

# EMERGENCE

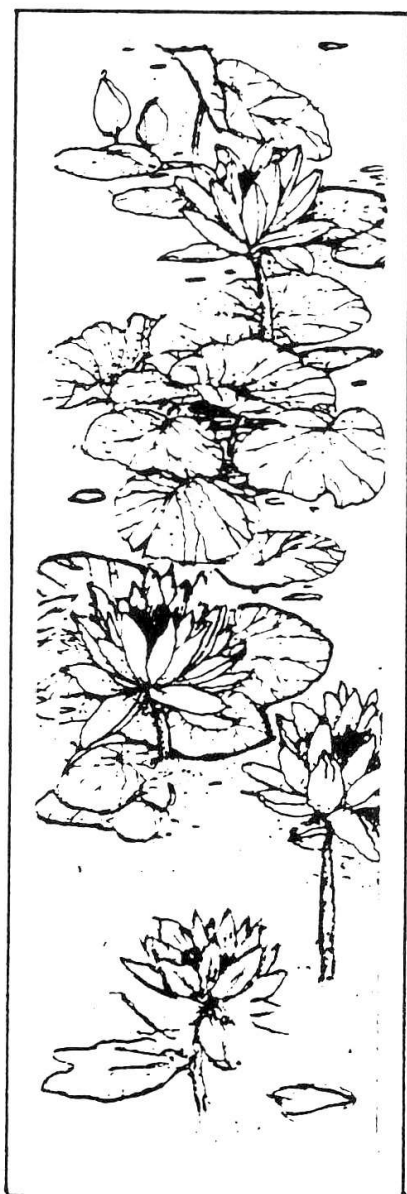
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# A LOCAL CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA?

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by Jerome Heyndrickx



The present situation of the Catholic Church in China is complicated and multifaceted, and to write anything about it at all is to embark on a rather hazardous journey. The chief danger lies in a failure to do sufficient justice to even one of the many complex factors involved, for historical, cultural, social, political, religious and theological elements have all combined to produce the present situation, and to neglect one or the other of these could easily result in an unbalanced view of the whole. Yet, it is also imperative that we keep ourselves informed about the evolutionary development that is now taking place in China, as it has serious historical implications not only for the future of the Church there, but also for the universal Church. The present situation might well be compared in its urgency to that of the time of Matteo Ricci and his companions, and to fail to realize its importance might well result in our slamming the door on a unique opportunity that could have far-reaching effects on the Church at-large.

What we are called upon to do is nothing short of shaping a framework for a new relationship with the local Catholic Church in China. Are we really prepared

to face such a challenge? Are we in a position to judge what form this model should take, or how it might differ from older and more traditional models? Are we able to comprehend fully that what we are now witnessing in China, in the painful struggle of the Catholic Church there, well might be the burgeoning of a truly Chinese local Catholic Church?

What I would like to do in this article is to share some personal reflections on this vital issue, and offer some opinions drawn from my own visits to China as well as from conversations with many Chinese in China and with those who have come to the West as visitors. Having followed closely recent developments in the Church in China, I, myself, tend to be very optimistic about her future. I am optimistic, but I am also not naive. My optimism flows from the positive nature of so many things that are going on there right now, but I am only too aware that the present situation of the Catholic Church in China must be viewed against an evolutionary process that dates back 400 years. This lengthy history presents problems that demand clarification, and these problems are not simple. It would be naive to approach China with the assumption that everything there is clear-cut and definable.

To understand the Church in China today, one must first look at what has happened in the course of its history. Without a detailed knowledge of what took place during the Rites Controversy, or what it meant for Catholicism to be reintroduced into China as part of the Unequal Treaties during the hey-day of 19th century Western imperialism, one cannot hope to come to grips with what happened after the success of the communist revolution.

### *SIX PHASES IN CHINESE CHURCH HISTORY*

#### Phase One and Two: the Nestorians and the Franciscans

Already by the 7th century - at a time when parts of Europe were still in the process of being evangelized - Christianity had entered China with the Nestorians. During this period a number of villages and towns accepted Nestorianism. Recent excavations of grave sites have unearthed

crucifixes and other relics dating back to that time. The results of this first Christian entry were obliterated by subsequent persecutions, and all traces of Christianity disappeared.

Joannes de Monte Corvino, along with his Franciscan companions, introduced Christianity for a second time during the 13th century. This attempt was also aborted, and no lasting local Church communities survived.

### Phase Three: Jesuit Mission to China: Ricci and Xu Guangqi

A third attempt to implant the Church in China was initiated by Matteo Ricci and his Jesuit companions at the end of the 16th century. This period might be called the high point of Chinese Catholic Church history. The Jesuits were very receptive of Chinese civilization, its customs and values. They were pioneers in the work of assimilating non-European cultures into Catholicism, not only in China but throughout the missionary world of that time. They took the daring step of integrating Confucian values and Chinese cultural traditions into the gospel message. While many Chinese officials remained suspicious of the implications involved in accepting the gospel, as well as Christianity's political ties with the foreign powers, other Chinese intellectuals accepted it and were converted. One of these was Xu Guangqi. With the Edict of Toleration in 1692 the Kangxi Emperor gave official recognition to Christianity in China - for the first and only time in Chinese Church history. Never before nor since has Christianity been granted such formal and official recognition in China.

