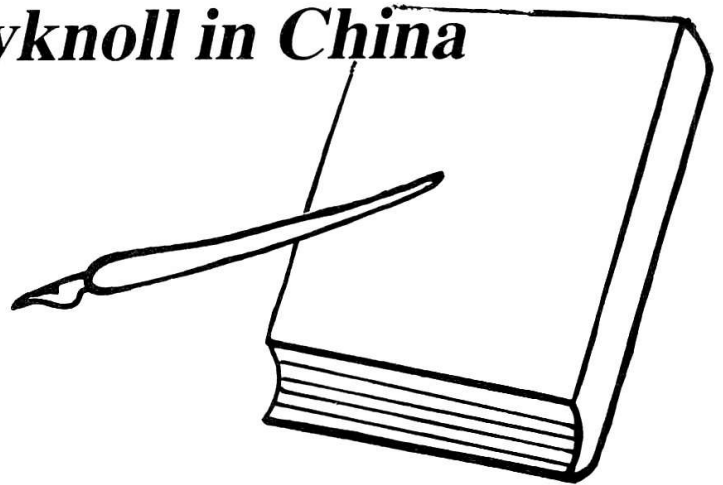


# Book Review: *Maryknoll in China*

by Miriam Xavier Mug



Jean-Paul Wiest in Maryknoll in China presents a comprehensive and highly readable account of Maryknoll missionary activity in China dating from the establishment of its first mission at Yeung Kong in Guangdong Province in 1918 to its expulsion after the Communist victory in the 1950's. In a well-documented study, Wiest traces the history of both branches of Maryknoll -- the priests and brothers (The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America) and the Maryknoll Sisters, who began their work in China in Yeung Kong in 1922. The Maryknoll priests took up work in the Mukden vicariate, Manchuria in 1925. The sisters went to Manchuria the following year, 1926. The author divides his material into four parts. After a brief introduction on the origin of Maryknoll and its insertion into a Chinese context, he moves on in parts two and three to "The Evangelization of non-Christians" and "The Building up of the Native Church", which are, of special interest to anyone concerned with the study of missiology and the development of the local church in non-Christian countries during the first half of the present century. These two sections of the book are most revealing and quite informative.

The Maryknoll approach to mission in the various vicariates assigned to it in China was by no means uniform. In Kaying Francis X. Ford assigned his personnel to live in the villages among the people with whom they worked. This innovative approach had far reaching effects on mission strategy in general. Up to that time, religious sisters had operated from centralized convents or institutions. Ford placed them side-by-side with their male counterparts in direct daily contact with the people on the grassroots levels of society.

Wiest's treatment of such issues as indigenization, adaptation, and accommodation reveals much about the Maryknoll community as it went about trying to achieve these ideals. He traces the methods used, the personal and communal aspirations of the missionaries themselves, how

they adapted to China, and how they related to the local and universal Church. He ends part three with a detailed analysis of "Maryknoll and Politics", pointing out difficulties and dangers besetting foreigners in a strife-ridden country.

It is to the author's credit that he strives to present an objective view, portraying Maryknollers as they really were. He finds that on the whole they loved and respected the people among whom they worked and appreciated their cultural heritage. But he also indicates that there were mistakes made along the way. While Maryknollers were sincere in their desire to establish a Chinese church, the place of the laity was neither well-recognized nor was their potential well-developed. As a result, when the missionaries were forced to withdraw during the 1950's, the laity were neither ready nor able to take effective control of the local church. Also, a Western mentality prevailed in the assignment of indigenous clergy to positions of authority which hampered the growth and development of a strong local church.

Wiest's final chapter is about the effects the Maryknoll community had on American Catholics at home, not only in its ability to draw young men and women to dedicate their lives to missionary work, but also in influencing the image American Catholics held about China and the Chinese people. Through its innovative use of mass-media methodology, Maryknoll was effective in communicating to a very large audience its own love of and appreciation for the Chinese people.

Wiest's concluding remarks are brief but noteworthy. Among them, he underlines Maryknoll's continuing concern for China. If the dream of a Christian China has been deferred, the expulsion of foreign missionaries has set up a situation that forced the issue of localization, whether the church felt it was ready or not. Localization, or indigenization, one of the primary goals of the missionary enterprise, means that local Christians are now responsible for the spread of the faith. However, a particular local church is also vitally linked to the universal church. Part of Maryknoll's present role is to encourage and educate First World Christians about the situation of the Church in China, which includes the history of its missionary beginnings, for the purpose of arousing interest and concern among members of the church universal for their brother and sisters in the Chinese Church. Wiest's book serves as a vehicle for this purpose admirably. He points out that the time of Maryknoll's missionary involvement in China was one of enrichment for Maryknoll itself, and, in reflecting on its own experiences there, how Maryknoll has found new directions for doing mission in contemporary society.