

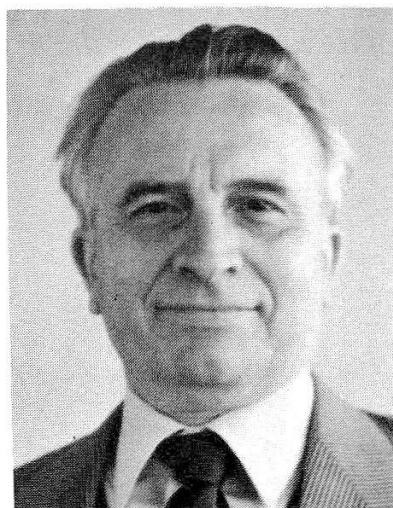
The Chinese Church at the Second Vatican Council

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The Situation of the Church in China at the opening of the Second Vatican Council

When the Second Vatican Council opened, there were in China 114 residential Sees plus 31 prefectures apostolic. In Rome, however, only approximately 55 prelates from China were present during each of the four Council's sessions (1962-65). These "China bishops" were of various nationalities. Such presence, international as it was, and limited if compared with the number of Sees, reveals the situation of the Church in China at the time.



What actually disturbed the "China Bishops" present at the Council was their recognition that the problems existing in the China Church were similar to the disastrous ones of the Church in the Communist bloc countries of Eastern Europe following the Second World War.

It may be helpful to recall briefly some events that took place during the decades preceding the Council, which affected the development of the Church in China. The establishment of the People's Republic, on October 1, 1949, caught the Church in a critical situation. Only three years before (11 April 46) the Holy See had established the normal hierarchy in China, considered the most significant of all missionary territories. The new structure consisted of 20 archdioceses, 79 dioceses, 38 prefectures apostolic and one mission *sui iuris*. On Christmas eve 1945, Pius XII had, for the first time ever, elevated a Chinese to the dignity of the cardinalate. He was Bishop Thomas Tien Kenghsin, SVD, up to that time a vicar apostolic. As a

result, the localization of the Church kept growing. In 1946 there were 31 Chinese prelates (24 bishops and 7 prefects apostolic), in charge of jurisdictions among the 138 ecclesiastical territories all told. Between 1946-54, twenty two more were added.

Unfortunately, history shows that the structural movement for change to a Chinese hierarchy had been too slow. Also the naming of the new Chinese bishops had come much too late. The politics of Mao Zedong for the People's Republic suddenly targeted the foreign aspect of the missionary Church, and accused it of being the "long arm" of Western imperialism. The war in Korea only aggravated the tension with the West.

The apostolic nuncio in China, Archbishop Antonio Riberi, was expelled in September 1951. A large number of arrests and public trials, within the space of three or four years, brought about the expulsion of all the other 5,500 missionaries who worked with total dedication in China. In 1955 the Catholic community of about 3,500,000 seemed traumatized by subsequent violent political campaigns. More often than not, simple priests, appointed by the respective missionary bishops before their expulsion, and scattered throughout the whole country, were left in charge of the local Church. These and the 20 Chinese bishops and the few prefects apostolic who remained had already experienced bitter struggles and difficulties. Several of them had gone through prison; all lived in strained situations. In the name of love of country, they suffered serious deprivation and repression. The regime aimed at creating a Church totally subservient to the exigencies of the new political situation. In September 1955, the arrest of Bishop Ignatius Kung Pinmei of Shanghai signaled the worsening of the situation throughout the whole country. The official establishment of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was approved in the summer of 1957. In 1958, some Bishops were constrained to accept election and consecration for the first time without the Holy See's approval.

Pius XII, in his last encyclical to the Chinese Catholics (*Ad Apostolorum Principis*) written a few months before he died (9 October 1958), had tried in vain to prevent the political authorities from establishing alternative ecclesial structures. For all practical purposes, every line of direct communication with the Church in China was closed when he died. The number of "democratic elections" im-

posed by the regime continued to increase. Information about the Church in China that reached the West was grim. In the juridical atmosphere that prevailed within the Church during the years preceding the Council, the flagrant disregard of the canonical norms for the election of bishops suggested an inevitable schismatic development within the Chinese Church.

Pope John XXIII was elected on 28 October 1958. From the very beginning of his pontificate, he expressed his intention of calling an Ecumenical Council. In his very first official discourse (15 December 1958), echoing the concerns of the Catholic community, he spoke at length about the critical situation of the Church in China. While recalling the heroism of so many faithful, he also expressed his anguish at those bishops who "have taken over the places and Sees of the legitimate pastors by unlawful means and thus, unfortunately, have paved the way for a deplorable schism." The elderly Pope added that the word "schism" burned his lips.¹ He referred to statements coming from China, attributed to the representatives of that Church. These statements were puzzling and ambiguous concerning orthodoxy and ecclesiastical discipline. The situation of Archbishop Pi Shushi of Shenyang (Manchuria), especially, had surfaced and caused alarm. Named by Pope Pius XII in 1949, Bishop Pi Shushi had spent a long time in prison.² In August 1957 he had accepted to become the President of the Patriotic Association. The statements attributed to this association, and largely disseminated by official media, emphatically stated that Chinese Catholics proposed to cut off all relations with the "imperialistic Vatican."