But the euphoria did not last long. Whereas some far-sighted, humanistic missionaries were determined and ready to pursue a policy of assimilation, others were not, and it soon became evident that the Church at-large was unprepared to accept such a challenge. The Church in Europe was not sufficiently open to the idea of integrating the gospel into non-European cultures. (Had it been more receptive at that time, the situation of the Church today might be quite different.) Disagreements over traditional Chinese ceremonies honouring Confucius and ancestors filtered through to Rome. The controversy among individual missionaries hardened into differences between Religious Orders,

resulting in what is historically known as the Rites Controversy.

Messages and envoys went back and forth between China and Rome. To the dismay of the Kangxi Emperor, the papal legates Charles Tomas Maillard de Tournon and Charles Ambrose Mezzabarba intervened in the controversy among the missionaries. In anger and indignation, Kangxi revoked the Edict of Toleration (1720). Pope Benedict XIV retaliated by forbidding Chinese Catholics to participate in rites honouring Confucius (Ex Quo Singulari, 1742). A long period of Church persecution followed. Within fifty years, the Church fell from the heights of official acceptance to the depths of official persecution.

One of the results of the Rites controversy, was that the Church was stigmatized as being "Western" - foreign to China and basically subversive to her interests. From that time on, conversion to Christianity has been viewed by large numbers of Chinese as an act unfriendly to China, denoting disloyalty towards one's ancestors, one's people, and one's country.

On the other hand, the Church has always respected and supported traditional Chinese values: its veneration of the dead, and the importance China places on family life and filial piety. The Church has also contributed in countless ways to the education, family life, and social welfare of the Chinese people. The real pity of this rupture dating back to the time of the Rites Controversy, has been that all such positive social contributions were virtually ignored by the majority of Chinese leaders and intellectuals. It was then that the Church was stigmatized as "foreign", "unchinese", "unpatriotic". Events in modern China prove that these scars still exist.



#### Phase Four: The Chinese Church of Silence

Although the Kangxi Emperor revoked his Edict of

Toleration and a time of persecution followed, the Catholic Church was not entirely wiped out. While some foreign missionaries remained and continued to work, albeit unofficially, in China, the Church obviously found no public acceptance there. During this period, its survival was mainly due to the untiring efforts of the local Chinese clergy. It was an heroic era in Chinese Church history, one about which we know too little. I refer to it as "the Silent Church". An important question from that period still remains unanswered: was there no Chinese priest available to succeed Bishop Luo Wenzao, the first ordained Chinese bishop when he died in 1691. To have appointed a Chinese successor at this time might well have served as the seed for the eventual growth of a truly Chinese local Church. As it happened, however, the appointment of another Chinese bishop was delayed until 1926, an indication that the Church of the 18th century and its missionaries did not make the serious efforts needed to promote and support the establishment of a local Church.

#### Phase Five: Forced Re-entry: The Church of the Unequal Treaties

Christianity entered China for the fourth time on the coat-tails of the Unequal Treaties following the Opium Wars. This was not a new entry for Christianity, which had never really ceased to exist there; however, it is so designated because it represented a mass movement of foreign missionaries arriving from Europe who took the initiative in assuming responsibility for direct evangelization. The missionary movement resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of local conversions. Between 1840 and 1949 Catholics in China grew from a few hundred thousand to over three million.

The missionaries and their congregations seized upon this chance as a God-given opportunity. They not only preached the gospel with great zeal, but also addressed themselves to the alleviation of the country's social needs, which they saw as an essential part of the gospel message.

During this period, the Catholic Church established 3 universities, 190 secondary schools, approximately 2,000 primary schools, 250 orphanages, 220 hospitals, and 780 dispensaries throughout China. It also pioneered agricul-

tural development projects in an attempt to improve economic conditions among its farmers. In the context of 19th century China, this was a genuine contribution to the country's progress and modernization. It was development avant la lettre.

At the same time, however, it must also be recognized that Benedict XIV's prohibition of the Rites to Catholics in Ex quo Singulari (rescinded only in 1939 by Pius XII) left deep scars; little attention was paid to the assimilation of the gospel and culture; and, while Chinese priests were trained in the newly-built minor and major seminaries, episcopal authority remained in the hands of foreigners.

While Western Catholics admired the missionaries for their courage, their spirit of sacrifice and sincerity of faith, and Chinese Catholics also respected and loved them, such sentiments were not shared by the general Chinese public. Despite their dedication, missionaries were lumped together with all the other "foreign devils" as unwelcomed intruders.

The Chinese saw the Unequal Treaties which followed the Opium War as the prime instruments used by the "foreign devils" to humiliate and plunder their country. These same treaties provided the occasion for the missionaries to re-enter China, and while the missionaries themselves did not use force to make their way in, this subtle distinction was lost on the Chinese, because once having arrived, the missionaries came under the full protection of the diplomatic missions of the Western Powers. Newly baptized Catholics also enjoyed these special privileges, and were given legal protection by the foreign consulates. Because of this, they were considered to be unpatriotic, and became outcasts in Chinese society.

