U.S. Catholic China Bureau Conference 2013: The American Catholic Church and China in an Era of Globalization

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The U.S. Catholic China Bureau held its 25th National Conference at the Water Tower Campus of Loyola University Chicago, located in downtown Chicago, in October of 2013. The keynote talks, panels, and other events of the conference proceeded under the banner "The American Catholic Church and China in an Era of Globalization." Over 120 people—scholars, clergy, religious, and lay people—participated. Most were people actively involved in the life of the Church in China, in the US, or in both societies. Participants sought to go beyond the headlines and learn what contemporary scholars and researchers had to share about China. Members of the diverse constituencies represented also had the opportunity to meet and network with one another. This conference, marked by record attendance, signaled a new moment in the Bureau's efforts to serve the Church and the Chinese community. In the article which follows, a board member and the assistant director of the China Bureau offer an overview of the conference and some reflections on the promise for the future it embodied.

The U.S. Catholic China Bureau was founded in 1989 as a collaborative effort of Maryknoll and the Society of Jesus to promote understanding among American Catholics of the Catholic Church and the situation of Catholic communities in China. Today its membership includes an array of religious orders, Catholic organizations, academics, and committed lay people working together to realize a living partnership between American and Chinese Catholics for the sake of China and its Church. Formerly based at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, the Bureau recently moved its offices to Berkeley, California. It has

always worked closely with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and is currently listed as an official Catholic organization in the Diocese of Oakland. For current information at the Bureau, see its website at www.usccb.net.

When the China Bureau was founded, it worked to support and collaborate with the Chinese Church during a period when China itself had begun a new moment of engagement with the world community. For the Church in China this was a time of rebuilding. Today the Church in China has 116 active dioceses, 10 major seminaries, 160 women's congregations with approximately 5000 members, approximately 3650 priests, and perhaps 12 million members in total.[1] Though small by Chinese standards, the Catholic Church in China is nonetheless a large and diverse institutional entity. It charts its course forward looking to play a constructive role in Chinese society while simultaneously facing the challenges of an increasingly complex and globalizing social order. In light of the needs of the present moment, the China Bureau has begun to rework the format of its conferences. Whereas in the past, their format emphasized the experience of people actively involved in the life of the Church, the October 2013 conference endeavored to retain that dimension while adding a day devoted to scholarly exchange. The aim of this arrangement was to enable the academic and the practical to complement and enrich one another.

The conference began with two well-received keynote addresses. On Friday evening, October 4, Richard Madsen, Distinguished Professor of Sociology of the University of California, San Diego and Director of UC-Fudan Center, spoke on "The State of the Church in China Today." Professor Madsen, author of numerous works on religion in China, including *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (1998), provided a range of historical and sociological perspectives for making sense of the contemporary Church in China. His talk was co-sponsored by Loyola's Joan and Bill Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage.

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[1] Based on the statistics published by the Holy Spirit Study Centre at http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/en/china/en_cinfo_china_stat12.html.

On Saturday morning, October 5, Ian Johnson spoke. Johnson is a Beijing-based journalist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Wild Grass*, in which he reflects on popular culture and the life of ordinary people in contemporary China. In his talk "Beyond Economic Growth: China's Search for Lasting Values," Johnson shared his insightful grasp of the religious searching that is taking place at all levels of Chinese society.

Six panel sessions then unfolded for the remainder of the day. The first, "The Chinese experience of Church in a Global Era," included Father Joseph Zhang Wenxi of Zhaoxian Diocese of Hebei, Sr. Lina Rong Lina of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Hope, and Sister Clare Zhang Jiaqin of the Congregation of Saint Theresa of The Child Jesus. The speakers offered an overview of their respective ministries. In addition, they commented on the pastoral opportunities and challenges they encountered after they had completed graduate training abroad and returned to China. Upon their return, they had to adapt what they had learned to the local culture and circumstances. In response to questions from the audience, each commented on the practical faith and inspiration required to implement viable programs of learning or pastoral care. They noted that as they gained more experience, they have become better able to measure success and understand the larger place of religion in Chinese civil society.

