

Book Reviews

By Patrick Taveirne, C.I.C.M.

Western Learning and Christianity in China: The Contribution and Impact of Johann Adam Schall von Bell, SJ (1592-1666). Edited by Roman Malek, SVD. [Nettetal: Steyler, 1998. 2 vols. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, Sankt Augustin.]

The two volumes present the proceedings of the international conference held in Sankt Augustin, Germany, in 1992, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the birth of the German-born Jesuit China missionary Johann Adam Schall von Bell. The collection comprises 54 essays from scholars from the East and West. All are printed in their original languages – in English (28), Chinese (17), German (8), and French (1), with summaries in alternative languages, a thorough bibliography, index, glossary, and vivid illustrations.

The articles offer insights into the relationship between science and religion, as well as the dynamics of cultural contact between East and West during the 16th and 17th centuries. As the editor, Father Roman Malek points out in the Prefatory Note, difficulties, of a more political nature, prevented the underlying wish for a broad dialogue with Chinese scholars from being fully realized during the conference.

Professor Lu Yao from Shandong province urged the Church to reflect further, in terms of accommodation, on the issue of how missionaries in various countries should deal with different religious and cultural contexts. He is convinced that, from the viewpoint of Chinese history, Matteo Ricci's methodology should be regarded as the proper way and means of missionary work. On the other hand, Cardinal Paul Shan of Taiwan observed that Schall's "marvelous synthesis of faith and science ... is a challenge to modern Chinese people."

"Scholar from the West" Giulio Aleni SJ (1582-1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China. Edited by Tiziana Lippiello & Roman Malek. [Nettetal: Steyler, 1997.]

This volume presents a total of 27 papers delivered at the International Symposium "Giulio Aleni, SJ (1582-1649). Missionary in China. A Promoter of Dialogue between China and the West." The symposium was organized by the Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana and took place between October 19 and 22, 1994, in Brescia, Italy. The papers by Western and Chinese experts in the field are organized along five topics: the historical context (4), Aleni's background, biography and role (6), his religious and missionary works (9), and humanistic and scientific works (7), and an epilogue.

The Dutch Professor Emeritus Erik Zürcher in the epilogue discusses the important Chinese source "Diary of Oral Admonitions" (*Kouduo richao*), which shows Aleni in action as a missionary, a teacher, a moral guide, and a source of exotic knowledge. The Italian scholar Isaia Iannacone does not consider Aleni to be a "scientist," but rather sees him as the "liaison" between Matteo Ricci, and the Jesuit scientists (Johann Schreck, Rho, Schall, Verbiest). Iannacone argues that these Jesuits did not introduce outdated science in China: "Although they were not Copernicans yet and did not have a completely secular view of natural dynamics, some Jesuit missionaries in China made remarkable steps forward in science." Many Chinese and even some Western scholars tend to disagree.

Perhaps, the Hong Kong scholar Bernard Hung-kay Luk's final comment in his paper "A Study of the Summary of Western Learning (*Xixue fan*)" strikes a conciliatory note. The real significance of Aleni's intellectual mission, according to Luk, should not be measured by how many converts were won for the Catholic religion, or even by how perfectly he transmitted Western learning to his Chinese readers, but should be evaluated by the simple fact that the first attempt was made to bridge the chasm between the two academic traditions. Thus in Aleni's own words "gradually will the learning of all the sages of the Eastern and Western Seas merge and flow as one current."

Bible in Modern China. The Literary and Intellectual Impact. Eber, I. et alii, [Nettetal: Steyler, 1999.]

The 15 essays in this volume are the intellectual fruits of the International Workshop, "The Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact," held in Jerusalem, June 1996. All articles are written in English, and followed by an abstract in Chinese. There is also a thorough general index with glossary, as well as clear

illustrations. The book aims at a better understanding of how the Bible has functioned in modern China's literary and intellectual discourse. Besides the six essays on the translation by Catholics and Protestants, two essays are devoted to the reception of the Bible by the people in China.

Another seven articles by Western and Chinese scholars elaborate on the appropriation of the Bible by literati in China.

As far as the Catholic translation endeavors are concerned, Professor Nicolas Standaert's essay "The Bible in Early Seventeenth-century China" explains why we hear so little about translations of the Scriptures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Standaert also mentions the previously unknown European source of Aleni's "Short Record of the Words and Deeds of God's Incarnation," *Tianzhu jiangsheng yanxing jilue*. According to Standaert, the latter work is probably a Chinese adaptation of the popular *Vita Christi* [*Vita Jesu Christi e quatuor Evangeliiis et scriptoribus orthodoxis concinnata*] of Ludolphus de Saxonia.

A. Camps' essay presents the history of the first complete Chinese Catholic translation of the Bible (published only in 1968) by the Franciscans, through the personal efforts of Father Gabriele M. Allegra (1907-1976).

On the one hand, several papers bear witness to the fact that Christian Scripture was taken seriously by several modern Chinese fiction writers such as Mao Dun, Lu Xun, Ba Jin, Lao She and others. On the other hand, Liang Gong in his survey of "Twenty Years of Studies of Biblical Literature in the People's Republic of China (1976-1996)" deplores the lack of biblical studies on the Mainland, and the neglect of earlier Chinese scholarship. "There have been only 150 articles, and some dozens of books published in a period of 20 years in a country of more than one billion people. This is not much. ... The quality of both research and analysis should be improved."

The scholarly essays in these and earlier volumes on prominent Jesuit missionaries in China and the introduction of the *Bible in China* will enhance the culture-oriented scholarly dialogue between East and West. May the study of the pioneering efforts and openness of mind of these Jesuit scholars and missionaries contribute to a wider and deeper historical understanding of the Christian mission in China, and its present-day challenges and hopes in the People's Republic of China and adjacent Asian nations.