The missionaries, during and after the catastrophe of the Rites Controversy, despite the basic goodness of their intentions, were largely at fault for the Church being stigmatized as "foreign". The Church now became the "Church of the Unequal Treaties". The good the missionaries accomplished in the fields of education, medicine, and agriculture was appreciated by only a small minority, mostly those living in proximity to their centres. Because they tacitly

accepted and did not openly reject the umbrella of protection offered by foreign consulates and gunboats, Chinese society, in general, chose to overlook the positive efforts they made on behalf of the Chinese people. In the end, it was the colonial context of the times that killed, in the eyes of many Chinese, the gospel message.

Anti-foreign feeling became equated with anti-Church feeling during the Boxer Uprising of 1900. During the uprising, Chinese hatred for "foreign devils" vented itself primarily against the Christian missions. Churches were put to the torch, priests, religious and laymen were killed - often being burned to death in their own churches.

Some of the more famous Western-style Catholic churches of China have become monuments to this anti-foreign uprising, reminding the Chinese who walk by them today of their foreign past. Examples of two such churches, both of which have been recently reopened, are the Wang Hai Lou Church in Tianjin and the North Cathedral in Beijing. Both served as refuges for diplomats and Catholics alike during the Boxer Uprising.

While all this was happening inside China, many Chinese intellectuals had already made their way to the West. During the latter half of the 19th century increasing numbers of Chinese students arrived in Europe to study modern Western science and technology with a view to returning to China to help in the modernization of their own country.

The eyes of these students were also opened to the social upheavals then taking place in Europe, with the concomitant anti-clerical and anti-Church spirit found in traditionally Christian countries such as France, Germany and Russia. They also witnessed the alienation of the European urban proletariat from the Church. Many returned from these European countries with a Communist ideology; and they were quick to spread as part of their gospel the word that the Catholic Church was not only anti-Chinese, but its teaching was also in conflict with modern science and social progress.

These were at best only partial truths. They ignored the Christian cultural base for European social reforms.

It was also the era of Rerum Novarum, and marked the beginning of large-scale Christian Workers Movements. It was also a time when missionaries were engaged in pioneering agricultural projects in many parts of China. But all of this was overlooked in what amounted to a proliferation of "selective truths" by returning intellectuals.

Nationalistic feeling continued to grow in China. The corrupt and ineffective Qing Dynasty was finally overthrown in 1911 and the Republic was proclaimed. While various national congresses and movements voiced enthusiasm for the creation of a new and independent China, Chinese Catholics, who had been left outside the mainstream of society, continued to be regarded as "collaborators with the foreign imperialists". Were they never to be able to shake off the "foreign stigma" imposed on them by the regrettable circumstances of history?

There were missionaries in China who were well aware of this situation and worked to rectify it. But it appears that the majority were "children of their own colonial times" - citizens of France and Germany, whose consulates continued to offer them protection. And as a consequence, they were not as open as they should have been to the great pull of nationalistic feeling that was the source of inspiration for Chinese on all levels of society at this time.

Most missionaries did not study the situation critically enough to see that the protection they received from the foreign powers was more problematic than providential, and only a few realized the urgent need to distance themselves from them.

It is easy for us today to look back objectively and with much regret on the Church's century-long involvement with certain colonial Powers. Hindsight also allows us to judge how this involvement had a detrimental effect on missionary pastoral activity, for it impeded the establishment of a genuine local Chinese Church. The reins of authority remained for too long a time in the hands of foreigners before being turned over to a Chinese hierarchy.

This criticism is not intended to be a condemnation of the labours of those who have gone before us, for we, like, they, are children of our own times. But the recog-



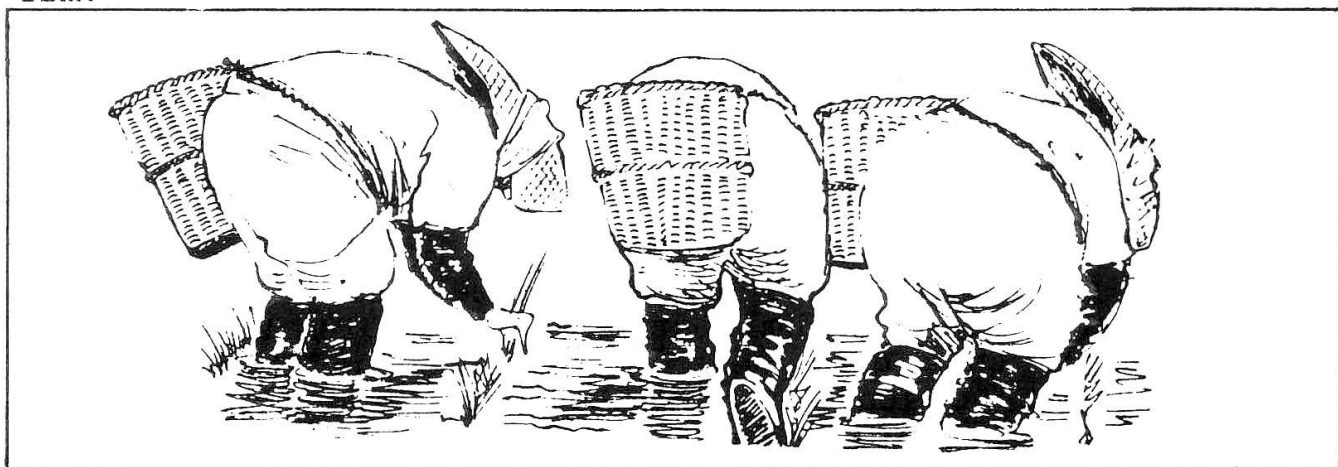
niton of past mistakes is an integral part of the process leading to future growth. The Chinese Church had to live with the consequences of such questionable policies; honesty and fairness demand that past errors be brought to light.