In such an atmosphere, the participation in the Council of bishops who now lived under the new regime in the People's Republic of China seemed unlikely. In fact among the 2500 Council fathers, from all over the world, present at the opening of the Council, not one came directly from mainland China. There were bishops present who had ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the People's Republic. But these bishops were not in Mainland China when the Communists took over. They had either been unable or unwilling to return. These were Cardinal Thomas Tien who still held the title of Archbishop of Beijing, but who, since 1960, had become apostolic administrator of Taipei; the archbishop of Nanjing, Paul Yupin, who was now the rector of the new Fu Jen Catholic University of Taipei; Bishop Thomas Niu, SVD,

who was still the bishop of Yanggu (Shandong) but who now was the apostolic administrator of Jiayi (Taiwan); Bishop Joseph Yuan Qingping for Zhumadian (Henan) who had retired in America. Six other Chinese bishops, originally from mainland China, also participated in the Council. They either represented the local Church of Taiwan, or were titular bishops (such as Archbishop Joseph Kuo; in 1959 he had resigned from the See of Taipei; and Bishop Vitus Chang from Xinyang in Henan who had already resigned in 1949). Two missionary bishops expelled from China, who had become apostolic administrators in Taiwan, were also present. The bishops of Hong Kong and Macao were Westerners. According to official accounts, there were twenty-one other "China bishops" who had the right to participate in the Council. Because of restrictions imposed by the Chinese Communist regime, however, they were unable to attend. (Many of these were in prison, as was also the last missionary left in China, the American James Walsh, MM; he was in prison in Shanghai.)³

However, the Chinese Church was also represented by about 40 missionary bishops who had been expelled from China some dozen years before. They still had ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but for all practical purposes they had lost total contact with their dioceses. Eight of these were prefects apostolic without episcopal designation. In Rome, for the formal opening of the Council, there were in all fifty-eight prelates representing the China Church. Of these ten were Chinese. Their numbers declined slightly before the end of the Council. Fifty-nine were present for the second and third sessions but only fifty-five for the fourth.

Between the Council's first and second sessions an inquiry was made to ascertain the possibility of inviting those bishops who were in the People's Republic of China. Various bishops of the "China Church" who lived in the free world were discretely asked about this (Pope John XXIII spoke about it in a private audience with the Council Fathers). We cannot verify, if in fact such an invitation could ever have reached China and, in any case, to whom it would have gone and how. What is sure is that no delegate came from the People's Republic. As is well known, no one could have left China without the formal authorization of political authorities. Considering the prevailing atmosphere that would soon set the Cultural Revolution in motion, such an authorization was highly improbable, all the

more since the question of diplomatic representation between Beijing and the Holy See remained sensitive and unresolved.

Normal diplomatic relations between the Holy See and China had been established in 1943. But after the expulsion of Nuncio Riberi, Rome had given recognition to the nationalist government in exile in Taipei. Taiwan still enjoyed a permanent seat on the United Nations' Security Council.⁴ The problem was further complicated by the difficult decision of whether to invite only those bishops legitimately consecrated according to canon law or to invite also those elected and consecrated without pontifical approval. (At the beginning of 1962, six new bishops, "democratically elected" by the Patriotic Association, had been consecrated). Without being able to examine directly what might have led those ecclesiastics to capitulate to a hostile political power, the issue was quite impossible to resolve. How was it possible to pass judgment on a subjective choice motivated by the desire to ensure the survival of the Church? This motivation had probably led more than one of these ecclesiastics to accept the "lesser evil".

The Long Preparatory Phase

To begin the preparatory phase of the Council, Cardinal Tardini, the Secretary of State, in the summer of 1959, sent a letter to the Ordinaries of the entire world, asking for suggestions and proposals. It is most unlikely that such a letter could have reached any of the Ordinaries in the People's Republic of China.⁵ The Holy See did, however, receive many different responses from bishops and heads of missions from outside mainland China. Some demanded a clear and well-articulated condemnation of atheistic, materialistic communism. Some hundred bishops from various other places around the world made the same request. Other topics were also proposed for the reflection of the Council, e.g. the use of the vernacular in the administration of the sacraments (Bishop Lacchio), the appreciation and implementation of the directives given to the Chinese Church by the Council of Shanghai in 1924 (Bp. Mignani); the importance of having missionaries pay special attention to the study of Islam (Bp. Pasini); the need to reexamine the way of choosing new bishops (Bp. O'Gara); the opportunity of admitting to the priesthood those persons

who are worthy though they may have little formal preparation (Bp. Massa); the need for apostolic delegates and nuncios to have specific preparation in mission matters and concerns (Bp. Van Melckebeke).⁶

Initiatives designed to foster the interest and participation of the faithful in the conciliar event ended up few in number and referred exclusively to the Churches of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao.⁷ For the feast of Christ the King in 1961, the seven Ordinaries of the dioceses of Taiwan jointly published a pastoral letter, on the “significance and goal of the Second Ecumenical Council,” and organized public prayers. In a pastoral letter of May 1962, Bp. Paul Cheng, auxiliary of Taipei, in the absence of Cardinal Tien, organized pilgrimages as well as public prayer. Bp. Paul Yupin promoted a series of conferences on the Council and held a conversation over Radio Taiwan. This was addressed especially to non Christians. Along with Bp. Stanislaus Lokuang, recently nominated bishop of Tainan, Archbishop Yupin held a conference on the Council in a hall of the Senate in Taipei. In Hong Kong Bp. Lorenzo Bianchi in a pastoral letter ordered a solemn novena, asking that in conjunction with the opening of the Council, all the bells in the city ring out joyously on the evening of 11 October, 1962 at 6:00 o’clock (*ICV2*, 1,2, p. 645). Later the Chinese community, scattered throughout the free world, was energized when, from the third session on, a formal Chinese language press office was set up in Rome. Bp. Tou Pao-zin of Hsinchu was named a member of the conciliar committee for the press.

The lived experience of the bishops representing the China Church obviously influenced their presence and contribution. The Council gave everyone a providential opportunity to compare and to reflect on the events of their own country of origin or of adoption and on the future of evangelization in mainland China. This was done through a series of twelve special meetings, which took place during the four sessions of the Council. The group of Chinese bishops and the other Ordinaries expelled from China, calling themselves the *Coetus Episcoporum Sinesium*, organized and maintained regular contacts. Bishop Stanislaus Lokuang, who had been nominated bishop of Tainan just a few months before the beginning of the Council, diligently carried out the task of maintaining contacts and calling the meetings. The minutes of the discussions and proposals from the meeting of the *Coetus* were written in clear Latin. They were then

simply stencilled using an old machine operated with alcohol. They were then sent immediately to each participant who lived throughout the city. For this research I was able to utilize the minutes from these meetings. They constitute a precious source of information, over and above that provided in the official documents⁸.

