

The Studium Biblicum and the Chinese Catholic Bible

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The Studium Biblicum was founded on August 2, 1945 at St. Francis Church in Beijing. The Second World War had not yet ended and people were struggling to eke out an existence. Many felt it was not the time to establish an academic society. Father Gabriel Allegra, OFM, however, with remarkable foresight and heedless of public opinion, established the Studium Biblicum and placed it under the protection of Mary, the heavenly Queen of China. From that time on, each manuscript and page published by the Studium Biblicum has been dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Queen of China.



Purpose of Studium Biblicum

The purpose for founding the Studium Biblicum and the ambience at the time have been carefully documented in the foreword of the Book of Psalms, the first volume published by the association on May 31, 1946. As the foreword explains: the war and its aftermath with its high cost of living, had caused everyone in China to suffer greatly both spiritually and materially. Most missionaries felt that it was difficult enough and sufficiently energy consuming just to try to maintain the status quo, let alone get involved in book publication. However, Father Allegra, the founder of the association, noted that many Christians, other than Catholics, were much bolder in propagating their beliefs, less concerned with the difficulties involved and less apprehensive about spending the money needed to accomplish their purpose. In fact, no sacrifice seemed too great for

them. Ought Catholics not, he asked, possess a similar spirit, as much zeal as their non-Catholic Christian brothers in bringing the light of God's Word, the two-edged sword, to the Chinese people and help disperse the darkness?

Father Allegra explained: "Christians live in a world replete with dangers and need an abundance of spiritual nourishment." He firmly believed that the major responsibility for seeing that Christians receive the nourishment they needed rested with priests. Father Allegra added: "Spiritual food is of two kinds: the Holy Eucharist and the Bible. Origen wrote, 'Through the living bread that has come down from heaven we are united with Jesus; through the Word in the Bible, we are also united to Jesus.'"

Complete Bible Needed for Chinese Catholics

There were at the time a number of translations of the New Testament available for the Catholics of China, but no translation of the Old Testament had appeared for 300 years. Members of other Christian persuasions often ridiculed the Catholic Church for its neglect of the Scriptures and many Catholics harboured a sense of shame. The lack of available Bibles in the Chinese Catholic Church was reminiscent of the situation at the time of St. Jerome. It was criticisms of the Church by outsiders that prompted St. Jerome to spend his whole life and all his energies in translating the Bible. His masterpiece silenced the detractors. Father Allegra commented, "Therefore, we are also determined to do our utmost to make up for this lack in our Chinese Catholic Church. We want to offer this food of everlasting life to our Chinese Christians."

Father Allegra and his men set out to work as hard as possible to accomplish their task. They petitioned all bishops, priests, Sisters and Catholics who had supported them in their work in the past to continue to pray that they might not be discouraged by the enormity of the task that lay before them.

Studium Biblicum Moves to Hong Kong

The Studium Biblicum moved from China mainland to Hong Kong in August, 1948 and the Franciscans redoubled their translation efforts. They published the Prophetic Books on May 31,

1952. In the preface to that publication the founder of the Studium Biblicum commented: "Many of our readers are quite surprised that, although at this time holy books cannot reach the hands of Catholics on the mainland, we continue to translate the Bible into Chinese...." He went on to explain, "Outside the mainland there are still many *People of Sinim* (Is. 49:12). (This reference to the People of Sinim in Isaiah is sometimes interpreted as referring to the Chinese people.) They obtain spiritual comfort and hope when they read or preach God's word as revealed to and by the Prophets. Since God uses the Prophets to speak to our Chinese compatriots, we cannot suspend the translation we have already begun."

Father Allegra and his men believed firmly that God's Word is alive and is most effective in obtaining salvific grace for human beings. It was this faith that moved them to take on the responsibility for this work and which made the work meaningful. Father Allegra wrote: "What is more authentic or effective than the Word of God? Through the prophet Jeremiah God described his own Word in this way: 'My word is like fire and like a hammer that breaks rocks into little pieces.' (Jer. 23:29). We should believe this not only because we are Christians, but even more so because we are priests and missionaries who have received the mandate to preach God's Word." There was no obstacle too great that it could not be overcome with zeal. Conditions, whether favourable or adverse, public opinion, whether supportive or opposed, listeners, whether many or few, nothing mattered. Father Allegra was determined to continue to preach the Gospel. "We do this," he said, "because we firmly believe that God's Word can touch the human heart and penetrate the most unreasonable and stubborn of hearts."

