrères Feeraert, Dom, Conard, and Verhaert were killed. Geussens his hometown is in Limburg province, which we called "Bronze Oak Forest" in Belgium, and because of this, his Chinese name "ÐÐÐ"(Ð, means forest) fits him perfectly. Indeed, he is a wise man who is from the "Bronze Oak Forest".

In September 1948 he became teacher at the college in Palakai and succeeded Father Mooris as director. When the communists invaded North-China, their troops settled several times in Palakai, from where they attacked the troops of the national government. At that time, the situation was getting more and more tense by the day. Geussens complained in his letters about the pressure, with which the Chinese authorities incited people to accuse the missionaries. His Superior Cor De Schutter told him in his letter:

"The Lord will give you enough grace! Keep working and being brave!" Geussens replied: "I am very afraid! May God comfort us! Let us keep this courage!" He was imprisoned on December 29th, 1951 in the Tiger Valley prison. We can understand the situation from what Father Geussens later wrote down.

"I will never forget the pain which we suffered on the road to the prison. It was winter in Central Mongolia, and we were handcuffed with bracelets and ankle cuffs in a rickety wagon for a long time arriving at the Tiger Valley prison." He described the life in prison: "when we lay among the criminals and bandits with the hunger, the cold, the uncertainty of our future, and the threat of death in our stinking prison, we could only think of death, which was familiar to us as an old friend. We were often kicked and beaten in prison, but deep down we felt also deeply the wonderful moments of the holy temple in our hearts, that feeling so precious like a divine consolation and testimony". After the interrogations, guards watched the prisoners day and night to prevent them from sleeping. "The guards watched 40 to 50 criminals, they laid down on the floor, and pushed against each other, in order to make sure the people being awake and asked them to meditate on past horrible crimes against the government and against the people, which they called "self-reflection". If you were sleepy and were caught in prison, you would be taken to the corner where you had to kneel down next to the spittoon, and let your nose touch the dirt stuff on the floor, and you must remain in this position for hours until you could please the jailer. What a disgusting thing!"

He was released from prison and was exiled from China in 1952, at that time, he was 37 years old. Later, Geussens called this experience in prison "He had the privilege of suffering and testifying to the truth".

Father Kerkhofs says about him: "the communists tried to undermine him but they did not succeed. His *Limburger* stubbornness connected with his radiant goodness and his appealing dedication, made him love his Flemish region, but not less the Chinese people and their country where he became Chinese with the Chinese".



Students of the school in Palakai



Fr. Lindemans, Fr. Kerkhofs and Fr. Geussens, after their expulsion from China, in Hong Kong



Wanda Road Rosary Church, the old building

After a period of work in Scheut in Belgium, Albert Geusens was sent to Taiwan, together with Father Van Hyfte Remi, Baert André, and Crevits Piet, to begin evangelization work there. In December 1954, he went to Taiwan. After one month, he started to learn his second Chinese language Taiwanese, he rented a house at 14 Dongyuan Street, where he began to say the mass and to baptize catechumens. Very soon, the space became inadequate, so he bought a land large enough to build a chapel. This was the beginning of the recent flourishing Wanda Road Rosary church.

He established a new parish in Taipei and in June 1956 was appointed director of the Huaming Publishing House, the publicity department of the Huaming Bookstore and Catholic Cultural Center in Taipei. In 1963, Geusens started the monthly magazine *Witness* (at that time, it is called *Catecheticum*), then he hand over the Taiwan Pastoral Center. For the next 40 years, “*Witness*” remained the main monthly magazine in Taiwan for pastoral and catechetical teaching.

In 1971, Geusens had to return to Belgium because of an operation on his lungs, but he did not retire. He began teaching at Our Lady’s Technical Institute in Tongeren and became the

parish priest in the suburb of DietsHeur, where he served as the director of the Christian faith community for 29 years. All parishioners in his entire diocese knew that Geusens was an enthusiastic participant in pastoral conferences, he introduced very often his insights based on his years of being missionary experience. Fr. Geusens wrote about his experiences in China and the Chinese prison in a book called: “*China, Yellow and Red*”. We like to present a peculiar part of it to our readers, in which he describes how Fr. Tops (in Chinese “*Tao Te Mou*”), another Belgian cism, interacts with the prison guards. But we first quote how Fr. Geusens describes his life in China:

“The six years I spent as missionary in China were, despite the sour grapes and much worry and anxiety, despite the sour apples of a hard red prison, the most beautiful and richest of my life. I got to know the Chinese people, to respect and love them in the poverty of their narrow-minded existence and their Old Testament customs, the paradise benediction of many children and great strong families. I took part, rich and happy in the strong fraternal fidelity, the reciprocal, affectionate support, the unexpected joy of the brave brigade, marching on to conquer China for Christ. I had the privilege, in the hard-communist prisons, to suffer and to testimony for the truth and the vital energy, for the divinity and eternal value of the Catholic faith. All that lives in the golden chalice of my most beautiful memories. I offer you a fistful of uncut, rough diamonds.”