Without doubt the Council itself was a valuable learning experience for everyone. It also helped the Chinese bishops to see their own problematic situation in a clearer light within the global and universal Church contexts. We know that the majority of these men were not intellectuals, but pastors working primarily in evangelization. In general, their interventions in the Council hall were not especially noted for their theological content, but they were often marked by a deep ecclesial love. The conciliar assembly manifested to them its sincere solidarity, as it did also to the other witnesses of the "Silent Church" of the Eastern bloc countries.

At the 19th General Congregation, the auxiliary of Taipei, Bishop P. Cheng, was invited to celebrate Mass before the whole assembly in St. Peter's Basilica. A few days later, the bishop of Hong Kong, Bishop L. Bianchi, was asked to carry out the solemn enthronement of the Gospel. At the conclusion of the Council, Archbishop Paul Yupin was among the 24 cardinals and bishops invited to concelebrate the Mass presided over by Paul VI.

At the onset, the Council participants voted many times over to choose a structure that would ensure an effective evolution of the Council's work. After the 4th General Congregation, two-hundred and seventy-four Fathers were elected or nominated to the various Conciliar Commissions. Of these, thirty-eight represented the Churches of Asia, and of these, three were from China (*ICV2*, p. 59 f.). Cardinal Tien was elected as one of the Council Presidents and also to the Commission charged with preparing the schema *De Missionibus*. Unfortunately, poor health prevented the elderly cardinal from participating actively in the Council's work. In the second session, following a serious automobile accident, he had to give up completely. However, his support for the proposal to set up a Secretariat for non-Christians had been duly recorded.

The idea had emerged in the spring of 1963 following a conference given by Bishop Zoa of Africa at the Fathers of the Divine Word in Rome. The Dutch Bishop Thijssen, a missionary in Indone-

sia, welcomed the idea. Cardinal Tien was favorable to the proposal and one of his statements was circulated among many cardinals, who had come to Rome for the conclave following the death of Pope John XXIII. A few weeks later, Cardinal Tien presented Pope Paul VI with extensive documentation on the subject, along with an accompanying letter. The idea was readily welcomed.⁹

The Holy Father also named Bishop Stanislaus Lokuang to the Commission *De Missionibus*. He became the secretary of the commission from the very first session of the Council and made a substantial contribution to the development of the definitive text. As a professor at the Pontifical Urban University, he had previously been part of the Tenth Preparatory Commission, concerned with the issue of mission.¹⁰ In speaking of mission, we must mention the contribution made by another Father of the Council who considered himself “Chinese”, Archbishop Gaetano Pollio, PIME. He participated in the Council as bishop of Otranto, in Italy.¹¹ Known for his long experience in China as missionary and archbishop of Kaifeng (Henan), he, from the beginning of the first session, along with Cardinal Tien, had been elected a member of the Commission *De Missionibus*. Later, in January 1966, he was also included in the corresponding Postconciliar commission.¹²

A few interesting interventions in the Council hall

It is not within the scope of this paper to present the complexities and debates of the Council, nor to follow the development of various documents that were approved. I am limiting myself to highlighting the chief contributions made by the Council Fathers who represented the Chinese Church. The first document approved in the conciliar assembly dealt with *Liturgical Renewal*. In the preparation of this important text the “China Fathers” made eleven interventions. Some deserve mention. Bishop Lokuang insisted on the need of an adequate preparation for priests so that the liturgy might respond to the needs of different peoples. He asked that the indult given to China for the use of the vernacular in the Mass be made permanent. He also mentioned that the Rites controversy had proved a grave obstacle to the Christianization of China (*ICV2,II, p.84*). Bishop Weber (of Yizhou, Shandong), in the 8th General Congregation (GC), stressed the importance of inculturating the liturgy to renew souls destroyed by

materialism and atheism. For this he recommended the use of language and celebrations that responded to the cultures and customs of the peoples. Archbishop Yupin also insisted on the use of local language "also in the Canon of the Mass" (12°GC). Bishop Joseph Cheng (Kaohsiung, Taiwan), asked for a recommendation urging missionaries to respect local art and to make an effort at adaptation. (18° GC). After the promulgation of the Constitution *Sacrosantum Concilium*, and even in 1964, Taiwan had looked into the possibility of inserting some popular Chinese feasts and customs into the liturgical calendar. In Hong Kong a group of priests and lay people were working at preparing liturgical hymns in accordance with traditional Chinese music (*ICV2 iii, p. 472, f.*). Another topic on which the Council Fathers concentrated from the very beginning was the Bible, its teaching and dissemination. Two China bishops made interventions on the preparation of one schema of the document entitled *De Fontibus Revelationis*. Bishop Vitus Chang, referring to a previous intervention by Bishop Bengsch (German), asked that something be said about primitive revelation, or proto-revelation, to show how God had the destiny of all peoples at heart (24° GC).

In the discussion of the schema on the *Unity of Christians* the Spanish Bishop Velasco (Xiamen), referring to the discussions on the liturgy and revelation, bemoaned the danger of false optimism in treating important points in the traditional doctrine of the Church (29° and 35° GC). When the discussion on ecumenism resumed during the Second Session of the Council, interventions were made by Archbishop Yupin and Bishop Lokuang. Bishop Vitus Chang, in aligning himself to a previous intervention, asked that the discussion of non-Christian religions also be broadened to begin with the universal salvific love of God. Confucius himself, according to Bishop Chang, professed an ecumenism *ante litteram* declaring that all persons are brothers and sisters (73° GC).

