

## *European Catholic China Colloquium*

### *Paris, November 6-9, 1995*

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*(The following account is extracted from James Kroeger, M.M.'s longer report of the Colloquium and used with permission)*

One hundred and ten participants assembled in Paris for the European Catholic China Colloquium. This gathering was organized by the "Catholics in Europe Concerned with China". Among the key organizers were Jean Charbonnier, MEP; Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM; Angelo Lazzarotto, PIME; Roman Malek, SVD; and Mr. Edmond Tang. Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian came from Shanghai; Msgr. Ghidoni represented the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

The central focus of the Colloquium, according to Fr. Charbonnier, was "theological studies taking into account both the European and Chinese traditions." He added, "We have to respond to the expectations of the 40 plus Chinese seminarians, priests and Sisters who have come to Europe during the past two years." A key discussion question was: "How will they prepare themselves to meet the challenges of the Church in China today and in the coming years?"

Approximately 25 Chinese students in Europe came to the gathering. A goodly number of Sisters, as well as several Benedictine and Trappist monks interested in re-establishing the monastic and contemplative dimensions of Church life in China also joined the gathering. Many missionary groups were present; they came to learn and share their experiences. One could truly say that the context is no longer *China watching* but *inter-church exchange*.

The afternoon of the second day began with two presentations that set the wider social-cultural-philosophical context within which the Church in China operates. Papers were presented by Zbigniew Wesolowski and Roman Malek. The key themes that emerged from both papers were: (1) the challenge to address the "spiritual void" in China today, (2) the "philosophical explosion" happening in contemporary China, (3) the difficulty currently being experienced by the Christian Churches to provide an adequate response to these two realities, (4) the exploration of these questions outside the Church by "Culture Christians", (5) the task before Christians both inside and outside of China to engage in these questions.

Key questions of the discussion included: How can the training of Chinese students studying in the West address the issues of "Culture Christians"; how can China learn from the local churches who face similar

issues (e.g. Japan); how can Church personnel become “allies” with such “non-Church movements” through dialogue; can the Church capitalize on the reality that “never since Ricci have Chinese intellectuals been so open to Christianity” (E. Tang); what does this social-intellectual movement say to male and female students preparing for ministry in the Church in China?

The following day, (Nov. 8) featured a very stimulating presentation in French by Bishop Jin of Shanghai. This was followed by an equally fine talk by Sr. Maria Goretti Lau, SPB, from Hong Kong. Both presentations addressed key issues: needs, directions, experiences, programs both inside and outside China for theological and pastoral formation of Chinese Church personnel (clergy, religious and lay).

The afternoon session began with a short reflection on the theological formation of Chinese students in Europe, presented by Sr. Maria Ko. Student representatives living in various countries then presented their realities, experiences and recommendations: Germany (13 students); Italy (17 students); France (12 students); Holland (10 students); United States (40+).

Feedback from the afternoon workshop groups pointed up the following areas: Need for/to:

- studies to be for all groups (clergy, religious, lay);
- a coordinated selection process in China; “Be slow to send seminarians abroad for their initial formation”;
- the emergence of “theological institutes” within China;
- give attention to students from the time of their arrival in the West, accompany them throughout their entire formation process and as they deepen their spirituality; this is probably more crucial than their theological studies;
- sponsoring agencies to devise ways to get Chinese bishops more involved;
- Chinese students to gather from various institutions and reflect on their experiences using Mandarin, (seminars; an association, etc.);
- formation for Sisters and laity;
- coordination among Chinese dioceses;
- financial aid;
- address the phenomenon of “Culture Christians”;
- have formation/education programs in China or Asia rather than in the West;
- the FABC (Federation Asian Bishops’ Conferences ) to have a larger role.

On November 9 (Day 4) Three “working groups” were asked to present specific recommendations to the participants. These documents are

probably the most important results of the Paris Colloquium; they come from (1) Chinese priests and seminarians; (2) Chinese Sisters, and (3) Agencies receiving/sponsoring Chinese students.

Four other workshops gathered on various interests/themes:

- Development Projects in China;
- “Culture Christians”;
- Contemplative Life;
- Open Questions [with Bishop Jin].

The afternoon session began with a panel of Chinese theological students. They were asked to express their views and speak of their experience of the reality of studying in the West. One stressed her delight about living in an European religious community and her growth in spirituality (Sr. Theresa Qi). Another (Jean Tian) stressed the need for a deep spirituality when one lives in an open and free society. Two others (Li Jing and Jean Ma) described their experience as a “purgatory” since study methods, language as well as differences in culture, customs and country were difficult. Other groups also gave brief reports.

Fr. Jeroom Heyndricks gave his impressions of the meeting and spoke about the need for all to focus on faith and the dreams for reconciliation within the Church in China.

Msgr. Ghidoni also expressed the hope that the various “structures” of the Church in China will be able to come together and be reconciled.

Bishop Jin in his response to Msgr. Ghidoni asked him to transmit the love of the Chinese people to the Pope. He gave several examples of how Christians from both the official and unofficial church express their loyalty to the Pope.

The full English documents of this gathering will be published shortly by China-Zentrum in Germany.

At the social evening on the concluding day of the Colloquium, at the Center of the Paris Foreign Mission Society, Ms. Audrey Donnithorne gave a special presentation on “Church Life in China Today”.

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