Fr. Vincent Lebbe, a Belgian priest, openly supported the nationalistic feelings of Chinese Catholics of this time, and encouraged priests and the faithful to work to establish a local Chinese Church with its own hierarchy - much to the dismay of many European foreign missionaries. Due largely to his zealous and untiring efforts, Pope Pius XI finally consecrated six Chinese bishops in 1926. Alas, it was already too late. When the Chinese hierarchy was finally established in 1946, only one out of five Chinese local dioceses had a Chinese bishop, and almost all pastoral missionary work remained in the hands of foreign missionary congregations.

#### The Burden of the Chinese Church after 1950

Anyone who sincerely tries to understand the Church in China today must be aware of the above historical facts. Without them, one cannot possibly hope to understand what the Communist liberation meant to the Chinese people.

The Chinese Communist Party - with its Marxist view of religion - had its own inherent prejudice against Christianity. It was not difficult for the Communists to sift through the events of Chinese Church history to find enough raw material to serve as a pretext for their claims that the Church and its leaders were agents of foreign imperialism.



It is during this sixth phase of Chinese Church history - the period from 1949 until our present day - that the whole heritage of the past will fall on the shoulders of the Chinese Church community. This yoke will prove to be the heaviest of their long history; yet it seems that out of this period of intense crisis, phoenix-like, a renewed and dynamic Chinese Church is arising.

#### Phase Six: Seeking Acceptance and An End to the "Foreign Stigma"

While the Chinese Church has been in a crisis situation since the time of the Communist liberation under Mao Zedong in 1949, it seems at the present time to be giving every sign of affirming itself as a local church, more Chinese (and receiving official recognition as such) than ever before in its history. Whether or not it will become a "truly Catholic local Church" remains to be seen.

Before reaching its present stage of development, however, the Chinese Church had to undergo three periods marked by acute suffering. The period immediately following liberation was characterized by a chronic deadlock that existed between Church and State. Then, in 1957, with the establishment of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association came a time of internal conflict within the Church. The Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966, ushered in a decade of terrible suffering for all Chinese, believers and non-believers alike - a time when the Church in China experienced its most severe crisis. After the Cultural Revolution, there came a new phase of liberalization, which began in 1978, and continues up to the present. What appears to be emerging in this phase is a local Church seeking definite acceptance in its own country, by its own people, and striving to shake itself free from the foreign stigma it has had to carry for so long.

#### Deadlock: the Communist State and the "foreign religion" - 1950-1957

The need for China to modernize itself had become evident ever since the humiliation of the Opium War. Earlier steps towards this goal were taken by those Chinese scientists who went to study in the West at the end of the 19th and early 20th century. The eventual political choice these intellectuals confronted was which of two systems to follow

- the way of capitalism or that of socialistic communism. Both options found supporters in China: the Nationalists under Chiang Kai Shek eventually became the defenders of capitalism, while the Communist Party, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, advocated socialism. A long internal struggle ensued, with Mao coming out on top. In October 1949, from the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing's Tianan Men Square, Mao proclaimed China to be an independent nation, free of all foreign influence and domination. China was now to build a new socialistic republic separate from and independent of any foreign influence - the remnants of imperialism were to be eradicated.

The victorious revolutionaries identified the Church in China with the foreign powers: its bishops were 80% foreign; foreign missionary congregations directed almost all its work; Catholics answered to the Pope of Rome, in Chinese eyes a foreign power. When some Chinese bishops, priests and lay Catholics left the China mainland for Taiwan with the retreating army of Chiang Kai Shek, it only served to accentuate the accusations that the "foreign" Church stood with the Nationalist capitalist cause.

These events took place during the post-war period when Russian Communism continued to make dramatic advances through Eastern Europe - years in which official Church rhetoric was aggressively anti-communist. The language of Divini Redemptoris, for example, described communism as a system "full of errors and deceit", "a truly diabolical propaganda", a perpetrator of "systematic violence", etc.

This antagonistic and anti-communist policy led to a head-on collision between the Catholic Chinese Church and the atheist Marxist state. All missionaries were expelled by the government as spies and instruments of foreign domination; Church property was confiscated; universities, high schools, primary schools, orphanages, hospitals, dispensaries, agricultural lands were seized.

In self-defense, the Church forbade all Catholics to cooperate with a government which was apparently intent on its systematic destruction. This measure was, in turn, considered by the government to be the final proof that the Church and its Catholics were, indeed, unpatriotic. It was the beginning of a long period of crisis for the

Church in China.

Would the atheistic Marxist state and the small minority group of Chinese Catholics continue to harass one another - or could some modus vivendi be found to resolve the deadlock? Could the Church survive? Would the propagation of atheism take precedence over the building of a new, modern China? And if modernization were to take precedence, would Chinese Catholics be allowed to participate actively, that they might prove once and for all their patriotic loyalty to their own country? Could they succeed in finally shaking off the "foreign" stigma with which history had so cruelly branded them?