The interventions on the theme *De Ecclesia* were varied and impassioned. Bishop Joseph Massa (Nanyang), speaking from his own experience and that of some other missionary bishops in Asia, declared that he was against the institution of the permanent diaconate, especially if this did not require the obligation of celibacy (42° GC). On the other hand, Archbishop Yupin, speaking in the name of 40 other Fathers "*ex Sinis*" and from Korea and Japan, upheld the

possibility of having permanent deacons, with adequate preparation in the local language. They felt that the decision regarding the obligation of celibacy should be left to the local Church (45° GC). Bishop Lokuang, speaking of the universal priesthood of the faithful, mentioned that in the Confucian tradition, the emperor, the governor and the *pater familias* as representatives of all the people also offered oblations to heaven (50° GC). In his remarks Bishop Lawrence Bianchi (Hong Kong) referred to his own recent experience and that of the Chinese Church. (He had spent two long periods of detention under the Chinese Communists). Speaking about the proposal on Episcopal Conferences in the name of seven other missionary bishops, he declared that they were against the proposition put forward by some to give juridical power to national conferences, stressing with Cardinal Krol the responsibility of the single bishop as successor of the apostles. Mentioning the experience of the Chinese Church, he said that the Chinese Christians had no problem with the monarchical constitution of the Church, with the Pope, Vicar of Christ as head. Worried about the danger of manipulation by political authorities, who could more easily impose their own decisions through a centralized structure, Bishop Bianchi asked that it should be stated clearly that the decisions of the Episcopal Conferences have no binding force, except in cases of total unanimity and after the approbation of the Holy See (66° GC). This was in fact the line followed afterwards by the Holy See in approving the statutes of the Conferences from the different countries.

Religious Liberty was a topic especially debated during the third session. Bishop Melendro (Anqing) strongly voiced his dissent on the proposed schema, convinced that it was wrong to rely on subjective conscience (88° GC). Bishop Lokuang, during the fourth session intervened arguing that he judged the schema proposed timid and reticent. On the contrary Bishop Velasco (Xiamen) in an emotional and polemical discourse, criticized the opponent's text. He considered it to be against the tradition of the Church and capable of engendering pragmatism and indifferentism (129° GC).

The document on *The Church in the Modern World* (the famous "Schema 13") aroused the lively participation of the "China Bishops". Bishop Lokuang, speaking specifically about local cultures, noted that although it had not always been the case in the past, the

Church today rightly did show its appreciation for them. In relation to this point he also mentioned the importance of witness and of a coherent commitment, especially on the part of universities, publications of various kinds and works of charity (113° GC). Archbishop Yupin speaking in the name of 70 other Fathers of various nationalities asked that a chapter on atheistic communism be added to the proposed document. He described communism as an inauspicious “sign of the times” and stressed that the Church had a duty to defend the truth when confronted with gross materialism and an accumulation of heresies. In addition it should be clearly stated that there cannot exist a “catholic communism”. The Church must come out clearly against oppression in view of expressing its solidarity with those who have suffered and who still suffer persecution (108° GC).

The debate on whether or not to make a solemn and explicit condemnation of communism and State-sponsored atheism was taken up again during the fourth and last session. The interventions were charged with emotion especially by some of the 82 Fathers from countries where the system was in force and who represented an equal number of bishops who had not been able to leave their Sees. A document signed by 297 Fathers was presented to the Secretary General of the Council, on 29 September 1965. The Fathers were requesting that a “new and suitable paragraph expressly dealing with the problem of communism be added to the conciliar document.” Bishop O. Ceol (Qizhou) and P. Lacchio (Changsha) were among the 25 proponents who had circulated the request.¹³

In the hall during the voting on each individual paragraph of this Apostolic Constitution, some one hundred amendments requested a more explicit condemnation of communism. Considering that this had been said in other conciliar documents, and especially in this one, in paragraphs 19-21, where the position of the Church relative to communism and atheism was clearly expressed, there seemed no further need for condemnation.¹⁴ The proposal therefore was not accepted. The document that begins with the words *Gaudium et Spes* was definitively approved on 7 December 1965 with 2309 votes in favor, 75 against and 10 void.

During the third session of the Council Bishop Lokuang made an intervention on the document concerned with *The Apostolate of the Laity* (98° GC). He deplored the fact that the materials dealing

with the laity in mission, taken out of the schema on missions in order to unify the subject matter of that document had, for all practical purposes, been eliminated. He asked that it be restored, in order to give a sign to the laity, in countries where religious associations have been dissolved and Christians forcibly separated from their pastors, to continue to give testimony of their faith generously even in the face of imprisonment. Bishop P. Cheng (Taipei) underlined the importance of charity also in the apostolate of the laity, who must be concerned about bringing Christ into the family, the city, and the country (99° GC).

The missionary document's long hard journey

The Chinese bishops also paid particular attention to the document, *The Missionary Activity of the Church*. This document went through five schemas before its final approval. At the beginning of the third session of conciliar work, 6 November, 1964, Paul VI emphasized the importance of the subject matter by intervening personally at the start of the discussion in the hall. Bishop Stanislaus Lokuang, secretary of the commission, presented a schema (the fourth) elaborating on the directions that had emerged previously. The discussion went on for three days with 28 interventions, some of which were quite negative. Bishop G. Massa (Nanyang) asked that emphasis be given to the principle of adaptation, but without weakening evangelical law. He noted that praxis demonstrates that there still are many aspects of the structure and organization of the Church that could be better adapted to individual peoples and regions. His long missionary experience had convinced him that what hindered the Chinese from embracing the Christian faith was not the moral exigencies that the Church demanded (in fact, it can be said that the customs of this noble people are in a certain sense naturally Christian), but the fact that "those who became Christian were constrained to abandon many ancient customs and institutions of their ancestors, for which they were accused of adhering to a foreign cult". He also suggested setting up a specific pontifical office for the promotion of catechists (117° GC). Bishop Velasco (Xiamen) grieved that the proposed schema on missionary activity was fragmented and not commensurate with the importance of the subject. The right of the Gospel to be pro-

claimed and diffused through the whole world had to be clearly stated. Expressions that could be offensive to the populations where missionaries work and which smack of paternalism should be avoided. The unity that must mark missionaries, putting the local clergy and the foreigner on the same level, should be insisted upon. Nationalism, which can become a danger, should be thoroughly examined and distinguished from true patriotism (117° GC).

Bishop Lokuang, intervening again in the name of several African and Asian bishops, asked that the theme of conversion be deepened. Conversion necessarily creates a break with one's past, demands a way of thinking and acting; which means renouncing some elements of one's very life and culture which are erroneous, not genuine, irreconcilable with a new life in Christ. The social 'life style' of Christians in missionary countries should respond to the double exigency of faithfulness to the Gospel and to local culture (117° GC). Concluding his argument, Bishop Lokuang said that the Commission would take back the document and take up the task of redoing the basic text using the many amendments proposed by the Fathers (118° GC).

