

Fujen Catholic University Celebrates 80 Years of Its Foundation

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Fujen Catholic University dates its beginning from 1925, when property and buildings were purchased in the Western District of Beijing, at No. 1 Dingfu Street on land which formerly belonged to a Manchu prince, and an academic institution opened on the site in October of that year. But its origins go back to the previous decade of the 20th century.



In 1912, two famous Chinese Catholics, Ma Xiangbo and Ying Lianzhi, wrote a letter to Pope Pius X asking for Rome's support in establishing a Catholic University in Beijing. Ma, a former Jesuit, had already founded two universities in Shanghai, Zhendan and Fudan, in 1903 and 1905 respectively, and Ying had found the newspaper *Da Gong Bao* in Beijing in 1902. No doubt due to disruptions caused by the First World War, Rome did not immediately respond to the two Chinese Catholics' request.

In their letter, Ma and Ying expressed their ideas for the university. They pointed out how successful Father Matteo Ricci was using education to propagate the Catholic faith. They would like to continue in the tradition of Ricci and Adam Schall, and open a Catholic university, which would emphasize Chinese cultural studies and an interchange between Chinese and Western cultures. Not waiting for a papal response, Ying Lianzhi started a small school in Beijing's Xiangshan area, called "Fujen She." The school

incorporated the ideas expressed in his and Ma's 1912 letter. However, due to financial difficulties the school closed in 1918.

In 1922, Father George Barry O'Toole, a diocesan priest from the USA, who was associated with the Benedictine Fathers at St. Vincent's Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania visited Beijing to study Catholic educational efforts in China. O'Toole met Ying Lianzhi there, and discussed with him the possibility of establishing a Catholic University. O'Toole had been a professor of philosophy and sociology at St. Vincent's College, on the grounds of the archabbey in Pennsylvania. O'Toole was convinced that the American Benedictines could shoulder the responsibility of running the proposed university. In that same year, Cardinal von Rossum, head of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, requested the American Benedictines to take up the task.

In 1924, Archabbot Aurelius Stehle of the Latrobe Benedictine abbey sent two monks, Fathers Ildephonse Brandstetter and Placidus Rattenberger, to Beijing to study the conditions for establishing a university, and to report their findings back to Latrobe. The Benedictine general council could then make an informed decision. The two Fathers arrived in Beijing on July 8, 1924. Archabbot Aurelius Stehle himself visited Beijing in February, 1925, accompanied by Father O'Toole

In January, 1925, Archabbot Stehle had appointed Father George Barry O'Toole as the first president of the Beijing Catholic University. He took office in September 1925, but left China in January 1926 to go back to the States to organize a committee to collect funds for the university. He returned to China in March 1927 to prepare for the opening of the next academic year in the Fall of 1927. In the meantime, Ying Lianzhi had again set up the "Fujen She," this time on the Manchu noble's estate on October 1, 1925. However, Ying passed away on January 10, 1926. After Ying's death, in addition to the Chinese Studies Department, which he founded, English, mathematics and other subjects were added to the curriculum in preparation for establishing a university the following year.

The Nationalist Government gave the approval for establishing a university, named Beijing Fujen University, on July 29, 1927. The university opened with only one college, Liberal Arts, in the Fall of 1927. Father O'Toole, in addition to being president, was also the Dean of Philosophy, a position he held from 1927 to 1933. In 1929, Fujen University added two more colleges, the College of Science and the College of Education, and the four departments existing in 1927 (Chinese, English Literature, Philosophy and History) were expanded to 12 departments. In that year also, Professor Chen Yuan of the History Department replaced Father O'Toole as president of the university. The latter took the position of vice-president.

The year 1929 also saw the completion of the administration building, which was based on ancient Chinese architecture. The architecture for Fujen was the inspiration of the Apostolic Delegate Celso Costantini, who was an advocate of using a Chinese style in Christian works of art. Father Gresnigt, a Belgian architect, designed the building. On June 27, 1931, the first graduating class of 11 students, who had studied for four years at Fujen University, received their diplomas.

Due to the consequences of the American Stock Market crash of 1929, the American Benedictines could no longer bear the financial of supporting Fujen. Archabbot Stehle had taken out a US\$ 250,000 loan from a bank in New York in early October 1929, and later that month the stock market crashed. The money was to be used for erecting buildings on the Fujen campus. Of course the Benedictines then found it difficult to pay back both the loan and the interest on the loan. These financial circumstances forced the Benedictines, in 1933, to turnover the administration of Fujen to the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), a German missionary order. After the Marco Polo Bridge incident in 1937, Japanese forces occupied Beijing. All the universities in Beijing, except for Fujen, moved to other parts of China. Fujen was allowed to continue functioning in Beijing because Germany and Japan were allies, and with the SVD's in charge, Fujen had a German administration.