About Fr. Tops in the Chinese prison:

An old sick man squatted down in the inner courtyard of the prison. Because of his old age he was allowed every day to sit down some time in the sun and enjoy the fresh air. Behind more than a 100 barred windows appeared alternately grey faces of prisoners. They saw how the anaemic lips of the old sick man moved slowly and how he brings a handful of little stones from one hand to the other. He seems to be counting slowly and prudently. What he does is supposed to impress the majority of the prisoners. They see how the legendary *Tao Te Mou* is growing dull and senile. The communists



Fr. Geussens (left) visiting Hohhot, China, in 1988, with Fr. Frans Peeters cism

finally broke his spirit. Who would recognize in that heap of dirty poverty, playing with little stones the great European boss of the Catholic Church of the village Twenty four. But the Christians among the prisoners know that priest Tao is not dull and that he does not play a senile game, but that he is praying. Every stone passing from one hand to the other is a winged Hail Mary.

On a flat prison roof a guard stands observing him. In the sharp light of the sun, his heavy weaponed dark figure is menacing. On his face an astonished sneer. Would the old proud foreigner be broken finally? It took a long time and a considerable effort has been put into it. Look at him in his worn out and badly smelling misery! He caused a lot of trouble. He considered judges and guards as boring flies and mosquitos. He always carried his proud head upright. But now he is finished. His resistance is broken.

Fr. Tao does not know that the guard is looking at him. He does not see how the astonished sneer of this brutal guardsman's face shows a moment a little bit of compassion. He is too happy for the peace and quiet of this hour, for the goodness of the sun and for the fresh unspoiled air. The sun and the air warm up his old body. A dizziness, as a light drunkenness rises to his head. With a happy smile on his face he murmurs Hail Maries and he thinks about his last wish which will soon be accomplished. After the joy and the pain of almost fifty years of missionary life he has only one wish: to die among the people he has been working for. He feels as an old Chinese farmer who wants to be buried on his own land.

"What are you doing, Tao Te mou?" The guard has descended from the roof as a predatory cat and stands menacing next to the old man. He wants to surprise him with this sudden question. Priest Tao raises his quiet childlike eyes to the dark figure. He smiles as if he awakes from a happy dream. Clear and decided so that all the prisoners in their cells can hear it, he answers: "I am praying". This happy smile and the evident innocence of a couple of eyes from which, also here in prison, radiates an indestructible joy, irritate the guard even more than the unexpected resolute answer. From all sides, behind the prison doors he feels the mocking eyes of hundreds of prisoners. It bothers him to have asked the question and to have received an answer. He cannot let himself exceed by that tiny miserable little man. He cannot lose his face. "That nonsense must come to an end" he says roughly and menacing. The happy amazed eyes of the old man look at him quietly and didn't release him. "Why would I not be allowed to pray?" he asks, in which irony and a fighting spirit are expressed. "You do not have to ask questions here! We command and you obey". With his heavy shoes the brutal man kicks against the meagre ankles of priest Tao. The old man was sitting on the ground. The brutal kick makes him stand up outraged.



Fr. Tops

"You have no right to kick me!". "He speaks about right!" sniggers the guard. He takes his gun from the holster. He waits a minute, aiming the weapon to the chest of the old man. If you go on behaving as you did, I chase you off through the southern gate and shoot a bullet through your head. "Don't wait until tomorrow" the priest answers. "Do it today. You would make me happy". "Shut your mouth or I'll put my fist in it!".

Tao Te mou is not the man to hide into his shell after a provocation. In beautiful Chinese he defies the guard. "Young man you can torture me in your dirty prison. You shoot a bullet in my head. But tell your bosses and the judges that I pray and shall keep praying, every day, until the end of my life". "Stop your bullshit" said the guard. The old man keeps speaking quietly, with some sadness in his voice.

"Man, he says, my mother learned me to pray, when I was a child. Thirty years before your birth I learned your father and mother to pray. And now you are going to forbid me to do it?" "The prison rules forbid it!"

"Your noble prison rules are a demonic mixture of shabbiness". "You insult the government! That is too much! Do not involve the government". Suddenly the voice of the old priest softens. "Boy, – he says – why would I not be allowed to pray in honour of the Allmighty and Eternal God, if you sing every day your songs in honour of Mao Tse Toeng, a human being who tomorrow can die from a cold or an appendix?". The guard seems to be very angry. As a wild barbarian he kicks against the priest's legs and drags him to a dark cell. Behind the walls more than hundred prisoners shout: " Well done, Tao Te mou". No, Father Alfred Tops from Zaventem, the legendary Tao Te mou isn't finished yet. But tomorrow he will not be allowed to warm up in the sun and enjoy the fresh air.