The re-working of the text was given to a sub-commission which completed the project in January 1965. It was then submitted to the Commission who sent it to all the Fathers. After gathering and considering the comments, the text was ready by September 1965. This was to be the definitive schema (the 5th). In the meantime, Father J. Schotte, formerly a missionary in China and superior general of the Divine Word Congregation, had been nominated vice-president of the commission. He presented the schema in the hall in the 144th General Congregation. There followed various interventions and proposals for emendations, among which were some by Bishop Lokuang (146th GC). For his part Archbishop Yupin recommended the specific formation of the laity "especially expert technicians, doctors, etc., who work in mission lands. With their example and prestige they can contribute a great deal to the evangelization of China". Archbishop Yupin asked that, where vocations were more plentiful, seminaries should be opened "to prepare missionaries destined for China, giving them a genuine religious Chinese formation and forming true apostles, not simply specialists in Chinese culture" (147th GC). Bishop Velasco, while generally approving the proposed text, rec-

commended that the part regarding adaptation of the Christian life to the socio-cultural situations of the different peoples be carefully reviewed, to avoid the danger of equivocation and falling into false optimism (148th GC). The final text, known as Decree *Ad Gentes*, was voted upon in the hall, point by point, and definitively approved by a large majority on 7 December 1965, on the vigil of the closure of the Council (ICV2, V, 367).

Fruitful encounter among the Chinese bishops in Rome

At the beginning of the Council, Cardinal Thomas Tien had called a meeting of all the prelates *qui sunt aut fuerunt adscripti missioni sinensi* (who are or have been in the China mission.), which was held 28 October 1962 in a Roman parish. The forty Ordinaries who were present decided to continue this kind of fellowship. As mentioned above, and thanks to Bishop Stanislaus Lokuang's efficient coordination, the group met formally twelve times during the course of the four sessions of the Council. His devoted work as secretary is proved by his letters of convocation, the agendas and the useful documentation that often accompanied the agenda for the coming meetings. From 1963, in the absence of Cardinal Tien, the two vice-presidents of the group, Archbishop Yupin and Bishop Van Melckebeke (Ningxia) assumed the chairmanship of the meetings. The Holy See had assigned the pastoral care of the Chinese throughout the world (the so-called "diaspora") to Bishop Van Melckebeke.

In the agenda of the meeting of the *Coetus* there were naturally many questions related directly with the work of the Council. At the first meeting, for example, they discussed how to support the proposal, already formulated by various groups, on the use of the vernacular in the liturgy, the promotion of local characteristics in sacred music and art. Other issues dealt more directly with the Chinese Church, such as the recommendation of Cardinal Tien regarding vocations "for mission in China in the future" and the proposal of the bishops of Taiwan (and shared by all the others) to ask *Propaganda Fide* to abolish "pro tota ecclesia sinensi", the ancient prohibition of using the terms "Tien" and "Shang Ti" to name God. There was also a suggestion to gather specific documentation on the heroic witness of priests and lay people during recent persecutions.

During the second meeting (21 November 1962), they exchanged information on the Christian presence in the Chinese ecclesial community outside the mainland. In the 4th meeting (8 August 1963), Archbishop Yupin presented a study on the advisability of setting up a permanent diaconate that he intended to propose to the conciliar assembly. The plan, put to a vote obtained a large majority. In the 5th meeting (16 November 1963), the first point of order of the day was a question: What can we do for the Chinese Church? Archbishop Yupin in a written note proposed setting up a special formation program in the apostolate for the Chinese laity. This was to include courses in theology in Taiwan (at the re-established Fu Jen Catholic University) and in the diaspora, using publications and various other modes of communication.

At the end of the 2nd session, Paul VI decided to increase the number of auditors, (at the time thirteen in number), invited to the Council. As a result possible names of Chinese lay people were surfaced and proposed to the presidency of the Council. Archbishop Yupin proposed the name of Dr. John Wu Ching-Hsiong, a famous Catholic intellectual, who was the first Chinese ambassador to the Holy See in the 1940's. The choice fell, however, to a Catholic of Hong Kong deeply involved in the lay apostolate, Dr. John Chen, who was present for the third and fourth sessions of the Council. Probably the Holy See did not want the nomination to be construed as being influenced by Taiwan and having political overtones. The bishops of the Chinese *Coetus* also discussed the advisability of setting up a Chinese language group at the Council's Information Centre. Their proposal was accepted by the Presidency. Another issue discussed was the suitability of introducing the cause of beatification of Matteo Ricci, Paul Xu Guangqi, and Candida Xu. A petition was addressed to the Superior General of the Jesuits, and signed by those present.

At the sixth meeting (30 November 1963) all those present also signed a request, presented by the Superior General of the Canons of St. Bernard, for the beautification of P. Tornay, killed for the faith by Tibetan lamas in August 1949 on the boundary between Tibet and Yunnan.

Two issues of particular concern for the bishops of the *Coeetus Sinensis* were a clarification on the real situation of the Church in the People's Republic and the search for an ecclesial type of ongoing coordination among all the "China" bishops who participated in the Council. This latter topic was discussed principally during the third and the fourth sessions of the Council

Saddened and worried about the negative attitude and the lack of confidence towards the Church in China manifested in Western public opinion, the bishops present at the Council thought of preparing a joint statement on this issue. Starting from a draft already prepared, they discussed the contents at length during the second meeting (21 November 1962).