A second panel addressed "The American Experience of the Church in China." Columban Father Thomas Glennon, based in Omaha, Nebraska, reviewed the wide scope of his regular visits to China over the last decade. Since 2007, Tricia Bolle, President and Founder of the Development and Engagement Initiative in Asia, explained her program to promote healthy personal growth and civic responsibility among college students and young adults in China. Rounding out the panel was Dr. Jean-Paul Wiest, presently a Research Fellow with the Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His observations on eight years as Research Director of The Beijing Center for Chinese Studies led him to emphasize that he has never understood his experience in China in terms of being either American or a Frenchman. Rather he has always understood himself to be a Christian coming from abroad eager to insert

himself among the Chinese people, desirous to hear their pains and joys, their aspirations and their frustrations. The room was packed with veteran travelers to China, and their comments indicated that the presenters' multi-faceted reflections resonated with their own experience of working in China and making sense of their role as collaborators with their Chinese brothers and sisters.

A third panel highlighted "The Chinese American Experience of Church." While the primary focus of the U.S. Catholic China Bureau has been the Church in China proper, the Chinese Catholic community in the United States is itself intimately bound to China, and the Bureau has always made a place for its voice at its conferences. In this year's conference, Debbie Wang and Stephen Wang of Queen of China Catholic Ministries in Corpus Christi, Texas spoke about their apostolate. They have designed, published, and distributed evangelization and catechetical materials to Chinese Catholic communities throughout the world. Chicagoan George Lee reviewed his service as Secretary and board member of the North America Chinese Catholic Association (NACCA). He also spoke about his ministry at St. Therese Chinese Catholic Church in Chicago. The presence of Irene Tang was especially poignant given the fact that her husband George Cheng, a board member of the China Bureau, had unfortunately passed away in June 2013. She spoke about their joint effort as a volunteer couple over the past eight years to bring the Marriage Encounter movement to China.

A fourth panel moved the horizon beyond Catholicism to address "The Experience of Other Christian Traditions and Churches in China." Joann Pittman, Senior Associate with ChinaSource, a Hong Kong-based resource ministry, offered penetrating insights deriving from her 28 years of teaching experience in China. It has enabled her to continue to instruct others in cross-cultural living, establish protocols for critical knowledge assessment, and collaborate with others who wish to serve the Church in China. Christie Chui-Shan Chow, a Ph.D. candidate in the Religion and Society Program at Princeton Theological Seminary spoke about "Seventh-day Adventism in East China." She noted the way that this tradition brought the Gospel into the contemporary Chinese cultural context.

The conference also included a panel on "Catholic Institutional Presence in China," in this case referring to American Catholic institutions of higher education. As sophisticated players in the global order, these universities have exchange programs, extensive relations, and even satellite campuses throughout the world. Presenters emphasized how fruitful collaboration in China can be, noting that the foundation for such collaboration is mutual respect. Dr. Daniel J. Curran, president of University of Dayton, outlined a remarkable initiative now operating in Suzhou, the University of Dayton China Institute. This institute is dedicated to industrial and technological research in such fields as biotechnology, renewables, and clean energy. It takes to China the expertise of U of D, a top-tier American research university with extensive relations in the private sector. Curran emphasized that the religious dimension of the U of D, a Marianist school, is manifest in its commitment to integrity and community service, and so when asked about the appropriateness of religious symbols on their China campus, Curran made clear that they were integral to the project, and they have remained. Thus his hosts showed their own respect for the school's mission. Dr. Jonathan Noble, Assistant Provost for Internationalization at the University of Notre Dame, then outlined that university's efforts to develop ties with Chinese universities. Currently Notre Dame collaborates with Tsinghua University, Peking University, Fudan University, and Zhejiang University, arguably among the most prestigious universities in China. Dr. Stephen Freedman, Provost of Fordham University, also spoke. Among American Catholic institutions, Fordham has one of the longest track records of engagement with China. In this panel, Freedman briefly outlined some of the innovative joint professional programs that Fordham has developed with a range of Chinese universities. He noted that as of fall of 2012 some 600 Chinese graduate students were studying at Fordham, often in specially-tailored programs; these students would take their expertise back to serve China upon graduation.