Fr. Tops (centre), with Fr. Aerts and Fr. Van Aert in Gangfanyingzi (ca. 1927)

Fr. Ignace Rybens, a unique missionary

Fr. Frans De Ridder cicm



Ignace Rybens was born on 5th May 1907 in Nieuwpoort, Belgium and joined CICM in 1925. He was ordained in 1931 and on 21th August 1932 he left for China. On 10th March 1981 he died in Taipei.

From his stay in China I know that he stayed in the country for some 20 years without going back home. The Chinese civil war, the war with Japan and the second world war made it impossible for the missionaries to travel back to their own country. Missionaries in these days were scheduled to go back home after 10 years. During the civil war in China, Father Ignace Rybens worked to the best of his abilities showing his original ideas. In China he built his first Church.

With his original thinking, he explained that he had an authority complex. The day his good friend and classmate Alfons Van Buggenhout was appointed as his provincial superior, Ignace went to see him and told him point blank: *"Dear Father provincial, from this day on I have to be against you, I regret, but this is the way I am."* Father Ignace liked to preach with passion. He had a preferential love for Children's Catechesis. During his homilies he used to go around in the church and pointing his finger at each one of them: "At least once a month...come to confession, at least once

a month!". It even happened that he would hear confessions during the Eucharist he was celebrating. People did the readings and the songs...so he had more time for confessions. Is not very liturgical, but it explains his obsession with this sacrament.

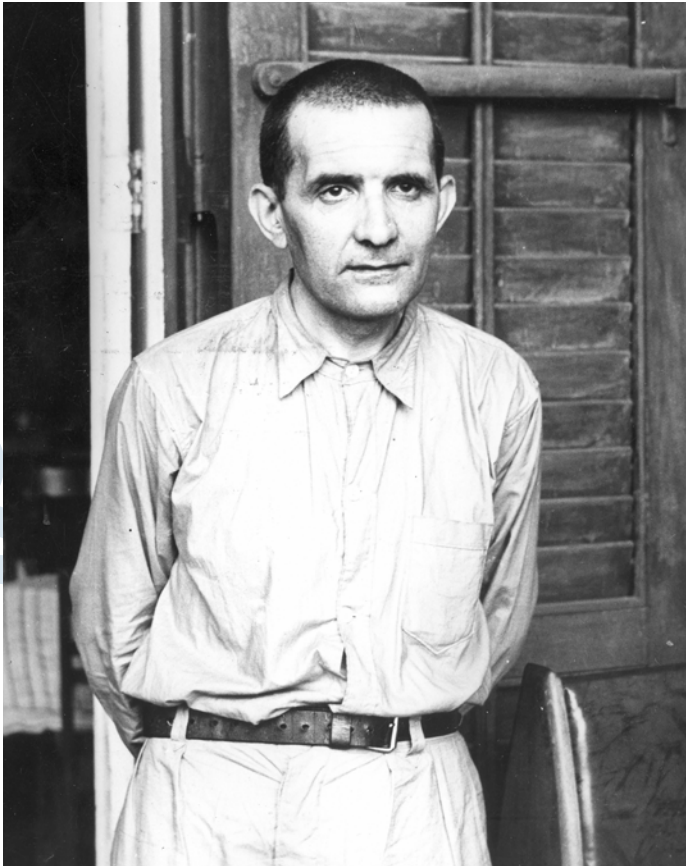
When the communist took power, Christians and Catholics were persecuted. Ignace Rybens ended up in prison for some 34 months: (1951-1954). He was tortured and interrogated, humiliated and accused of being a spy for American Imperialism etc. They were forced to renounce their faith; they had to betray fellow missionaries. Especially the Legion of Mary was targeted. The word 'Legion' sounded like a military term and this roused the suspicion in a country wanting to be atheistic. The time in communist prison must have been terrible months and years, being beaten and interrogated during sleep-

less nights until the poor victim collapsed...and did not know anymore what to say. Dehumanizing on all accounts! "one loses one's human dignity and self-respect..." he would later share. It is not impossible that his 'original' ideas and stubborn character helped him to survive this ordeal. A lot of what these missionaries suffered is written in a book by another CICM missionary in China. His name is Andrew (Dries) Van Coillie. The name of the book in English translation is: *I was brainwashed in Beijing.* Fr. Ignace' name is mentioned in the said book.

Released, exiled from China forever as "enemy of the people"... Ignace Rybens went back to Belgium for a more than deserved home leave... recovering from the 34 months nightmare in Bei-



Fr. Rybens with his students at Hsi-Ts'e-T'ien, 1936



Fr. Rybens after his exile



Holy Road Rosary Church Taipei, today

ging. He was welcomed and almost worshiped like a hero, a saint. I did not find any confirmation whether Ignace Rybens had a home leave in Belgium between 1932 and 1954. Most likely he did not! When in Belgium he went around and visited schools, religious houses and parishes. He shared his suffering and asked for prayers. Wherever he went he would always say: "Pray every day three Hail Mary's for China."