The following is a summary of the discussion, taken from the minutes of the meeting. All were uneasy with the silence of the press and the frequent distortion of the news. Bishop Kramer (Luan), Franciscan, mentioned that there was a need to understand their Chinese brothers who, against their will, found themselves in a situation of possible schism. On the other hand, he added, "*Vera Hierarchia Ecclesiae sinensis est apud illos bonos et fideles episcopos sinenses qui in carcere detrusi sunt...*" (the true Chinese ecclesiastic hierarchy is that of those good and faithful Chinese bishops that are forced into prison.) The Capuchin Bishop Larranaga (Pingliang) observed that he had a good recollection of some who had accepted the episcopal consecration. He noted that they had been in prison often. Certainly these do not have the intention of founding a schismatic Church. The elder Bishop L. Morel (Scheut missionary, who had resigned from the diocese of Suiyuan in 1951), citing the opinion of some "experts" in Hong Kong (Fathers Germain, Pieraccini, Dufay), thought highly improbable the conjecture circulating in some quarters that the recent illegitimate consecrations were only simulations without any real intention on the part of the consecrating prelates and candidates. Bishop Bianchi of Hong Kong did not doubt the validity of the consecrations. He mentioned the case of a priest from his Hong Kong Diocese, Bishop Yip, who had been consecrated recently (20 November 1962) in Canton by Archbishop Pi Shushi. Bishop Bianchi was confident that he was a very good priest, esteemed by Christians for his piety and zeal. While regretting the manner of the consecration, Bishop Bianchi said that "all are convinced that he is really a

bishop. The priests constrained to participate in these elections were certainly concerned about selecting the best among their confreres. We must exercise great charity towards all these.”¹⁵ Bishop Ceol (Qinzhou), Franciscan, mentioned the devastating effect of the system of interrogation and the public trials often used against the representatives of the Church. He admitted that Pope Pius XII in an audience had confided to him: “*judicare non possumus de episcopo qui ‘brainwashing’ subiit*” (“We cannot judge a bishop who underwent brainwashing”).

Archbishop Yupin who presided over the meeting, corroborated Bishop Niu's (of Yanggu) statement, maintaining that they could not base their opinions on news diffused by the regime in power. He was also convinced that stressing that the newly consecrated are “good priests” (while according to the law of the Church they are excommunicated), we would end up playing the communist game. He maintained, “It is better, therefore not to make any public statement on this problem, and say nothing more than what is contained in the proposed statement, if asked”. But Bishop Lacchio, OFM (Changsha) insisted that they had to respond to the newspapers that published false statements and explain the facts in their objective and subjective reality.

Bishop Tou (Hsinchu) summarizing the discussion noted that there was a major consensus on the following points: 1) We do not have enough information to pass judgment; 2) Many of those consecrated are very good priests; 3) We believe in the words of Christ who helps his Church and who has promised: “*Non vi lascierò orfani*” (“I will not leave you orphans”). At this point, Archbishop Yu Pin proposed that the issue be presented and left to the judgment of Cardinal Tien: “Even if such a statement is not given to others, it will at least serve for us...” In the actual situation, given Cardinal Tien's unfortunate and grave accident, Yu Pin's proposal was perhaps intended to block a decision. In fact, what prevailed was the fear that the regime might use the declaration, supported by the majority of the prelates, as a tool. Consequently, nothing was communicated to the public. One year later, during the sixth meeting of the Chinese bishops (30 November 1963), Bishop Vitus Chang explicitly deplored the fact that the memorandum agreed to by almost all the prelates had never been published. Yet little by little, and notwithstanding the sparse news

that filtered into the West, especially during the dark years of the Cultural Revolution,¹⁶ Church public opinion manifested a deeper understanding and compassion for the challenge facing the Church in China,

The idea of an on-going union among the Ordinaries that the persecution had scattered to the four winds, began to take shape during the second period of the Council. During the fifth meeting (16 November 1963), Bishop Lokuang proposed that they try to set up a *Unio Coetus Episcopalis in Sinensi* without real and definitive juridical structures and different from the *Catholic Central Bureau* that the Internuncio Riberi had set up in Shanghai at the end of the 1940s.

In the following meeting, an extensive discussion among the thirty-four participants revealed a general agreement on the advisability of setting up an on-going union. But some, like Bishops F. Kramer (Luan) and C. Van Melckebeke (Ningxia) thought that the "Union" proposed by Lokuang was too weak. They insisted on a real and proper Episcopal Conference. Others stressed the particular juridical and practical difficulties involved in setting up a real Episcopal Conference, from which the bishops in China would be excluded. As for the "exiled" bishops, they would be unable to effect future resolutions. Besides, there was the difficulty of their getting together for meetings. Therefore, they decided to charge Bishops Yu Pin, Lokuang and Van Melckebeke with proposing concrete norms and contacting *Propaganda Fide*. And so on 3 December, 1963, Yu Pin wrote to Cardinal Pietro Agagianian, Prefect of the Congregation, in the name of all the China Ordinaries at the Council, asking to set up a "real National Episcopal Conference for the whole of the Chinese nation", in order to provide for the future of the Chinese Church and to implement the decisions of the Council immediately.

Cardinal Agagianian, in giving an official response, 22 April 1964 (Prot. 1509/64), praised the good intention of the bishops who had been expelled but added, "It is not clear how such a Conference could be organized and bear fruit, given that the Ordinaries who are the members are scattered throughout the world, and for fifteen years have been deprived of precise knowledge of the actual situation of their respective dioceses. And except for the Council they would not from now on have occasion to meet except at great cost," consequently, Cardinal Agagianian added that, at least for the moment, it

would be more advisable to set up only a Conference of the Ordinaries of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao for the implementation of the conciliar directives.

The matter might have been considered closed once and for all. During the third session of the Council, the apostolic internuncio in China (resident in Taipei), Archbishop Joseph Caprio, was present for some of the meetings of the China bishops. He suggested to Bishop Kramer that he put into writing the reasons for a broader pastoral engagement for the expelled bishops, who were far from their respective missions in China against their will. The memorandum, written by Bishop Kramer in the name of the other confrères, along with supporting documentation, was transmitted to *Propaganda Fide* by the internuncio, 17 November 1964.

The new response of the Congregation came quickly. While repeating his appreciation for the constant love these Ordinaries had for the respective Churches in China, Cardinal Agagianian said that “because of the well known situation, these Prelates are not able, *de facto*, to exercise their jurisdiction in Mainland China, and (that same jurisdiction) is in abeyance with regard to their priests in exile”. He added that they could continue to help, especially with prayer.

Archbishop Caprio, the internuncio, communicated the content of the decision to Bishop Kramer (with a letter from Taipei on 25 January 1965, Prot. 3530), noting that the question could be considered closed.

