

Book Review

Chosen for China: The California Province Jesuits in China, 1928-1957: A Case Study in Mission and Culture

Peter Joseph Fleming, S.J., (Ph.D., Dissertation)

UMI Dissertation Information Service, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1987, 727 pp. paper.

Reviewed by Michael Sloboda, M.M.

Drawing upon published materials, the archives of the Jesuit California Province at Los Gatos, and interviews with "old China hands," Peter Fleming tells the story of the 55 Jesuits of the California Province who served in China from September 1928 through June 1957. Fleming devotes the first quarter of *Chosen for China* to situating these West Coast American Jesuits within their cultural and ecclesial contexts. Foreign missionaries were special, fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission (Mt. 28). Jesuits especially, had inherited the self-sacrificing, military and heroic spirit of Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier (pp. 3-6). Fleming finds these images of the missionary in comic books, school plays, and poetry used to inspire Catholic school students.

Tensions soon surfaced between sending "the best men" to the missions, and using all available resources for the home apostolate (p.8). Fleming honestly exposes the personal and linguistic limitations of the Californians sent to China, telling stories which never made the *China Letter* or *Jesuit Missions*.

Because Matteo Ricci and his successors reached out to scholars (p. 7), later Jesuit communities in China felt pulled towards education and reaching the intellectuals. This same desire was shared by a rich Chinese businessman and zealous Catholic who "succeeded in bringing the California Jesuits to China in order to establish an English-speaking high school in Shanghai. Were it not for Lo Pahong, the Californians would probably never have gone to China" (p. 132). How this desire for an intellectual apostolate was delayed for years and, in the end, largely frustrated is one of the book's main themes

During the second quarter of the 20th century, mission was Rome's top priority. In 1926, Pope Pius XI consecrated six Chinese bishops. In 1927, he instituted Mission Sunday and the

Feast of Christ the King in 1928 (pp. 48-50). In mission territories, much too slowly turned over to the local church, missionaries had their own ways of doing things, and interpreting the Chinese scene to newcomers. In sad contrast to the early Jesuits who had high esteem for Chinese culture (pp. 186-196), French Jesuits had misconceptions of the Chinese reality, as well as a sense of cultural superiority (p. 202) which they fraternally passed on to their American brothers.

California Jesuits had never been involved in any outreach to the Chinese in their midst. Some California Jesuits did, however, come to the rescue of a delegation of Chinese orphans and their exhibition of artwork from Xujiahui at the 1915 San Francisco Exposition. "The memory of the Exhibit became an intimation for a call to China ten years later" (p. 131). Writing in the mid-'80's, Fleming is much more aware of the pitfalls of paternalism, of constantly doing good things *for* poor Chinese, then anyone of that era ever was.

The Chinese meanwhile were struggling to strengthen their country. Fleming repeats enough of the history of the Northern Expedition, the Nationalist-Communist split, the Japanese invasion, and Mao's victory in the civil war that the reader becomes better informed than the Jesuits on the scene ever were of the dynamics of nationalism and anti-Western sentiment. Angry high-school students shocked their Jesuit teachers by going on strike and talking back to them (pp. 234-236). The semi-monastic life in the center houses and language limitations isolated most of the missionaries from the Chinese. Several Jesuits worked with the foreign community in Shanghai in a parish, a radio station, and a Catholic monthly; "the Californians who *fell into* these three English language apostolates could do nothing else in China because they could not speak Chinese" (p. 372). Uncritically holding an American world view, they were slow to see both Japan's aggressive designs on China, and the weakness of the Nationalist government a decade later.

Fleming divides his dissertation into: the early years, 1926-34; a diversification of ministries overtaken by war, 1935-45; and the Yangzhou mission north of Shanghai, terminated by the arrest and eventual expulsion of all the Jesuits, 1945-57.

The first Californians had to adapt to two new cultures simultaneously: Chinese and French (their Jesuit mentors). Their first apostolate was in education, helping to staff second-

ary schools in Nanjing and Shanghai.

The second period saw plans drawn for a Catholic Institute in Nanjing, focusing on evangelization through higher education (p. 281). Shifting foci, insufficient funding, personality clashes, and the war frustrated a repeat of Ricci's apostolate. At the rice roots level, Fr. Charles Simmons labored in Haizhou, a rural mission district, until he was murdered by bandits at age 39, becoming California's "first martyr in China" (p. 326). The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor led to the internment of the Americans and a halt to almost all work.

Hopes for a Catholic renaissance in China were high at the end of the war, and the Californians were delighted to have their own mission territory, the Yangzhou district on the Grand Canal in Jiangsu. But the Communists soon arrived. After a period of increasing surveillance and pressure, some Jesuits were arrested and then expelled. Others spent years in prison, but soon the last foreign Jesuits were put on a ship leaving Shanghai.

So what did they accomplish? In his final pages, "A Theological Reflection on Mission and Culture," (reprinted in this issue of *Tripod*), Fleming sees the hand of God at work in spite of the chaos of those years and all the cultural, missiological, and personal shortcomings of the Californians. The passing decades provide him with a perspective denied to those caught up reacting to the flurry of events, and worried about whether the faith could survive under the new government.

At times Fleming is harsh, even sarcastic in his treatment of individuals and institutions, stopping just short of labeling them "politically incorrect." He achieves his goal: no one will mistake this for "hagiographical or promotional" writing (p. 480). Judging the past by contemporary standards is one of the problems of historiography. Nonetheless, *Chosen for China* is a significant addition to recent and well-documented books on the work of missionaries in China. Fleming paints his predecessors with more warts and pimples than do other authors in this field. But it is one sign of maturity in missiology that religious communities no longer print only those aspects of their histories which edify.

Seven appendices include a chronology from 618 to 1986 and biographical sketches of the California Jesuits missioned in China. While one sketch map and a dozen photos of the leading characters would enhance the book, the inclusion of an index is indispensable.