Taiwan: Holy Rosary Taipei

For Ignace Rybens there was only one good choice: Taiwan. His fascination with China - in spite of the 34 months of immense suffering - was stronger than ever. He came to Taiwan in 1955. Soon he became the parish priest of Holy Rosary. He was the one who built the church. It was also the time of the baptism boom. United States Relief Service did a great job to come to the rescue of the more than one million people following Chiang Kai-shek when he retreated to Taiwan: clothing, milk powder, flour to make bread and all what people needed. The churches (Catholic and Protestants) were among the agents to distribute these vital necessities to the most needy ones. The poor people flocked to the churches to get their share. And the zealous missionaries were more than willing to proclaim the Gospel to all who were willing to listen. As a result huge numbers of people were baptized. Ignace Rybens ever shared that at night his arms were heavy, tired just by baptizing people! In this he emulated Saint Francis Xavier, the tireless missionary in Japan, Malaysia, India. I remember that during those days articles were published announcing: "Taiwan is soon becoming a Catholic Nation!" It was not to happen. In our Holy Rosary par-

ish records I could find the number of people baptized during the time Ignace Rybens was in charge of the parish. In 1956: 342 people baptized. In 1957: the high number of 522 people!

Conclusion

Fr. Ignace built four churches in Taiwan. Not a minor achievement! CICM missionaries are known for pioneering and for building churches. There is a saying that (some) CICM missionaries are born with a brick in their stomach. One could wonder where he found the money to do all this. Of course the local people contributed. Yet Fr. Ignace Rybens was also a wizard in fundraising. He wrote many letters to friends and benefactors overseas. He was not shy. He courageously asked people to support his church-building projects, soliciting for money. He himself lived a very sober life with almost no personal needs. In order to generate money he also invested in post stamps. He bought lots of them, kept them in safe place for some years. When they were "ripe" and marketable, he hoped to sell them. This was mainly done after his death. I enjoyed listening to the stories of his missionary life. He would re-enact (say: dramatize) his homilies while feeding us with ice cream. Remarkable man of faith, with many original ideas and a disarming sense of humor! A unique missionary! In more than one way Jesus' words in Jn 15: 13 can be applied to Fr. Ignace Rybens: "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." He gave his life, and like the good seed dying in the ground, new life will burst forth in God's time. His remains are in the Catholic Cemetery of San Hsia.

Fr. Octaaf De Vreese and Rennie's Mill

Fr. Jos Nijssen cism & the redaction



The CICM fathers Snoeks, Van Hyfte, Van Dillen, Verstraeten, Marechal and De Vreese.

Father De Vreese was born in Tielt, Belgium on 21 May 1900. First he was a missionary in North-East China for 29 years. These were years of severe hardship as he had to fight not only the local bandits, but also the Japanese, and later the communists. But Father De Vreese was afraid of nothing, and his indomitable character earned him the nickname of "Lion of Flanders." He was expelled and arrived in Hong Kong in 1956, the last CICM Belgian missionary to be expelled from China.

Because of his knowledge of Mandarin, he went first to the refugee camp of Rennie's Mill where he stayed for six years. In 1962 he was called to start a new mission in Lei Yue Mun and Yau Tong in East Kowloon, where he began St. James Parish. In 1972 he moved to Hang Hau Village, where he worked for the next three years. Eventually, in 1975 and at the age of 75, he returned to Belgium. He served as chaplain in his hometown of Tielt, and retired in the CICM houses of Torhout and Kessel-Lo. He passed away on February 10th, 1996.

In a booklet by Fr. Jos Nijssen cism, Fr. De Vreese describes his arrival and work in Rennie's Mill, after being expelled from China. A one of a kind testimony:

After 10 months of rest I was back among the Chinese. But I was in a strange mood in these new surroundings. Therefore I was happy to have some confreres, I had known in the north. The first was Mgr. Oste, the exiled bishop from the Jehol Mission in Manchuria. I had been working almost 30

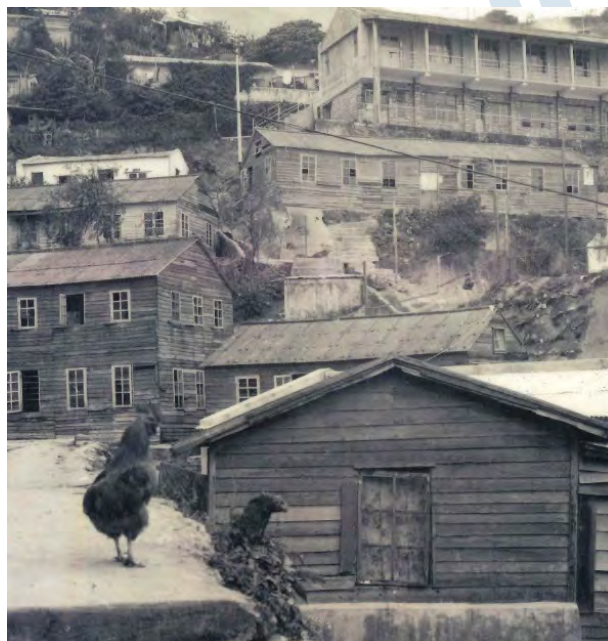
years with him, the other one was Father K. Govaert, my former assistant priest. We spent happy years together, we shall never forget. Together we still speak about that beautiful time and we still say that if China was reopened again, we would be on our way to Manchuria immediately, which has been our second house and home. Now we had to start all over again a completely different work. We still were among the Chinese but the situation was completely different.