However, Fujen refused to fly the Japanese flag and to teach the Japanese language. For this reason, many patriotic Chinese students applied to attend Fujen, and the student population increased during the war years.

In 1945, at the end of the war, Fujen had 4 colleges with a total of 15 departments. In 1947, there were 43 professors, 17 associate professors, 93 lecturers, 57 teaching assistants and 2,383 students. The university library contained 130,000 volumes. Many of the teachers were very capable. Lin Zhiyuan, a member of the Fujen Alumni Association, in the paper on the foreign professors at Fujen University he delivered at the 80th anniversary seminar in Taiwan in December, 2005, pointed out that from 1930 to 1949, 242 foreign professors taught at Fujen. They made up 30% of the teaching staff. 64% of the foreign professors were German and 16% American. The rest of the foreign professors came from 17 other countries. Liu Zhiyuan expressed these words of praise for the foreign professors: "The foreign teachers made a great contribution to Fujen. They left their loved ones in far off lands; they were not afraid of difficulty; they did not seek remuneration; they did not ask for special treatment; they got along well with the Chinese teaching staff; and they wholeheartedly devoted themselves to their teaching tasks. They gave their whole lives to Fujen, and some died carrying out their duties. For example, Father Joseph Murphy, SVD, died of a heart attack at age 40 in 1935, after only two years at Fujen. The student dormitory building was later named after him."

In 1952, Fujen was amalgamated with Beijing Normal University, and thus its 27-year history (1925-1952) in Beijing came to an end. After an 11-year hiatus, Fujen Catholic University started up again on a campus in Xinzhuang township, outside of Taipei in Taiwan. On April 25, 1960, the Taiwan government's Education Department had already given Fujen permission to start up again. Today the Fujen campus contains 9 colleges, 47 departments, 42 Masters programs and 11 Doctoral programs, the university has a student population of approximately 23,000.

Some Difficulties

Fujen's beginnings were not without difficulties. Nicholas Koss took up one of these in his paper given at a seminar commemorating the 40th anniversary of the re-establishment of Fujen University on Taiwan (held in conjunction with the 7th Verbiest Foundation seminar on the History of the Catholic Church in China) in September 2001. Koss' essay dealt with the 1924 letters of Father Ildephonse Brandstetter to Archabbot Aurelius Stehle regarding plans to establish a Catholic university in Peking. Archabbot Aurelius had assigned Father Ildephonse and a Father Placidus Rattenberger to go to Beijing to investigate the circumstances surrounding the founding of the university.

Koss reports that there are nine letters of Father Ildephonse in the archives at Latrobe for the year 1924, and carbon copies of five letters of Archabbot Aurelius' in response to Ildephonse. In the first letter, dated July 17, 1924, Ildephonse states that the Apostolic Delegate, Celso Costantini, is anxious that the Benedictines accept the task of running the university. The Catholic bishop, Stanislaus Jarlin, CM is also in favor of the Benedictines running the university. But Father Ildephonse points out that the usual way for the Benedictines to get involved with education is to start with a high school, and then gradually build the institution into a four year liberal arts college. One of the purposes of the high school would be to train possible candidates for the Benedictine Order.

This question about whether to start with a high school or a university is the subject of many of Ildephonse's subsequent letters back to headquarters that first year. In another letter, Ildephonse writes that an Irish Vincentian by the name of Father Mullen has offered the Benedictines a high school, which he himself cannot run anymore. Ildephonse is in favor of taking it, so that the Benedictines would have the opportunity of learning the Chinese language before undertaking the administration of a university. A later letter mentioned that the bishop of Kaifeng in Henan Province also offered the Benedictines a high school, called Pei Wen Catholic Academy. In fact, Father Placidus has already begun teaching there.

Ildephonse again expresses his wish to accept the bishop's offer. Archabbot immediately cabled back: "Obviously we cannot accept a site, even for nothing, if it involves anything that may interfere with the work outlined by Rome, i.e., the university at Peking."

Undeterred, Ildephonse continued his arguments in favor of starting with a high school rather than a university. In his letter of November 1, 1924, Ildephonse cites the Jesuits and others involved in university education, whom he has consulted. They say we must have a "feeder" school, such as a high school, as a source of students for the proposed university. Archabbot Aurelius' response is clear: the university must come first. "Roma locuta, causa finita" (Rome has spoken, the case is closed), he wrote.

Ildephonse wrote to a confrere in December 1924, saying that he considered the high school in Kaifeng as a source of vocations to the Benedictines. During the visit to Beijing of Archabbot Aurelius and Father O'Toole, begun in February 1925, the offer of the Kaifeng high school was definitely turned down. However, the idea of high school work was not completely erased from Ildephonse's mind. Eight years later, in 1933, when the Benedictines turned over the administration of Fujen University to the Society of the Divine Word, those Benedictines who chose to remain in China, including Ildephonse, went to Kaifeng.