These were the implicit questions of the period of deadlock in the early 1950's. As we describe the evolution of events, seen now in retrospect, it seems as if it has taken the Communist State a long time to opt for modernization over atheism. In 1979, this choice became clearer, and later, in 1982, the deadlock was formally resolved by the adoption of the new constitution, and the road to a new future was opened. In the meantime, the Catholic community had also to struggle with the question of whether or not to collaborate with the Government established Catholic Patriotic Association. Would collaboration compromise their faith? This fear gave rise to internal conflict within the Church itself.

#### Internal Conflict: 1957-1966

In 1957 the Communist Party organized the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association as part of its United Front Policy in an effort to enlist Chinese Catholics in the cause of modernization. Emphasis was placed on total independence from all foreign control or influence. Self-propagation, self-government, self-subsistence: these were to be the goals and guidelines for the Church, and they were interpreted as a demand for Catholics to break all ties with Rome, which was perceived by the government as a foreign power. Catholics were confronted with a choice: to remain faithful to the Pope as the spiritual leader of the universal Church, and thereby incur the accusation of being unpatriotic to their own government, or to profess publicly their membership in the CCPA and thereby incur the disdain of other Catholics as being unfaithful to the Pope. While

there is no contradiction in being both Chinese and Catholic, the popular designation of the Church as "foreign", which had been passed down by history, clouded the issue and made it seem as if there were. The choice was both ambiguous and unfair; it forced Catholics into a position of having to reject one or the other of two essential elements in their personal identity. The issue plunged the Catholic community into painful, internal turmoil. A few Catholic leaders elected to join the CCPA, and were rejected by their fellow Catholics; the majority, who refused to accept membership, were driven underground.

This development must be viewed in light of the aftermath of the "100 Flowers" movement. The country was then in the midst of an anti-rightist campaign which resulted in large numbers of intellectuals and ordinary citizens being sentenced to long prison terms in labour camps. It is within this context and against this background that the Bureau



of Religious Affairs seized the initiative in organizing throughout China provincial and local branches of the CCPA. The Bureau also instituted at this time a plan for the "democratic election and ordination of bishops" within the Chinese Catholic Church.

In its propaganda campaign, the Bureau was able to draw upon the patriotic sentiments of a number of Chinese priests, as well as the residue of their personal resentment left over from years of frustration and what they felt to be their humiliation under foreign bishops. As part of their preparation for the consecration of newly "elected" local bishops, the Bureau proposed its list of candidates to Rome for approval. Rome rejected the list and countered with a warning that any consecration of bishops independent of Rome's approval would result in ipso facto excommunication for all parties involved. This response further embittered some Chinese priests and Catholics, who accused Rome of failing to understand their true situation.

It must be remembered that this historic and dramatic

development took place at a time when communication between Rome and the Church in China was far from adequate. In the circumstances it was almost impossible for either side to convey in detail the true nature of their proposals. The effects of this misunderstanding were far-reaching. Today CCPA leaders still point to it as the instigating cause of their decision to go ahead with the ordination of their own bishops; and between 1958 and 1966 there were 35 Chinese bishops consecrated without Rome's approval. The decision provoked strong reaction from Rome, and while John XXIII was the only Pope to mention the word "schism" in relation to China, the Chinese leaders of the CCPA continued to register deep disappointment at Rome's attitude, insisting up to the present day that no schism has ever taken place in China. However, this tension between Rome and China has continued to foster an impression throughout the Universal Church that a "more or less schismatic Patriotic Church" exists in China, alongside a "faithful Church".

It is common knowledge that the relationship between members of the CCPA and non-members is not without its tensions. There have been open disagreements and divisions in some places, and the situation is not without its history of dramatic confrontations. But it is also incorrect to speak of two churches - a "Patriotic Church" and a "Faithful Church" as many Western church members are wont to do. Such language implies a formal state of schism, which does not exist, and while it is true that there is no direct communication between the CCPA and Rome, this state of alienation is largely the result of tensions caused by certain public statements made in the past.

#### The Cultural Revolution: The Church Suffers: 1966-1976

Only the passage of time will be able to reveal the full extent of the material, cultural, social and moral damage done by the Cultural Revolution. No one at this stage is in a position to adequately measure its destructiveness. And while the country is now fully engaged in sweeping efforts to implement the four phases of its modernization programme, there are still many people quietly recovering from the wounds inflicted on them by a decade of intense suffering. Few Chinese families escaped the traumas of the Cultural Revolution, but China's Christians, its Catholics in particular, were hit hardest of all. The

foreign stigma attached to them by history only served to heighten accusations of subversion. Persecuted for their religious beliefs and previous ties with foreigners, they stood helplessly as their churches were either demolished or converted into theatres or factories. In this time of turmoil and chaos, all religious activities were forbidden; Catholics were the chosen victims of continual verbal and physical abuse; children were turned against parents and parents against their children; religious instruction was outlawed even within the privacy of one's own home. Nor did the Revolution discriminate between members or non-members of the CCPA: all suffered a common fate.

The Cultural Revolution was a time of great anguish for all Chinese, believer and non-believer alike. Ironically, while the people of China were experiencing the deepest agony of their history, European intellectuals and commentators were portraying this period as one of exceptional social progress for China, expressing praise and admiration for what was taking place there.