Hong Kong exists already 130 years, and it expanded, thanks to the intelligent policy of the British, into a rich city, called the pearl of the East. And it is beautiful especially during the night. Its sparkling yellow red and green lights change the streets into a fairy-tale paradise and pass over the mountains as a ravishing beauty. But if you walk over these mountains in daylight, you will see hundreds of thousands poor huts where hundreds of thousands refugees live, as turtledoves in their nests in the caverns. That is the place where the stateless people live, afflicted by their terrible destiny. They are proletarians, refused by the reds, considered as social parasites, who had to be murdered. They escaped death and fortunately they are still alive.

I wanted to work in their midst, to share their lot. I myself was expelled from China. I would fight for them, for a better world, to repair the injustices they suffered. I had been a missionary among the Chinese and I couldn't be it anywhere else. I was fighting myself to obtain a place as missionary in the kingdom of God. After some days of rest, I went to my new place: a refugee camp, called Rennie's mill.

I took the small ferry called the Shaukiwan and I arrived after half an hour sailing. On the mountain sides I saw a tremendous amount of small wooden huts. It was the 22nd October 1956. The first refugees arrived in 1950. It was a barren mountain, without any tree or vegetable. They put up a triangular tent. They were given some rice by the English government and they ate in big common kitchens. This was poverty but they were still alive and they considered it as a benediction from heaven after the great avalanche of communism.

When I arrived at Rennie's Mill, Father Palmers was there. He had experienced the hard refugee life, and lost weight because eating rice with some vegetables is unbearable for a European. Therefore many left the place, but he remained, which proves his endurance and his supernatural enthusiasm. He was parish priest and supervisor of the primary and secondary school.



Rennie's Mill Village



Meeting of Fr. De Vreese with Fr. André Han and Bishop Tu Shihua at Scheut, 1985.

There was another young Scheut Father named Stassen, who stayed there to collaborate. Moreover there was Father Li, a Chinese priest. Director of the school, an energetic and dynamic man, but with a difficult character.

Every day the church was crowded, they sang prayers as they did in the North. So from the very first day I felt at home. I gave lessons in the primary school. I loved the Chinese children with their notable eyes and small noses. Very different from the North. Here was a furious vivacity, whereas in the North there was calmness and composure. It wasn't all that easy to keep the pupils quiet in the classroom. But after all the soul of the Chinese people is basically the same. Their way of thinking is different from ours and if we do not take account of it, we risk to explain things the wrong way or to misunderstand them.

The pupils came to my room and saw the photos of my family and of the beautiful landscape of Flanders. They were surprised about the beauty of it. They had been told many times that Eu-

rope didn't mean anything. I told them that all this is not a question of quantity. If so the ants would form the greatest empire in the whole world. It was not a question of bigness either. If so camels would be the strongest. It is not a question of richness either but of love, as proclaimed by your great man Confucius "Seu hai cheu nei tou hsioungi ye". This means "that between the four seas we are all brothers. You love your country, and that's all right, but you expect that I would hate my country, that is not Christian love but paganism and its false principles. I have a big nose and Father Lebbe had a big one as well, but he did never cut off his nose in order to be a better Chinese. All that is snobishness and false science".



Fr. De Vreese, praying in Diksmuide (Belgium)

Working among poor people is not easy. The mission had been founded without any strategy nor prospect, because they were expecting it was not going to last a long time and that they soon would have the possibility to go home. So a lot of families were living within the compound of the mission, and that was an annoying situation.

The Verbiest Foundation celebrates together with Scheut

Pieter Ackerman & Hugo Vanheeswijck

Founded by cicm in 1982, Verbiest Foundation [VF] feels close to the congregation of cicm. Not only are eight cicm confreres one way or another still actively involved in working with VF, but even the focus of our research is on the "History of CICM in China". Over the past 40 years VF published 55 articles on the topic and 15 volumes. When cicm became officially international (Albano Chapter, 1974) cicm had already been expelled from China where Founder Verbist had started. As a result, young candidates joining cicm novitiates in Asia, Africa and the America's learned little on the history of cicm in China because not so much reading material was available in English

and French. Some cicm superiors told VF about this and that's why in recent years we have taken this into account in our planning.

