

# Catholic China Initiatives in Germany

by Roman Malek & Manfred Plate

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In 1987 Roman Malek and Manfred Plate published the book *Chinas Katholiken suchen neue Wege* ("Chinese Catholics searching out New Ways", Herder, Freiburg/West Germany). This book was the first major German publication of material on the situation of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and on the theological discussion of the problems surfaced by this Church. Furthermore, it also summarized the concern that German Catholics have for China, including as it does recent German publications on the Catholic Church in the PRC. The following article gives, in a slightly revised version, a summary of Catholic China-initiatives in Germany. We hope that it helps to stimulate numerous new initiatives by Catholics in Europe, Hong Kong and China.

In 1952, when the last missionaries had to leave the PRC, links with the Catholic Church there while not completely severed, were much impeded. The interest of the German Church in China, during the years however was never wholly extinguished. Especially with the on-set of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), people interested in China began once again to think increasingly about the future of Christianity in the

PRC. Among the *Divine Word Missionaries* (SVD) of St. Augustin near Bonn there was a group of former China-missionaries, who, naturally enough, maintained a strong interest in whatever was happening in "Red" China. Since 1972, the internationally renowned sinological journal *Monumenta Serica* has had its editorial offices here, and its editors have always kept close contact with sinologists and missiologists around the world, with their connections in Taiwan and Hongkong naturally play-



ing an important role. At the same time, they also tried to keep alive the interest of the German Church in the PRC.

Another center of Catholic interest in China in those days was the chair of missiology at the University of Würzburg (Bavaria), which professor Bernward Willeke, a Franciscan, had held since 1961. In cooperation with the then President of the *Pontifical Missionary Work* in Aachen, Prelate Klaus Mund, Professor Willeke had already during the sixties gathered people interested in China for an exchange of ideas and information. This group soon sought to be involved in the ecumenical cooperation with Protestant organizations of similar interest, who were members of the *Evangelisches missionswerk* (Protestant Association for World Mission, Hamburg, Pastor Pörksen). Their first preliminary consultation took place in 1969 and 1971. At that time on the Catholic side a special *China-Commission* was set up within the *German Catholic Mission Council*, and Professor Willeke became its chairman in 1971. After a further series of consultations, the foundation of the *Ecumenical China Working Group* was established, which, with great energy, began to collect information and, sometimes in rather unorthodox ways, establish contacts with China. The leader on the Protestant side was (and still is) Dr. Justus Freytag of Hamburg. The present Chairman of the Catholic China Commission is Professor Hans Waldenfels SJ of Bonn.

In the beginning of May 1973, the first large China-symposium, which was organized by the *Ecumenical China Working Group*, took place in Arnoldshain, Taunus, near Frankfurt. This conference met with lively public response. A report of this meeting was later published in *China, Herausforderung an die Kirchen* (China: Challenge to the Churches, Erlangen 1974). As a consequence of this meeting, the Catholic China experts in Germany, England and the USA met together to prepare plans for a large-scale ecumenical convention. This was held in Louvain in September 1974, sponsored by the research-institute *Pro Mundi Vita* in Brussels and the *China Study Group of the Lutheran World Federation*. This convention, which enjoyed world-wide coverage in the press helped to stimulate a reawakening of interest on the part of the German Church in China.

With the thaw in Chinese-American relations and the admission of the PRC to the UN (October 1971), increasing hopes for an "opening" of China had been awakened. In October 1972, the Federal Republic of Germany and the PRC had also established diplomatic relations, and in the end of 1975 Chancellor Helmut Schmidt visited China. In the same year (January 1975), the *Catholic China Commission of the German Catholic Missionary Council* was recognized as an official advisory body to the

government. From that time on, twice yearly China consultations took place, usually in conjunction with the Protestant China circles. The members of the China Commission in those years functioned as important facilitators in organized discussions. At the time focus of the discussions centered on Maoism which was then in vogue. At a meeting in Bonn in 1976, the *Theological Implications of the New China* were discussed.