The issue came up again after Paul VI published his *Motu Proprio* of 15 October, 1965) setting up the Bishops’ Synod. A note written by Bishop Kramer was discussed at the ninth meeting of the China bishops at the beginning of October 1965. It was again taken up at the tenth meeting (18 October, 1965), where Archbishop Yupin pointed out: “The Chinese Church and the responsibility for its future demand that we commit ourselves with all solicitude to its pastoral care...” Not yet knowing the modality of the new collegial structure, the thirty-four Fathers, unanimously approved the proposal to ask to prepare a “China representation for the Bishops’ Synod.” A draft of rules was set up by a committee of seven ordinaries and discussed at the twelfth and last meeting (17 November, 1965), and approved after a few amendments. It consisted of twenty-nine articles and strangely enough carried the title “Statutes of the Bishops’ Conference of

China” the same title used for the former proposal which had been rejected. Archbishop Yupin transmitted the text to Cardinal Agagianian, with a letter on 20 November 1965. Rather than referring to the *Motu Proprio* on the Synod, he appealed to the Decree on the episcopal office approved by the Council shortly before. Based on that decree, he argued that the bishops of China “intended to set up their own National Episcopal Conference”, convinced that they could not refuse or ask others to take on their responsibility. We do not know the response of the Congregation, but we can presume that the request was again refused. Only the regional structure previously approved for Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau became operative.

John XXIII, Paul VI and the Chinese Church

The group of “China” Prelates present in Rome had lived through a painful pastoral experience, because of the “policy of religious freedom” pursued by the Communist regime. This policy aimed to cut the ties of the Chinese community from the rest of the universal Church and from the Holy See. They felt their link with the successor of Peter particularly strong. They were happy for the opportunity offered by Pope John XXIII and Paul VI to meet the various groups of bishops participating in the Council. In general these meetings were informal with no official account given by the Vatican Press. The notes of the meeting taken by the secretary, Bishop Lokuang, were edited and circulated within the *Coetus*.

At the audience with John XXIII, 26 November 1962, there were forty-seven conciliar “China” prelates. Cardinal Tien, who was ill, was absent. The presentation was made by Bishop Stanislaus Lokuang. The Pope was pleased with the number of conversions in Taiwan. He referred to a work prepared for him by the Secretary of State on the number of dioceses and faithful in China before 1949 and also on the present situation of the Church there. The Pope expressed his sorrow at the death in prison of three bishops and lingered on the news of the forty-two episcopal ordinations carried out illegitimately during the last years.

He wanted to hear the opinion of the bishops present. Bishop Lawrence Bianchi of Hong Kong said: “We know that some of those who have been consecrated illegitimately are good, excellent priests. Lacking reliable news, we cannot pass judgment on them”. The Pope

agreed. He then asked if it might be opportune to invite all the bishops under the Communist regime in China to the second session of the Council. Bishop Ceol (Xinzhou), answered that such an invitation might occasion a new persecution. Archbishop Yupin mentioned that the news they had on the illegitimate consecrations come only from Communist sources and should be taken with circumspection. He then added that, in his opinion, if the Holy Father wanted to send an invitation to all the bishops in Communist China, it might be good. It could give pleasure and consolation to the faithful of China. Bishop Tissot, of Zhengzhou, suggested that perhaps it would be possible to have these invitations reach the bishops of China through some friendly government. The Pope assented, but added that the experience of using these means was not always positive. The Pope asked whether the Communist rule should be considered as the sepulcher or the end of Catholic missions in China. Bishop L. Capozzi, (of Taiyuan), answered firmly: "The end of the persecutions and the restoration of liberty will signal the beginning of a magnificent development for the Catholic religion in China." The Holy Father said he was very happy about that. Bishop L. Morel, formerly Bishop of Suiyuan, told about two letters sent by a priest from mainland China asking to know about the deliberations of the Council and promising immediate obedience.

The minutes of the *Coetus* offer the following details for the audience with Paul VI, which lasted twenty minutes, on 21 November 1963. Archbishop Yupin, vice president, presented the group to the Holy Father. The Holy Father introduced himself saying that among the many audiences, this one particularly moved him. He asked the bishops present to communicate to all that the Holy Father is with them. "To everyone say: Be strong and have faith!" He added that he was well aware of the witness of the faithful who in China struggle to conserve the faith. He knew about the heroism of the China Church. Remarking that "dark clouds now threaten the Chinese people," the Holy Father observed that "this people, like the peoples of Europe, has experienced other times of tribulation in its long and noble history. This also will pass and there will be a resurrection." He was happy to see the Prelates of China united, fulfilling their pastoral responsibility even in difficulties. He was sad, however, that many Chinese bishops, who should have been present at the Council, had not been able to

attend. Paul VI expressed the wish that the leaders in China treat the Catholics with impartiality. The fact that they are Catholics, in no way means they are any less upright citizens in confronting the challenges facing their country. "When they return to their dioceses, the bishops here present may tell all those faithful that the Pope follows them with the greatest of love."

The Pope gave witness to the fidelity and the zeal of the young Chinese priests he had known during the past years in Rome and in Milan. He was happy that the works of the Church were proceeding very well in Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan. He said he was ready to support them in every possible way. He added that it was necessary to promote editions of Catholic books in the Chinese language to build up a Christian culture and literature. The Holy Father would not fail, he said, to help in this endeavor. And so he intended to support ("with the greatest care!") the work of Fu Jen Catholic University, formerly in Beijing and now in Taiwan. He asked that, if the bishops who were at the Council representing China had any proposals or initiatives, "let them present them with simplicity and confidence to the Pope. As was done for the liturgy, the same should be done in every field to encourage the fullest participation of the faithful."