Bishops, priests and faithful from the former cicm missions in North China – Inner Mongolia, Jehol, Ningxia, Datong etc – constantly write us and urgently ask "Please send us books explaining the history of our parishes and dioceses! All our archives were stolen or burned during the Cultural Revolution and what local scholars publish about our history is mostly prejudiced and denigrates our Church." All this motivates VF to focus our

research on the History of CICM in China. We see this as a missionary duty. But it is also quite a challenge, because to meet all these needs we must publish in English and French but also in Chinese and we now even consider translating some important cism history books into Mongolian, both traditional Mongolian script – which is only used in Inner Mongolia [PRChina] – as Cyrillic Mongolian, which is only used in Ulaanbaatar (Republic Mongolia). All this is of course done and planned in contact with the cism History Commission and of course with Fr. Charles Phukuta Superior General, who is our VF Board member and vice-chairman. Hereunder we like to report on what VF plans to celebrate the year 2023.

VF-planned activities and publications to celebrate the 200th birthday of Founder Verbist.

1- CICM China Martyrs shrine in CCL Memorial Garden, Vlamingenstraat, 1, Leuven.

VF is developing in the Chinese College in Leuven (Vlamingenstraat, 1) a *Chinese Memorial Garden*, commemorating China missionaries from the Low Countries. There is already a statue of Founder Verbist with bronze plaques of Bp J. Van Aertselaer and Fr. J. Rutten. We plan to add a CICM China Martyrs Shrine. The inauguration of that martyr-shrine will hopefully be a moment of VF & CICM-celebration with friends in the course of 2023.

2- VF and the CICM China Museum.

The house of Scheut starts to plan how to integrate the China Museum in the refurbished building. VF is willing to investigate what it can do within its limited space available to exhibit part of the museum in Leuven. VF plans to invite in the future school children from Leuven, parish groups and others to show them the history of the China Mission. A visit to our Memorial Garden, including this little Museum including a PPT show in our class-room will keep alive the memory of CICM in China Past and Present.

3- Digitalization of the texts of CICM Founder Verbist

Peter Baekelmans cism agreed to this part-time job that will start in September 2022. All the texts of Founder Verbist or related to him will be digitalized. VF considers this as a contribution to promote further study on Th. Verbist and several cism pioneers.

4-VF prepares to publish or re-publish books on the history of CICM in China

At the occasion of the “2023 Verbist Year” VF has decided to make an extra effort to publish several meaningful articles and books reporting on the history of cism in China. Following is the list of books planned to be published in 2023 or soon afterwards.

1. *Mission among the Mongols* by J. Van Hecken cism & M. van Oss cism. Planned to be published in English, French, Chinese and Mongolian.

2. *Social Service by the Church in N-W China* by Carlo van Melckebeke cism. Planned to be published in English, French, Chinese, Mongolian.
3. *Bishop Hubert Otto cism, the Good Shepherd*, by Carlo van Melckebeke cism. Planned to be published in French and Chinese.
4. *Bishop Alfons Bermyn cism* by Carlo van Melckebeke cism. Planned to be published in Chinese. [The book was never published in English]
5. *History of the Catholic Church in Gansu*, by Dr. Koen De Ridder. The publication of a doctoral dissertation at KULeuven. In English.
6. *Jos Mullie cism missionary, philologist, linguist, archeologist*. By Dr. Zheng Yongjun. In English and Chinese.
7. *Four Centuries Of Catechetics in China: Annotated and translated version of the classic book of Fr. Jennens cism*. Publication in English and Chinese, 1 volume.
8. *Verbist Study Notes, (VSN) Issue Nr 18*. A cism internal publication. In English.

Between 1982 en 2004 Verbiest Foundation (then also called China Program) published 17 issues of VSN with articles by cism confreres – old China missionaries and Sinica Province confreres – on their work. This was stopped in 2004 which VF regretted but could not help. It is felt that VSN can now respond to a need for more information on CICM in China (today and in history). VF therefore plans to reactivate the series and plans to publish in VSN articles which provide reading material for confreres to respond to the oft-repeated call for more reading material for the confreres in general, especially for confreres in formation.



Cardinal J. De Kesel, VF Chairman, together with Fr. Charles Phukuta cism, VF vice-chairman, Br. René Stockman fc, Delegated Director of VF and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism, founder of Verbiest Foundation, at the statue of Theophile Verbist in the Chinese College in Leuven.

BOOK REVIEW

“Whispering the Gospel”

Hugo Vanheeswijck



Cardinal G. Marengo in Kazakhstan, September 2022

In Mongolia, the Catholic Church has been present for almost 25 years and Catholics number about 1500, out of a population of three million (half in the capital Ulaanbaatar). Today there are no studies in Catholic missiology specific to evangelization in present day Mongolia, except the work of Giorgio Marengo. At this moment he is the youngest Cardinal of the Catholic Church. His approach to evangelization is more adapted to the complexity of the Asian context. It entails putting people and human relations at the centre of things, creating empathy and confidence.