Father Allegra felt that God's Word could not wait for peaceful or opportune times and that preachers should not rely solely on human experience. In season or out of season, in bright or dark and troubled times, those whom God had chosen were "to march forward bravely and complete the task God has given us."

Bible Translation Completed

In August 1961, the Studium Biblicum completed the Chinese translation of the whole Bible. The men attributed this

accomplishment to the special help of Our Lady, China's Heavenly Queen. In the preface to the second volume of the apostolic epistles, Father Allegra commented: "For the past 15 years our association has been like a small boat tossed about in choppy seas...the first part of the voyage is over but the completion of the voyage is still far off." Father Allegra believed, like St. John Chrysostom did before him, that the Bible is like a vineyard which cannot produce the fresh fruits of life and truth without the solicitous attention of a capable and efficient gardener. For Fr. Allegra efficient gardeners were proficient scholars of the Bible whose task was to unearth the Bible's rich treasures. They write books to explain the Word of God, and through scholarship and holiness help eliminate erroneous interpretations of God's Word propagated by those whom the Apostle Peter refers to as *false teachers*.

When Cardinal Thomas Tian Gengxin heard that the last volume of the Bible had been translated and was about to be printed, he wrote a letter to the Studium Biblicum:

I have heard the good news that the last volume of the epistles and the Book of Revelation are about to be published. For the past 10 or more years everyone has worked continuously with the single purpose of translating the Bible into Chinese. Besides translating the actual text, detailed annotations explaining chapter and verse according to the views of Biblical scholars have been added. Thus you have produced an annotated version of the Bible in Chinese which is suitable for both cultivated and popular tastes. This is not only a great contribution to the Chinese church, but also a work which will have a considerable effect on Chinese culture itself. I hope the Fathers at the Studium Biblicum will now make an effort to produce a popular edition of the Bible, which will be convenient to carry, inexpensive and easy for Catholics to buy. This will naturally foster an atmosphere of Bible reading.

Beijing Publication, 1990

Cardinal Tian's hope was realized at Christmas, 1968 when the one-volume edition of the Chinese Bible was published. The preface of this Bible contains the following words: "After many difficulties this one-volume edition of the Old and New Testaments in Chinese has finally been published. Now with respectful and joyful hearts we offer this book to our Chinese

Catholic Church." Unfortunately, Cardinal Tian died before the work was completed. Although the Bible is still not easily available to Catholics in mainland China, at least the Studium Biblicum has succeeded in producing a Bible for the Chinese Catholic Church. 1990 marked a new accomplishment in the work of the Studium Biblicum: the Old Testament section of the Bible was published in Beijing where the association first began its work. This is a wonderful and praiseworthy event for the Church in China. According to the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN), within two months of its publication, 5,000 copies of the Bible had already been sold. This is a powerful witness to the love of God's Word by the Catholics of China.

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Hong Kong's regional seminary from 1933-35. He was ordained in 1937. In 1952 he was named vicar general of Fuzhou diocese. This appointment is still duly registered as such in the Pontifical Annuario for 1990.

Bishop Zheng was arrested in 1955, sentenced to life imprisonment in 1961, and released in 1983. In 1988, he was invited by the official church to serve as rector of the diocesan minor seminary. Bishop Zheng says he accepts this ordination "for the sake of the unity and growth of the Church."

Bishop of Xiamen Dies in Native Village

Bishop Joseph Huang Ziyu, 80, died in his native village, in Fujian, On April 8, 1991. His funeral Mass was held at Sacred Heart Church on Gulanyu where the elderly bishop had lived before returning to his native village last November for health reasons. The bishop had long been suffering from tuberculosis and injuries received during the Cultural Revolution.

Born in 1911 in Fujian, Bishop Huang was educated for the priesthood at the Hong Kong regional seminary from 1931-1934, and then in Rome where he was ordained in 1938. The diocese of Xiamen had been without a bishop for 30 years when Father Huang was ordained for that See in 1986.

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