Recently, a Chinese professor, while addressing a European audience, made the following remarks, providing some interesting and somewhat surprising comments on the effects of this period on the Chinese people.

It was a time during which all Chinese stood helpless before this violence and suffering. Experiencing such profound need, many were brought to reflect upon the true meaning of life, of death and of suffering. This may be one reason why many Chinese are nearer now to religious belief than they were before.

This time of common suffering also had a redeeming aspect for Christians. For centuries we Christians had been considered "unpatriotic" and were hated by other Chinese because of the special protection we received from the foreign powers. But now we were equals in suffering with all other Chinese. And we earned for ourselves the right to be called patriotic Chinese. What is even more important, Christian Churches in China could no longer be considered to be "foreign".

These comments confirm our own hope that from the depths of its suffering, a more truly Chinese local Church may emerge, redeemed, at least in part, from the stigma of being "foreign".

The upheavals of the Cultural Revolution will always remain obscure and ill-defined for Westerners. The words of a visiting Chinese bishop to foreign friends bear testimony to this: "You were not there. Nor are we able to explain what happened. You would do better not to discuss it - much less judge it."

Pope John Paul II had apparently grasped this insight when he addressed a message to the people of China from Manila in 1981:

In those long years you have undoubtedly lived through experiences which are still unknown to us. And at times you will have asked your consciences what was the right thing to do... Yet, I want you to know this: I, and the Universal Church with me, have been with you in thought and prayer...

These words, certainly have the ring of authentic Christian understanding, appreciation and affirmation.

#### *RESTORATION OF THE POLICY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: 1978-1982*

##### Policy of Religious Freedom Restored: 1978-1982

Following the Cultural Revolution, China opened itself to friendly relations and exchanges with foreign countries. The United Front Policy was reactivated as part of the movement towards liberalization, and Christian support was once again openly sought in the drive for modernization. Catholics were even invited to send delegates to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

In October 1979 The People's Daily announced that the policy of religious freedom would be restored, and Christians would not only be allowed to believe, but they would also be permitted to practise their faith openly. During that same year the Religious Affairs Bureau and the



CCPA were reestablished on the provincial level, and they began the task of reopening churches.

Another important step was taken in 1980 when the five major religions in China were officially requested to organize national congresses. The Catholic Church held two important meetings: the first was the CCPA's third national congress at the end of May; the second, in early June, was the first congress of Chinese Catholic representatives. What emerged from these meetings was the decision to establish a Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference to deal with matters of Christian doctrine, and a Catholic Church Affairs Commission for pastoral concerns.

Thus, the role of the CCPA was further clarified as being little more than a link between Church and government; it was to be a lay association, a political arm of the Church.

In 1979, China's criminal code legislated that government officials who deprived citizens of the right to practise their faith would be liable to prosecution and imprisonment. The New Constitution, which was adopted in 1982, restated the right to freedom of religious belief.

In China today, five major world religions are officially designated as being distinct from "superstition": Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Protestantism and Catholicism. They are accepted and recognized as religious organizations having their own scriptures, disciplines, and teachings, all of which raises them above "superstitious" practice, and, therefore, are permitted to function within Chinese society as contributing moral education for citizens in the promotion of ethical behaviour.

This new religious policy must be seen within the wider context of liberalization in present-day China, and China's attempt to rally all citizens in support of its



modernization policy. It does not imply a basic change in the official government view on religion. The disappearance of religion, according to this view, is part of a long-term historical process. The government admits it misunderstood this in 1957, and has made mistakes in its militant campaigns to suppress religious activities, customs, and habits in the past. More specifically, it now states that the propagation of atheism should not be accompanied by force or violence.

A public statement by Professor Zhao Fusan, the Vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, during the March 1985 meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, makes it clear that the official attitude towards religion has undergone some modifications. "Religion is not 'the opium of the people', as has often been said. It is, rather, an important part of our culture which deserves closer study. Religion is neither 'backward', nor a 'form of escapism'. It is, on the contrary, the most direct way to confront world problems. Religion must not be considered as superstition. We consider it as man's first attempt to reflect more deeply on the meaning of life."

While lecturing at Louvain, Professor Zhao expressed his personal view that religion has its own role to play in contemporary China. This role is to be found in the social and cultural fields, a role of reconciliation between peoples.

Such views present religion in a far different light from those we were accustomed to hearing during the 1950's. One cannot deny that important changes seem to be taking place with regard to attitudes towards religion in China today.

Freedom of Religion is an official government policy. Catholics, however, raise questions about the last phrase of Article 36 of the revised Constitution which states: "No religious affairs may be dominated by any foreign country." Is this statement directed against the person whom Catholics consider to be the spiritual leader and primate of the universal church? Could this spiritual leadership of the Pope - which poses no threat to national interest - be interpreted as a form of political "foreign domination" in a country which has as few Catholics as China?

## The Church Reorganized: 1982-1986

According to figures quoted by Church officials, there should now be over three million Catholics in China (approximately as many as in 1949). It is reported that about 30,000 baptisms take place annually. Roughly, 600 churches and more than a 1,000 chapels have been reopened since 1978.

There are about 50 bishops in China, among them a few who were appointed by Pope Pius XII. Many dioceses still remain without a bishop. The exact number of priests is unknown, but it is estimated to be about 1,000, with their average age around seventy. Any traveler to China cannot but be impressed by their zeal and dedication to the pastoral task of reorganizing the Christian communities.

