

Seventh Verbiest Foundation Symposium

Peter Barry, MM

The Seventh International Symposium on the History of the Chinese Catholic Church took place at Fujen Catholic University in Taipei, Taiwan, September 7-10, 2001. The topic of this year's symposium was the "History of Catechetics in China." The Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation of the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, has been organizing these symposia on the history of the Catholic Church in China since 1986. This latest symposium was sponsored jointly by the Verbiest Foundation and the Catholic Historical Institute of Fujen University. It was one of numerous activities organized to mark the 40th anniversary of Fujen's re-opening on Taiwan, after being first established in Beijing in 1925.

Over 100 scholars from Taiwan and eight other countries submitted papers on catechetics. Ten scholars, invited from the China mainland, were not allowed to attend the symposium. One alleged reason preventing them from participating was the canonization of the 120 China martyrs on October 1, 2000.

At the opening ceremony, Father Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM, director of the Verbiest Foundation, warmly welcomed all the participants. Cardinal Paul Shan of Kaohsiung gave the opening address. He encouraged the scholars to present their findings free of any ideological prejudice. As Christians, he pointed out, we have the duty to search for the truth, presenting not only the laudable parts of the history of the Catholic Church in China, but also its less honorable aspects. We have nothing to fear from the truth, he said, for Christ told us: "The truth shall set you free." (Jn. 8:34) However, Cardinal Shan went on to point out that many publications in recent years have focussed on negative aspects of the history of the Catholic Church in China. He urged scholars to present a balanced view by writing about the positive achievements of the Church as well.

To offset the negative criticism of the Church, arising from the Rites Controversy, that it looked down upon Chinese culture,

Cardinal Shan cited the Instruction of the newly founded (1622) Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, issued in 1659. He quotes:

Do not endeavor in whatever way nor use any persuasion to make those peoples change their rites, habits and customs, provided that they are not evidently contrary to the Religion and good morals. For is there anything more absurd than to bring France, Spain and Italy, or any other part of Europe into China? Do not import those nations but only the Faith, which does not reject or offend the rites and habits of any people whatsoever, as long as they are not depraved, but which, on the contrary, wishes to keep and preserve them well.”

Finally, Cardinal Shan thanked the speakers and called for a more objective appreciation of Christianity in general and of the Chinese Catholic Church in particular among non-Catholic China scholars.

Professor Gu Weiying of the History Department of the National Taiwan University read Professor Yang Guilin's keynote speech entitled *Inculturation or Contextualization: Interpretation of Christianity in the Context of Chinese Culture*. Professor Yang is the director of the Research Institute on Christian Culture at the Chinese People's University in Beijing and was not permitted to attend the conference. He treated the important question of whether Christianity, from the time of Matteo Ricci to the present, has been sufficiently inculturated into Chinese Culture. Fathers Mark Fang Chih-Jung, SJ, of the Theology Department of Fujen University, and Jac Kuepers, SVD, provincial superior of the Society of the Divine Word on Taiwan, made insightful responses to Prof. Yang's speech.

On the morning of September 7th, the participants enjoyed a rich variety of presentations on the history of catechetics in China, from Ming times up to the present. Dr. A. Dudink of the Sinological faculty of Leuven University presented a paper on the catechetical works of Fr. Jean Basset, MEP (1662-1707). Father Miguel San Roman, OP, discussed a catechetical book first published in Manila in the 16th century, entitled *Testimony of the True Religion*. Prof. Robert Entenmann and Dr. Jean Charbonnier presented papers on the catechetical work of Andreas Ly (1692-1775), a Chinese priest

active in Sichuan Province during the period when Christianity was proscribed by imperial edict (1724-1844). Dr. Claudia von Collani of Wurzburg University in Germany talked on *Mission and Medicine in China*. Dr. Roman Malek presented a paper on *Catechetical Materials from the SVD Missions in Shandong*. Dr. Patrick Taveirne and Wim Holderbeke presented a paper entitled *Scheut Missionaries' (CICM) Contribution to Catechesis in Northern China and Inner Mongolia (1865-1949)*. The catechetical work of Maryknoll (celebrating its 90th year of foundation this year) was covered by Dr. J.P. Wiest and Peter J. Barry.

Approaching more modern times, Mr. Lin Ruiqi discussed the catechetical work of the Hong Kong diocesan weekly *Kung Kao Po*, founded in 1928, and Ms. Pauline Cheng described the development of catechesis in the Diocese of Hong Kong since Vatican Council II. Professors Zhao Yabo and Lin Jingzi presented the catechetical work of Father Vincent Lebbe in China. And bringing us up to the present, Ms. Lei Huiliang, Sr. Zhu Shaoxue, Sr. Peng Yushen and Ms. Zhao Rongzhu presented papers respectively on Taiwan's Fons Vitae Pastoral, Catechetical and Liturgical Training Institute, the catechetical work of the Sheng Kung (SMIC) Sisters on Taiwan from 1949 to 2000, the Taipei catechetical work of the Sisters Devoted to the Sacred Heart, and the work of the Taiwan Pastoral Institute.

The various papers are a treasure trove that open avenues for further research. The materials presented at the symposium makes it possible to compare how the Catholic doctrine was presented to the Chinese people at different times down through the centuries, for instance, both before and after Vatican Council II.

The Seventh International Symposium on the "History of the Chinese Catholic Church" held at Fujen University on September 7-10, 2001 was a fitting introduction to the three international conferences held during October in Hong Kong, Beijing and Rome to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci's arrival in Beijing (1601-2001). China scholars, both Catholic and non-Catholic, can look forward to future rich exchanges on the general topic of religious and cultural interchange between China and the West in the 400 intervening years.