Fr Giorgio Marengo is a Consolata missionary. Since 2003 he has lived in Mongolia, a country “where the majority of the population is Buddhist and shamanistic, and where religion and culture strongly overlap.” Here, “the only way to evangelize is to reach the hearts of the people by whispering Christianity” to them. ‘Whispering the Gospel to the heart of Mongolia’ is a translation, in a simplified version, of a research made by Marengo in Italian. This nicely edited book is the tenth volume in the Monograph Series of the Antoon Mostaert Center.

In the first part we read about the history of Mongolia, ‘The land of the eternal blue sky’. Attention is paid to the political history, cultural characteristics and last but not least to the ‘Asian piety’ and religions. ‘Whispering the gospel of Mongolia’ is the title of the second part. He described his close experience with Mongolians and the best approach to get to understand and interact with the “infinite nuances that characterize the Mongolian heart.” Discretion is a recurring theme for the author. There is no

need to shout to proclaim the Gospel. The truth is something obvious and does not need to assert itself aggressively. Fr. Marengo’s thought comes from something said by Mgr Thomas Menamparampil, Archbishop Emeritus of Guwahati and a key figure in the peace process in India, for whom the best method of evangelization in Asia is “whispering the Gospel to the soul of Asia.” The Italian missionary and recently ordained Cardinal believes that, in Mongolia, the approach to which whispering refers to is the one that best fits the context in which he works. For Fr. Marengo, the whispering method presupposes focusing on human relations and on the humanization of relations. It is expressed through confidence, calmness, symbol, allusion, image and even silence. This way, one creates a climate of empathy and confidence, which are fundamental conditions if one wants to pass on deep Christian teaching. The Church’s missionary testimony in Asia, which often entails working with the poor, the marginalized and the sick, must be accompanied by the spiritual care of the individual.

In the opinion of Marengo working only on projects and initiatives is a risk that our testimony will remain superficial. Once a project is completed, faith disappears. This does not mean that educating the young or serving the elderly and the sick no longer have any meaning. It simply implies that we have to go back to the primary needs of the communities in which we work.

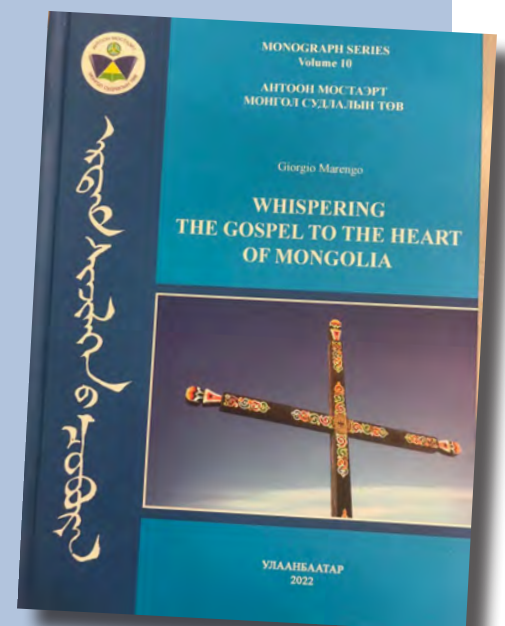


Photo report



On November 19th, a one-day symposium took place at Fujen University, organized by Verbiest Institute Taipei. 9 speakers representing different congregations gave presentations. Fr. Jeroom spoke in the last session followed by the video speech of Fr. Phukuta, which was a perfect conclusion for the conference. Prof. Chen Fang-chung put it well in his closing speech: the history of the church in Taiwan is inseparable from the history of the Church in China. Fujen Academia Catholica and Verbiest Institute Taipei have expressed simultaneously that, this is the first yet not the last. We will continue to invite more congregations to participate in the next symposium.

On November 25th a Eucharistic celebration, led by Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx, was held in commemoration of Fr. Peter Mertens SAM, in Caritas Taipei.



*On Nov. 24, 2022
Fr. Jeroom was invited
for lunch by the Bishops
Conference of Taiwan.*



*On November 25th, scholarship
students of Verbiest Foundation,
studying at Fu Jen University
(Taipei) gathered in the Verbiest
Institute Taipei.*

*On November 28th,
the board of Verbiest
Association Taipei
gathered and discussed
the projects for the
working year 2023.*



Fr. Jeroom was received in his old Mission Diocese of Taichung (Taiwan) on November 29th, by Bishop Su, Fr. Toon Maes cism and some of his students whom he taught Latin in the years 1959-1964.



In Taichung (Taiwan) Fr. Jeroom was interviewed on Catholic Television about his experience as teacher in the Minor Seminary and as Assistant Parish Priest of the Taichung Cathedral in the years 1959-1964.

Chinese visitors in Banneux

In September and October two groups of Chinese American pilgrims visited Banneux. Sr. Gaby, Fr. Matthew and Fr. Jeroom received and guided them for a full day. The day was concluded with a Eucharistic celebration.