Koss comments that Father Ildephonse seems not to have been able to establish good relations with Mr. Ying Lianzhi and other Catholic laymen associated with the founding of the Catholic university. Ildephonse had better relations with the French missionaries, who may not have been completely in favor of setting up a Catholic university in Peking, Koss speculates (pp. 204-5).

Transfer of Supervision from Benedictines to SVD

Archabbot Aurelius Stehle died on February 20, 1930. Archabbot Alfred Koch replaced him as archabbot of St. Vincent's Abbey, the "mother" community of Fujen University. Realizing that the Benedictines were experiencing difficulty in supporting Fujen, in June 1932, while passing through Rome, Archabbot Koch

consulted the superior of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), Father Joseph Grendel, about the possibility of their Order taking over supervision of Fujen. The SVD's were favorable to the idea because they were a missionary Order, and they saw the running of the university as a means of preaching the Gospel. They also saw it as a challenge to their young community to help it grow up. The SVD's had been founded in 1875, and in 1932, they numbered about 3,000 members. The SVD superiors thought that teaching in Fujen would also give an outlet for the talents of their members who had a penchant for study. Those who opposed accepting the administration of Fujen said that the SVD's had no personnel who could run a university. Also, how would they be able to raise the necessary finances?

The SVD's set down some preliminary ideas, which could later be drawn up into a more formal contract: (1) the SVD's would not accept any existing short or long term debts; (2) the missionary funds of SVD would not be used for the university – the university must have its own separate source of funding; (3) the Holy Father should announce that Fujen is directly under him, so that he can solicit funds for it from all the Catholics around the world; (4) the Benedictines should be in charge of the university until the end of the 1932 academic year; (5) the Apostolic Delegate should personally transfer the university to the directorship of the SVD's, and ownership of properties should be clearly delineated; and (6) Fujen University should belong to the Vatican; only the use of it was to be given to the SVD's.

The main persons involved with the running of Fujen University were in Rome during the Spring of 1933. These were: Cardinal Costantini, Father George Barry O'Toole, vice-president and Dean of Studies of Fujen, Archabbot Alcuin Deutsch, Head of the Cassinese Benedictines, Archabbot Alfred Koch, head of St. Vincent's Abbey in Latrobe, and Father Joseph Grendel, superior of the Society of the Divine Word. They came to general agreement on the preliminary ideas expressed above.

Finally, Father Grendel, as superior of the SVD's, drafted a

letter, dated April 13, 1933, to Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide (the Vatican congregation in charge of the Catholic Church's worldwide mission effort). Incorporating many of the abovementioned ideas, the letter contained the following points: (1) the SVD's accepted charge of Fujen University in the name of their North American province; (2) the faithful and ecclesiastical authorities in America should be publicly notified that they are invited to support Fujen as a Pontifical work; (3) transfer of administration will take place at the beginning of the academic year 1933-4; the transfer will take place from the Benedictines to the Holy See, and then from the Holy See to the SVD's; the property rights of the Benedictines should be clarified; the university should be considered the property of the Holy See, and the SVD's only get the use of it during the time the Holy See entrusts it to them; (4) existing contracts and relations with civil authorities, and internal organization and personnel remain unchanged; (5) the Benedictine Sisters can continue to be in charge of the Woman's Section, but if they choose to leave, the SVD will appeal to the Holy Spirit Sisters to take over; (6) SVD considers the running of Fujen as a missionary work; thus they will seek local vocations, so that in the future Fujen will be Chinese-run; (7) SVD agrees that a legacy in Milwaukee, USA belonging to Fujen University can be used to pay back a loan from the National City Bank of New York; and (8) debts incurred during the current academic year, ending in June 1933, are not the responsibility of SVD.

The Congregation of Propaganda Fide accepted the conditions expressed in the SVD superior's letter on April 27, 1933. The final graduation under Benedictine tutelage at Fujen took place on June 20, 1933. The SVD's took charge of the administration of the university on August 1, 1933. Father Jac Kuepers, SVD, in his paper at the 80th anniversary celebration of the founding of Fujen (December 2005), notes that the change of administration took place rather smoothly.

Conclusion

Today, on Taiwan, Fujen Catholic University continues the ideals laid out for it by the two Chinese Catholic laymen, Ma Xiangbo and Ying Lianzhi, in their 1912 letter to Pope Pius X. Under the aegis of the first two presidents, Cardinal Paul Yupin, 1963-1978, and Archbishop Stanislaus Lokuang, 1979-1992, philosophy researchers at Fujen continued to investigate possible points of contact between Christianity, and Confucianism and other ancient Chinese philosophies. In fact, Fujen University's present mission statement contains the following statement: "Fujen is committed to a dialogue leading to the integration of Chinese culture and Christian faith." Now that is a statement of which Messrs. Ma and Ying would be proud!

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Fujen Catholic University in Beijing, 1925-1952



Fujen Catholic University in Taiwan today