Acting on the initiative of Fr. Joseph Spae (1913-1989), people from Northern European countries who already had been interested in China since 1973 formed an association called *Catholics in Europe concerned with China* (CECC). The *German China Commission* also collaborated with this group. On the occasion of an international China conference held in Hong Kong in 1979, members of the *China Commission* made their first trip to South China in order to visit Protestant and Catholic communities re-established in that region. These encounters, which on the Chinese side were still characterized by nervous fear, represented for Germany the beginning of a new era, and in June 1979 a group of people from all over Europe had another meeting in Hofheim for more intensive discussions about this new situation.

In the fall of the same year (November 1979), the first decisive attempt to build a bridge between the churches was made. Together with a government delegation from the Land Baden-Württemberg, Bishop Dr. Georg Moser of the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart visited the PRC, the first foreign bishop in thirty years to do so.

During these important years, China began for economic reasons to boost foreign tourism in its country. Among the first tourist groups who travelled to China, were Catholics who brought back information about the situation of Catholic communities from the places they had visited. With permission of the local Bureaus for Religious Affairs, they were able to talk to individual priests. Sharing experiences during such visits with Hong Kong and overseas Chinese was also of great help to them. At that time the Catholic weekly *Christ in der Gegenwart* (Christians In The Present Age, published by Herder, Freiburg/West Germany) started to organize study tours to the PRC on a regular basis in order to facilitate contacts between the Chinese and the German Catholic Church on the professional level. These visits not only brought them to the well-known tourist places, but also to a great number of churches in nearly all parts of the country.

One of the most active travellers involved in this undertaking was (and still is) the former editor-in-chief of the Catholic monthly *Mission*

*aktuell*, Mr. Hansjosef Theyßen from Aachen. He was the first one to organize and lead groups of German Catholics to China. On these tours, visits to local Catholic communities were always part of the program.

In 1982 the *Adam Schall-Gesellschaft* (Adam Schall-Society) for the promotion of German Chinese friendship was founded with Mr. Theyßen as its President. While this society is not strictly a Catholic institution and operates along neutral lines, it does, however, preserve its close affiliation with the Catholic Church. With the help of the *Adam Schall Gesellschaft*, which is located in Aachen, many bridges between China and Germany have been built. In Munich, there is a second center of the *Adam Schall-Gesellschaft* under the leadership of Fr. Peter Gerhards SVD, a former missionary to China, who is also in charge of a house for Chinese students and does commendable work among many Chinese students in Munich. Together with the Franciscan Bernward Willeke, Fr. Gerhards remains today a very active advocate of the Chinese Catholic Church in Germany.

A great number of other more or less official bodies within the German Church, who work primarily for the missions, never lost their interest in China during all those years: e.g. the great Catholic associations of *Misereor* (Prelate Norbert Herkenrath) and *Missio* (Prelate Bernd Kaut) and the *Missiological Institute*, all in Aachen, as well as other missiological institutes as the already mentioned chair at the University of Würzburg and the *International Association for Missiology*. Then there is the Asia department of the Secretariat of the German Bishop's Conference (Mr. Hermann-Josef Großimlinghaus), and *Missio Munich* and its President Msgr. Heinrich Haug, who have also always shown great interest in the Chinese Church.

In this context we should not forget the many articles on China in journals like *Die katholischen Missionen* (editor-in-chief Fr. Ludwig Wiedenmann SJ), *Mission aktuell* and *Stimmen der Zeit* (voices of the time), and, on more academic level, the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* (Journal for Missiology and Religious Studies). In other Catholic publications, there can also be found increasingly well-informed articles on the situation of the Catholic Church in China. Georg Evers, who is an Asia Expert in *Missiological Institute* (Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Aachen) and also a member *China Commission*, has through many trips and publications (among others in the *Herder-Korrespondenz*), most actively stimulated and promoted the German-Chinese dialogue.

One of the first well-known theologians to address the religious



situation was Professor Hans Küng of Tübingen University. Already in August 1979, he visited Beijing with an American delegation and gave a much discussed lecture on the dialogue between Christianity and Atheism. In Professor Küng's *Ecumenical Institute* at Tübingen University, academic discussion of China issues has always been emphasized; here we especially want to mention specifically the publications of Karl-Josef Kuschel and the Chinese scholar Julia Ching.