IN MEMORIAM: Fr. Tim Atkin cism

Fr. Timothy William Atkin CISM was born on May 18, 1948, in Jackson, Michigan, and ordained a priest May 4, 1974. He was sent to Haiti, where he learned both French and Haitian Creole. He became the provincial treasurer of Haiti (1995-2000) and provincial superior of Haiti (2000-05). His missionary work took him to Mexico and the U.S. Father Atkin became general councilor of the congregation (2005-2011) and then was elected general superior of the congregation (2011-2017), all while living in Rome. He was a long-time member of the congregation's Investment Management Board and the General Finance Committee. He came to Missionhurst in Arlington to retire but was involved in several activities including organizing the Christmas displays on the grounds. He was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2021 and passed away on September 8, 2022.

At Verbiest Foundation we had the pleasure of welcoming Fr. Tim Atkin during our International Conference in 2012, during which we celebrated 30 years of VF and 150 years of CISM. He gave a lecture at the opening of the conference in the Jubileum Halls of the Leuven University, and, together with Fr. Luc Colla, delegate of the cism central government, attended all the sessions.



Fr. Tim Atkin delivering the opening address at the 2012 Verbiest Conference in Leuven



Fr. Luc Colla cism, Fr. Peter Zhao Jianmin, Fr. Tim Atkin cism and Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism at the 2012 Verbiest Conference in Leuven

The agreement between the Holy See and China: a voice from China

Yulai Zhang

The Provisional Agreement on Nomination of Bishops of the Catholic Church was first signed by the Holy See and China on September 22, 2018. Renewed in 2020, it will celebrate its fourth anniversary this year and will face another renewal.

First of all, the Provisional Agreement is worth affirming a positive thing, which is a vital milestone in Sino-Vatican relations. The signing of the agreement results from the joint efforts of China and the Vatican with an open mind, engaging in dialogue, and close communication. Furthermore, it is a tentative solution for Catholicism to better adapt to China's social and political system and current conditions through bilateral dialogue and negotiation.

Over the past four years, the agreement has been successfully implemented thanks to the joint efforts of both parties and produced many outstanding achievements. For the international community, the signing of the deal conveys freedom of religious belief in China. Simultaneously, with the Vatican, the agreement serves as a window of communication and dialogue between China and Europe and indeed the entire Western world, thereby reaching a consensus; moreover, it will assuredly enhance China's comprehensive international influence as well; concerning the Catholic Church in China, the signing of the agreement has enabled catholic churches across China to develop in a normalized way. We find that the case of illegal ordination of bishops in the past has not happened again since the signing of the agreement. In addition, the government recognized many bishops and priests of underground churches through public inauguration ceremonies that enabled local churches to carry out their religious activities regularly.

While affirming the provisional agreement with applause, we are also aware of some challenges we face. In the Catholic churches in China, dioceses have very different backgrounds and problems yet to be addressed individually. The various historical rifts and legacy-related issues still need specific mediation by the Chinese government and the Vatican. The results of these provisional agreements also helped us to figure out the necessity of continuous dialogue and communication.

Regarding the renewal of the provisional agreement, the joint efforts of both parties continue to maintain and enhance the development of Sino-Vatican relations; through bilateral cooperation, religion will play a positive role in China and the international community. Moreover, the renewal will contribute significantly to the *community with a shared future for mankind*; this should also be our common goal.

In recent years, in the international arena, both China and Vatican have expressed a shared vision of global peace & security, environmental protection, humanitarian causes, and other critical international affairs. Therefore, we are more confident and motivated in looking forward to the future of Sino-Vatican diplomatic relations. Furthermore, the renewal of the agreement will improve bilateral diplomatic ties. Finally, China and the Vatican will also play a more significant positive role in these fields.

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation

Mission Statement

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

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

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

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

VF has developed three activity programs to realize its goal:

1. A Program for Pastoral & Social Exchange and Cooperation,
2. An Academic Research Program
3. A Cultural Exchange Program

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

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

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

- CICM (Congregation of Missionaries of Scheut) was founded in 1862 by Theofiel Verbist (Antwerp). Between 1865 and 1955 679 missionaries worked in North China: in Inner Mongolia, in Jehol, Datong, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Qinghai. They evangelized, they built schools, hospitals and developed agriculture. Some Scheut missionaries became famous around the world through their research on the Chinese and Mongolian language and culture. Having been banished from China, after 1949 by Mao Zedong, they opened missions in Taiwan, Hong Kong, in Singapore and later in Republic of Mongolia.
- When China opened again to establish collaboration with the West, Scheut created with the Catholic University of Louvain, in 1982, the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, bearing the name of the famous Jesuit missionary eighteenth-century Belgian astronomer, teacher of Emperor Kangxi. His Eminence, Cardinal J. De Kesel (Mechelen) chairs the Foundation. Board members represent different congregations of missionaries: the mission of Scheut, the Claretians, 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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