These priests are fully aware that the future of the Chinese Church is in their hands. Many commit their entire efforts to the training of new ministers, the formation of catechists and nuns for pastoral work. Above all, they encourage vocations to the priesthood among the youth. Even though China's young people have undergone great social changes, vocations are abundant.

Very important to the Church's reorganization is the recent opening of major seminaries to train candidates for the priesthood. The first to be opened was Shanghai's She Shan Seminary in September 1982, which now has over 100 seminarians. In 1985 seven priests, all seminarians dating from the 1950's, were ordained there. New seminary buildings have been erected to house over 160 seminarians. Other seminaries opened in Beijing (the National Seminary and another for the Diocese), Wuchang, Shenyang, Chengdu, and Shijiazhuang. These seminaries boast a total of over 600 young men now preparing for ordination to the priesthood.

Since 1984 novitiates for nuns have been opened in Xuzhou, Guangzhou, Jilin, Hankou, Beijing and Shanghai. A total of 140 novices were in formation in 1985.

### *THE EMERGENCE OF A CHINESE CATHOLIC LOCAL CHURCH?*

Is it possible for a Church to rise from the chaos of the past thirty years and become, for the first time

in its history, fully Chinese - a Church that will be self-directed, self-subsistent, self-propagating, as all local Churches are expected to be - a Church that is, at the same time, truly Catholic, in full communion with the universal church under the Holy Father?

Looking at the facts, one is moved to say "Yes". This response is not a groundless hope, but one which shows concrete signs of moving towards realization.

Traveling throughout China and meeting various Catholic communities is like being in a caravan that time and time again arrives at another dynamic oasis of living faith. Large crowds gather for Mass on weekdays as well as on Sundays. In some churches on important feast days, worshippers number over a thousand, with many people coming from great distances. Some travel a full day, arriving the night before so as not to miss a moment of the Eucharistic Celebration. They sing the Latin chants from memory, and the ceremonies are solemn and edifying, with hundreds going to confession and many receiving confirmation after Mass.

In Tianjin hundreds of Catholics attend daily Mass. And should you visit during the Month of May the pilgrimage site of Our Lady Help of Christians on She Shan Hill just outside Shanghai, you would join with hundreds of Catholics coming from all corners of China as they pray the rosary and sing hymns to Our Lady.

The Catholic Church Affairs Commission has supervised the reprinting of the New Testament, the Imitation of Christ, many new prayer and hymn books, and the catechism (although questions about the primacy of the Pope have been omitted). It has also published for the past six years a magazine called The Catholic Church in China. Another new periodical is published in Shanghai: A Collection of Catholic Documentation. Besides all this, there is a growing market for locally manufactured religious articles, such as rosaries, statues, medals, and other objects of devotion. In Beijing, the Xiangbo Language Institute has reopened. In many places, new dispensaries are being planned. Some speak of the establishment of a Catholic Institute for Language and Culture in the very near future. In some of the newly reprinted Chinese prayer books, one finds prayers for the Pope. Many Catholics will tell you that they pray for the Pope, and in doing so, feel truly united with the Universal

Church.

In so far as local Catholic Churches are self-directed, self-subsistent, and self-propagating, one can say that they are truly autonomous. This is in line with the current understanding of local Churches that exists within the Universal Church. Nor is it in contradiction with the equally important and essential reality, that every local Church can only be authentically Catholic when it is united with the Universal Church under the Holy Father. Whatever the obstacles to formal unity there may be, this spiritual unity cannot be ciphered away. It touches on the very essence of Catholicism. My strongest conviction, shared also, I am sure, by many who have traveled through China, is that the fidelity and unity in faith of China's Catholics with the Universal Church under the Holy Father cannot be doubted. Visitors to China are reassured of this by the hundreds of handshakes they receive in the occasional brief but warm encounters with Chinese bishops, priests and laity. The same terse comments are continually repeated "We believe just as before" "Credo in Unam Sanctam, Catholicam et Apostolicam Ecclesiam," "We are all in the one same Church", etc.

It is not possible for them to say more; nor is there any need to. Their statements testify to an ever present unity of faith, and a desire to express it even if in the most informal and briefest terms. At a later time, one hopes this unity can be given more formal and explicit expression.

In the end, it is the spiritual unity of the Faith that matters most to the Church. Confusion is often caused by equating unity of faith with Vatican-Chinese diplomatic relations, as if the latter could automatically produce the former. This is not necessarily the case.

Perhaps we have focused too much on diplomatic relations. Might this have been a natural reaction to the harsh statements coming from China rejecting any relations with the Vatican, and exaggerated claims of total autonomy and independence? But we must remind ourselves that the Vatican has, strictly speaking, no formal diplomatic relations with any country. The 1815 Viennese International Convention,

renewed in 1961, states that the Holy See, which is represented by nuncios, exerts only a moral influence in international affairs.