After the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (8 December 1965), this group of senior Chinese bishops never had occasion to be together again. Meanwhile the Church had introduced the new practice that bishops were to submit their resignations at age 75. In the ten years that followed the Council, the majority of these deserving prelates expelled from China were no longer active. The events that followed and the relentless dialectics of the time had the upper hand over their good will. It distanced these generous witnesses ever farther away from the reality of "their" Church. For the rest, the evolution of the situation of the Catholic community in the People's Republic of China, as well as the new Code of Canon Law, developed according to the thought of the Council and published in 1984, seemed to demand a rethinking of some of the traditional structures of the Church, also for China.□

Notation

(The above article was submitted to Bishop Lokuang, who is still alive and living in Taiwan. He said that the article "is an important historical documentation for the Church in China, because so far I have not seen any other account of this kind." He made two annotations: 1) The original project of the Cardinals presiding over the Council was to keep it as short as possible, hoping to give Pope John XXIII (who was already sickly) the opportunity to conclude it. Because of this, only a few topics had to be treated at length (Liturgy, Revelation, the Church in the modern world, the Episcopate); the rest were supposed to be very succinct. This is the way the project on the Missions was treated in the first instance. When it was presented in the Council hall during the 3rd session, Pope Paul VI showed that he liked it. But when the discussion revealed that the bishops would have rejected it Bp. Lokuang took it back so as not to have it voted down, thus saving face also for the Pope. The second comments dealt with the proposed Bishops' Conference of the China bishops, Lokuang says that he was against the idea, out of technical reasons: Such a Conference, if approved as proposed, would never have been able to function, because it would have been impossible to convene even a sufficient number of members to make its proceedings valid, given the fact that the Ordinaries living in China could not participate and those expelled were scattered around the world.

Endnotes

¹ *Discorsi Messagi Colloqui del Santo Padre Giovanni XXIII*, Editrice Paliglotta Vaticana (1963), Vol. I, p. 78-83. The Pope pointed out the danger of schism in the discourse in which he announced the Council (25 January, 1959) and in the next discourse of Pentecost (17 May, 1959).

² In 1953, the Pontifical Directory (p. 1376) noted "died in prison", putting his name among the deceased bishops; only in 1956 did the *Annuario Pontificio* report again his name for the See of Mukden, adding "in prison for the faith".

³ The official documentation on all the interventions and documents presented during the Council is written in Latin and gathered in 26 volumes: *Acta Synodalia S. Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, Typis Polyglottis Vataicanis, Civitas Vaticana, Romae, 26 Vols., 1970-1980. In this paper, I am preferably using the 5 volumes edited in Italian from the famous review, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, that offers concise accurate reports: *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, Roma, 1966-1969, 5 Vols. (Cited simply as *ICV2*). The statistics above are in *ICV2*, I, 2, p. 682

⁴ Cf. Wei Tsing-Sing, L. *Le Saint Siege et la Chine*, Allais, Sottevilles-Rouen, 1971, p. 286s. According to the Vaticanist G. Zizola, quoted by Wei, the idea of sending an invitation to the bishops in the People's Republic was not carried out also because of the opposition of one segment of the Roman Curia.

⁵ Strangely, the official statistics of this initial phase of the work (named Pre-preparatory) speaks of the 116 Ordinaries of the Chinese Church having been consulted. In fact they obtained and reported on only 56 responses (48.2%): cf. *Acta Et Documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II Apparanda*, Series I (Ante praeparatoria) Vol. II Consilia et Vota Episcoporum ac Praelatorum, Pars IV, Asia, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1960, p. 277.

⁶ Cf. Loc Cit., pp 471-611, where the responses of the "China" prelates are reported in full.

⁷ It is possible that the news of the Council was not published in the official press of the People's Republic. The only non-Chinese missionary remaining in Beijing was the Divine Word Father, Peter Huengsberg, who was a teacher in the Institute of Foreign Languages. He said that he found out about preparations for the Council in the autumn of 1961: Ag. *KIPA*, 19/1/62. Cf. *ICV2*, I, 2, p. 421

⁸ A copy of these minutes and related documents is kept in the Mission Archives of the PIME in Rome

⁹ Cf. *ICV2*, II, p. 416. Cardinal Bea had looked forward to a specific model for dealing with other religions distinct from that of the Secretariat for Unity.

¹⁰ In this work of consultation there was also another Chinese professor from the Urbaniana, Mons. Vincent Che Chen-pao. Among the Consultori of the Conciliar Commission for Missions the Spaniard Capuchin, Ignazio G. Larranaga Lasa (Pingliang) and the Belgian Francis Legrand, previously a missionary in China, were also nominated.

¹¹ Archbishop of Kaifeng (Henan) for 15 years. He was imprisoned there and expelled after a dramatic public trial. When the Holy See nominated him anew for the See of Otranto in 1960, Pollio resigned as Archbishop of Kaifeng

¹² Mons. Pollio was also consulted in June 1963 by P. Sigismondi of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* on possibly inviting Mainland China bishops. He gave a favourable answer but doubted that this invitation would meet with success.

¹³ *ICV2*. V. pp. 119-21; cf. *Civiltà Cattolica*, 1965, IV. p. 493 ff.

¹⁴ On that occasion the attitude of dialogue probably prevailed since Paul VI was a convinced supporter. In the speech given on September 12, 1965, at the Catacombs of St. Domitilla, he said, "The Holy See keeps trying to carry out a most difficult task: not only to defend its own existence and rights, but also freedom, human dignity and the moral and spiritual interests of the people. The Holy See abstains from frequently and vehemently raising legitimate protests of condemnation. This is not because it is unaware or neglects the reality, but out of Christian patience and in order to avoid even worse harm. It is always ready to participate in honest and dignified negotiations, forgive the wrongs it has suffered and prefers to look at the present and the future instead of at the recent and painful past. But this is only when it meets with concrete signs of good will." Cf. *ICV2*, I, 2, p. 421.

¹⁵ He was recollecting that Cardinal Agagianian, during a recent visit in Hong Kong, told him: "*Si objective consideratur casus, certe possumus dicere esse malum: if subjective consideratur, non audeo ferre iudicium.*" (If we consider the matter

objectively, we can for certain say that it is a bad thing; if considered subjectively, I cannot dare pass judgment.”)

¹⁶ The substance of the text, agreed upon in Rome at the beginning of the Council and included in the documentation of the meetings of the *Coetus Sinensis*, was published 15 years later in the special number of the Italian magazine *Mondo e Missione* (Milan, 5 May, 1977, p. 177), on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