The final panel of the day was dedicated to "Christian Tourism in China." Jesuit Father Jeremy Clarke, Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Boston College, spoke about Catholic Shanghai. Shanghai is a city with a long Catholic history dating

back to the Ming Dynasty, and Father Clarke has extensive knowledge of that history. Dr. Jean-Paul Wiest, who graciously filled in for an absent panelist at the last minute, covered a range of Christian sites in China. Some such as the Nestorian stele of Xi'an or the Beijing Observatory, are well known. Others also worth exploring include the beautifully decorated tombstones of Quanzhou in Fujian, Shangchuan island and the tomb of Francis Xavier, Zhaoqing (where Ricci began his ministry in China), the beautiful churches and faithful Tibetan communities of Shangri-la in Yunnan, and the Lixin orphanages for disabled children in south Hebei. The panel speakers made available resources and insights to enable tourists to China to encounter the historical roots of Christian faith in China, as well as share moments with the present-day Chinese Christians.

The day's events also included the presentation of the China Bureau's Ricci Award to Dr. Wu Xiaoxin of the Ricci Institute at the University of San Francisco. It acknowledged his longtime support of scholars researching the role of Christianity in Chinese society and Sino-Western cultural exchange. The local Catholic community of Saint Therese in Chicago's Chinatown and Loyola's own campus ministries contributed to a beautiful and inspiring liturgy. Jesuit Father Mark DeStephano, Chair of the Board of the China Bureau, gave a dynamic and insightful homily, while the Bureau's Executive Director, Jesuit Father Michel Marcil, presided. A festive reception at the Notre Dame Club rounded out the day's events.

Sunday was dedicated to three panels which focused on the role and resources of the academy as they related to the Church in China. In the first session on "Scholarship in China," Dr. Wu Xiaoxin spoke on the China Hinterlands Project. This project fostered scholarship on Christianity in China outside the established centers of research. Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, Professor of History at Pace University in New York City addressed challenges in field and archive research he has encountered in his study of Protestants in 20th century Suzhou. Jean-Paul Wiest has lectured and published on Christianity in China in English, Chinese and French. He rounded out the group by summarizing his extensive contacts with Chinese universities and his work accompanying young Chinese

professors and graduate students in their research on Christianity. Wiest observed that contemporary Chinese scholars are capable, serious, and not subject to overt political interference in their study of Christianity in China. While critical, they are also balanced in their assessments. At the same time, they do seem to be aware that they should stay within certain limitations, given the parameters of political and academic life in China.

In the day's second session, Richard Madsen and Fenggang Yang, Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University, addressed the topic "The Sociology of Religion in China." Both world-class scholars, they spoke about their own work, the development of the discipline of sociology in China, and the insights of the discipline for making sense of the place of religion in Chinese society today.

The final panel was dedicated to "Teaching about Catholicism and Chinese Religious History." Jesuit Jeremy Clarke, and Dr. Anthony E. Clark, Associate Professor of Chinese history at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, both dedicated teachers, spoke about how to bring the study of Catholicism in China to life in the classroom. Jeremy Clarke provided examples of videos he made when visiting historic Catholic sites in China. He also directed a digitization project of China sources with the Burns Library at Boston College, *Beyond Ricci: Rare Books from the Jesuitica Collection* (see http://ricci.bc.edu/about). Anthony Clark shared how his use of visual images pertaining to the Confucian classics kept class discussions provocative. He also entered into controversial questions concerning how to integrate discussion of Catholic China in the curriculum. He has compiled a remarkable collection of China mission resources available online (see http://chinamissionhistory.org/).

People interested in the proceedings and presenters of this conference should visit the website of the U.S. Catholic China Bureau (www.usccb.net). They will find links to videos of the presentations and more information about the panelists. The next conference of the China Bureau is currently scheduled to take place in fall of 2015.