Ever since the time of liberation, the problem of the Catholic Church in China has centered itself on its relations with Rome. Such a concentration of focus on this one single issue in China has resulted in the Church being identified with a "religion that follows the instructions of the Pope, a foreign leader." This represents a distortion of the whole issue. It fails to touch upon the true meaning of our unity of faith with the universal church under the Holy Father, our spiritual leader. Too much stress has been put on this one aspect of our teaching. As important as it may be, it remains but one element, and while it does merit attention it does not merit all the attention. The Bishops of Taiwan in their pastoral letter of September 1984 stated quite clearly the nature of the relationship of the Pope to local Churches:

...the relation between the Church and the Pope is a matter of communion in faith. When we assert belief in the Pope's primacy of leadership, our understanding is that he is the head of the Church - not the head of a political party.

All this points to the fact that a local Chinese Church living in a spirit of communion in faith with the Holy Father is by no means outside the realm of possibility. Given the present evolution of the Church's hierarchial structures and the current theological understanding of the relationship of local churches within the framework of the Universal church, one can see signs of the emergence of an authentic local church in China, one that ardently seeks to maintain and foster a unity of faith with the Church at-large.

#### CONCLUSION

It is my conviction that the task ahead is for us to continue to search out new modes of relationship with this emerging local Church on the China mainland. One way of proceeding is to encourage and intensify the mutual



exchange of visits between Chinese Catholics and Catholics outside of China. After a modest beginning seven years ago, and following upon the visits of Cardinals Koenig and Etchegaray to China and the Catholic Chinese delegation to Montreal, this form of mutual exchange has been on the increase, especially during the past two years. It has resulted in the establishment of warm and friendly ties between numerous priests, religious and lay people on both sides.

With the reopening of China to the outside world, the opportunity to foster friendly relations between the Church in China and outside local Churches has not only been made possible, but these relationships have also been allowed to develop on the highest levels of church authority. China has played host to Bishop John Wu of Hong Kong (on two occasions), a delegation of 5 bishops representing the Federation of Asian Bishops, and Jamie Cardinal Sin from the Philippines. Recently, Chinese bishops have visited both Europe and the United States as guests of local Church organizations there. Such visits are not meant to minimize differences nor ignore the problems that await resolution, but they do go a long way in establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect which can serve as the basis for developing further new and positive relationships in caritate et veritate. Exploring new ways of communication, in a spirit of openness and candor, is the first step towards achieving a true and lasting communion. All indications point to an acceleration of these friendly visits in the future, and as relationships develop so, too, will a spirit of mutual receptiveness and acceptance.

I myself have experienced an example of this when I was invited by Bishop Aloysius Jin to give a series of lectures to the seminarians of Shanghai's She Shan Seminary, where Bishop Jin is the rector. In attendance were 95 seminarians and my subject was the Second Vatican Council. That I should be allowed to lecture freely, openly and in

great detail on the Council and its efforts to modernize and up-date the universal church, was something quite new and surprising for me personally.

I spoke to the seminarians of how Vatican II was the first council in church history to represent a true plurality, with bishops of all nationalities, races, cultures and people taking part. The European and Western dominance that had characterized previous Church Councils was no longer in evidence. Decisions regarding the future of the Church and the directions it must take in the modern world were made in a spirit of genuine collegiality. "What a pity," I added, "That, because of unfortunate historical circumstances, bishops from the China mainland were unable to attend." And I went on to express my hope that these bishops, in the not so distant future, might be able to assume their rightful place in the universal church's College of Bishops under the primacy of the Holy Father. "The Church," I said, "strives to be a community of brothers and sisters which, in a society characterized by science and technology, desires to participate fully in working for progress and modernization, while at the same time bearing witness to spiritual values by means of a life of faith that is meaningful and appropriate for the times and places in which we live."

That such exchanges as these are allowed and encouraged is one more sign that times are changing. A new era is dawning for the Church in China, one which beckons her to take her rightful place in the universal family of churches. It is a turning point in the history of the Church in China, and it might well be a turning point in the history of the universal church; certainly, a new chapter in that history is now being written. As the Church in China faces a new crossroads, one thing is obvious - there can be no going back to the past. China can never again be thought of as a 'missionary territory'. Today the Church in China must be recognized and accepted as a local church on the road to full maturity. The implications of such a realization means that we, who are on the outside, must continue our efforts to seek appropriate responses to this new and changing situation, and to work out positive methods for maintaining a close and supportive relationship with her.



Our missionary task in China is over. That it has now come to completion is made clear to us when we observe the mature and positive way the Church in China is taking responsibility for her own present growth and development. But this does not mean we, in the West, can put her off to one side or forget about her needs. On the contrary, the new situation there offers us a new challenge: to relate to the Church in China as a genuine local Church within the world community of Churches.

The end of the Second World War saw much of the world emerging from centuries of colonialism. The colonial mentality could not help but taint our relations with China and the church in the past. Today, however, a new kind of relationship is demanded, a relationship based on equality and mutual respect. To rebuild relationships requires time, patience, and a strong commitment to slow, gradual growth. All of us, both inside and outside China, are now being challenged to rediscover each other's cultures and peoples, in order that we might renew and regain mutual appreciation and respect. We have much to explore and much to share. Scientific and culture exchanges (religion is an essential element of the latter) can be raw material for our growth and enrichment. The Chinese and Western Churches must move beyond the mistakes of recent history to achieve a relationship based on the meaningful exchange of both science and culture. Such an exchange cannot help but foster that highest of ideals - a universal brotherhood founded on mutual respect, appreciation and equality.