Thus it can be seen that even after the end of the foreign missionary era, interest in China has continued to be lively in the Catholic Church of Germany. A great deal of important information and personal contacts have always come via Hongkong, which is in active partnership with the diocese of Essen.

With regard to Catholic China-initiatives in Germany, we also wish to mention the active role played by the many Chinese Catholics and theologians who for years have been living in Germany. An example is Fr. Rochus Tsi from Northern China, who is a priest of the diocese of Trier. In countless ways he has helped to create better understanding and remove misconceptions regarding the Church of China.

During the last few years, missionary orders such as the Benedictines of Sankt Ottilien (especially Archabbot Dr. Notker Wolf), the Franciscans and the Jesuits have redirected their attention to China. Among the Jesuits, the former Japan Missionary Hans Waldenfels (who since 1977 has been professor of fundamental theology at the University of Bonn) has been working from very early for a new understanding of the situation in China through his writing and personal initiatives in the Church.

With regard to the missionary orders, *Divine Word Missionaries* in St. Augustin near Bonn are to be mentioned once again. Their highly specialized library *Monumenta Serica* (80,000 volumes, about half of them in Chinese, and a collection of 200 journals) is open to scholars and students, which makes St. Augustin a center for German-Chinese contact. Former China missionaries and younger sinologists - among them several from Poland - have joined in a combined effort to study the new situation in China and to develop appropriate responses. In 1982, the editors of *Monumenta Serica* began to publish the bulletin *China heute* [*Chung-kuo chiao-hsün*, Information on Religion and Christianity in China] which has proved to be an indispensable instrument for furthering the German-Chinese dialogue. The first volumes, edited by Dr. Hildegard Coldehoff, were subsidized by *Missio*, Aachen. Since 1984, the sinologist Fr. Dr. Roman Malek, SVD has been editing this bi-monthly

bulletin. A broad variety of initiatives, suggestions and information have grown out of these activities and members of the Society working in Taiwan have been engaged in this cooperative effort. Fr. Dr. Willi Müller, SVD, who was chairman of the *China commission* and editor of *Monumenta Serica* for a while, and Fr. Dr. Arnold Sprenger from *Fu Jen University*, Taipei, were both invited to teach at the *Normal University* in Beijing.

In 1985, preparations were made to invite Fr. Aloysius Jin Luxian, who had recently been ordained Bishop of Shanghai, to visit Germany under the sponsorship of *Christ in der Gegenwart*. His trip, which took place from April 16 to May 13, 1986, received such a positive response that contacts between the Catholic Church in Germany and in China gained a new dimension.

In order to intensify efforts to form closer relations between the Catholic Church in Germany and China, the *German Catholic Missionary Council*, the associations *Missio*, *Misereor* and *Caritas*, and several missionary orders such as the *Divine Word Missionaries*, the *SSpS-Sisters*, the *Franciscans*, the *Benedictines* and the *Jesuits*, in 1988 established in Bonn the *China-Zentrum* (China-Center). Chairman of the board of the *China-Zentrum* is the President of *Missio Munich*, Msgr. Heinrich Haug, and the director of the Center, which is also located in St. Augustin, Bonn, is Fr. Dr. Roman Malek SVD.

The Center works in close cooperation with the institute *Monumenta Serica*, and *China Heute* is now being published here.

The Center wants to encourage people in all German-speaking countries to take an interest in China and also to establish contacts with China and the Church there through the different ways which are today possible. Consequently, it wants to serve towards fostering a dialogue of the broadest possible scope, not only with the Chinese people but also among the groups and communities within the churches of Germany who are working for China. The activities of the Center include: collecting and distributing information about China with special regard to religion; awakening awareness of the problems of China; developing scientific and socio-practical cooperation with China. The Center also wants to encourage research projects on the history of Christianity and other religions in the Chinese cultural milieu, as well as to serve as a consultative office for the above mentioned plans and purposes.

In all these areas, we hope to intensify our cooperative efforts with Chinese friends in the PRC and in Hong Kong.