

# ***400 Years of Catholicism in Shanghai***

***A pastoral letter issued at Christmas 2007***

***by Bp. Aloysius Jin Luxian, SJ***

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## **All Holy Missionaries in Heaven, Pray for Us**

Dear priests, Sisters, seminarians and laity:

### **400 Years of Catholicism in Shanghai**

In 1608, Xu Guangqi began *dingyou* upon the death of his father. (In ancient times, when the father or mother of a government official passed away, he resigned from his office and returned home for three years of filial mourning, called *dingyou*.) En route home from Beijing, Xu passed through Nanjing and paid a visit to Fr. Lazare Cattaneo. He invited him to come to Shanghai to preach the Gospel. Fr. Cattaneo happily accepted the invitation, and set out. First he lived in the home of Xu Guangqi in Shanghai, and used it as a base for evangelization. He baptized all the members of the Xu family, young and old. Xu was then a member of the Hanlin Academy. He was very learned, virtuous, and had a good reputation. News of Xu's conversion, and that of his family, to Catholicism spread quickly. (See No. 15, the part on Father Cattaneo, of *Biographies of Jesuits in Ming and Qing China*, by Father Pfister.) Father Cattaneo also spread the Gospel to the districts outside of Shanghai. We can see that 1608 was an extremely important year



for the Catholic Church in Shanghai. The year 2008 will mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Catholic Church in Shanghai. Thus it is worthy of a solemn commemoration by our Diocese.

During his two years in Shanghai, Father Cattaneo baptized over 200 people. In 1610, he went to Hangzhou to plant the church. In 1620 he returned to Jiading to evangelize, and he rested in the Lord in 1640.

After Father Cattaneo, the Jesuits sent a number of their members to preach the Gospel in Shanghai. One of them, Father Francisco Brancati, worked for a rather long time and got a good response. He arrived in 1639, and as Father Pfister records, in his first year of work, 1124 people were baptized, with another 1240 added in the second year. This wonderful achievement was made possible with the help of Candida Xu, the granddaughter of Xu Guangxi. In 1640, he built a Chinese style church on Wutong Street in the old city of Shanghai. That church is still intact despite the ups and downs of history. It has been used as a temple of Guandi and as a school. This church has also served as the centre of the Shanghai Diocese, and it had a rather large school. The church has historical value. Of this diocese, Fathers Li Shiyu, Ai Zuzhang, and Yan Zhi'en, Bishop Zhang Jiashu, and myself were all baptized in that church. The church has been used as a school for some time. Now we are in the process of applying to have the building returned to the use of the diocese. We hope this will be realized before too long.

Due to a persecution of the church, Father Brancati was banished to Guangzhou. In 1671, after the Qing Dynasty restored freedom to the missionaries, Father Brancati prepared to return to Shanghai. But he got sick and died on April 25 in Guangzhou. Catholics brought his coffin to Shanghai, and buried it in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the southern part of the city. Throughout the centuries, over 100 priests and Brothers of the Diocese of Shanghai were buried there, including Father Wu Li (known as Yushan), one of the four great painters of the *mojingdao* school of the late-Ming early-Qing period. During the Cultural

Revolution, the cemetery suffered severe destruction. Coffins were dug up, headstones scattered, and bones tossed by the roadside. It was an agonizing tragedy for the Diocese of Shanghai. As bishop, I also feel deeply wounded by this incident.

### **Remembering the Missionaries**

We Christians all know that there is not one day of our lives which is not filled with God's grace. Looking back on my 91 years of life, I think that, of all the countless graces I have received, the greatest has been the faith. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," and he continued by saying, "But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Rom. 10:13-15) Thus we should greatly honor the missionaries. We cannot forget them.

### **The Route of Evangelization**

We know that the first group of missionaries to China included Matteo Ricci, Adam Schall, Ferdinand Verbiest, Alessandro Valignano, Giulio Aleni, Lazare Cattaneo, and Martino Martini. They journeyed from the far distant West. These young men were almost all from illustrious families, and were well educated, scholarly and multi-talented. They had lived prosperously. In order to put into practice the command of Jesus "Go out to the whole world, and proclaim the Good News to every creature," (Mk. 16:15), they resolutely said a final farewell to mother and father, brothers and sisters. They crossed the wide and deep ocean, and after enduring a long journey and a thousand hardships they came to a totally unfamiliar place, East Asia. I wrote that they said "goodbye forever" to their families, because they never returned home again. They never again saw their relatives and friends. Jesus'



requirements of his disciples sound too severe and demanding, and hard to put into practice. Luke the Evangelist records:

“As they were proceeding on their journey, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Foxes have dens and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ And to another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he replied, ‘Lord, let me go first and bury my father.’ But he answered him, ‘Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ And another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (Lk. 9:57-62)

The demand of Jesus is to follow him unconditionally and completely, and the missionaries put it into practice. I wrote, “a long journey and a thousand hardships,” because transportation in those days was not as luxurious and convenient as it is now. There were no luxury cruise liners, nor trains with soft seats and private carriage, and certainly no supersonic planes; just a sailing ship surrounded by life-threatening dangers. From the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, the ship was rocked by strong winds. The missionaries ate salted vegetables, chewed hard bread, drank a rationed amount of water, and had only a few medicines and no medical treatment. Day and night for about six months, wind, rain, and the sun assaulted the ship. Those who died en route were buried at sea, and they were in the majority.

### **All Kinds of Hardships**

When they finally set foot on Chinese soil, they were all alone and pitifully solitary. All by themselves, they had to face head-on one concrete problem after another. They could not speak the language. The culture was different. The customs were vastly different. People looked at them with curiosity or coldness, if not with hostility. They had to resolve pressing problems of where to get a foothold, where to stay safely, and then how to get started on the work of spreading the Gospel. At the end of the Ming and



beginning of the Qing dynasties, the authorities implemented a policy of isolation. Aside from a few merchants, they did not allow foreign influences to enter our nation. Violators were swiftly expelled. At times when the Church was frequently persecuted, there was the danger of being confined to prison, or even to being condemned to death by beheading. Intelligent, clever people kept asking, "What are these barbarians with big noses and blue eyes hoping to achieve by forcing their way into our country? Are they doing this for money? They are not in business. Are they seeking high rank? They cannot participate in the civil service exams; they certainly cannot become officials. So what are they, after all, trying to obtain?"

In fact, they did not in the least conceal their objective. They publicly announced: We only want to do one thing, that is, to proclaim Jesus Christ to everyone. He was crucified in Judea 1500 years ago. God is our motivator. The love of Christ compels us, urging us to come and proclaim His Gospel to the great Chinese people. We have come to help you recognize the "Way" (*Dao*), which you have been seeking since antiquity. Does not the *Dao* point to the Way and the Truth? Does it not point to Life, and to the Mother of Heaven and Earth?

Laozi, your great thinker, wrote "There was something undefined and complete, coming into existence before Heaven and Earth...It may be regarded as the Mother of all things. I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of *Dao*." (*Daode Jing*, ch. 25) And yet you ask, "Who can tell the nature of *Dao*?" (*Daode Jing*, ch. 21) It is unclear. And so we come to tell you: the Way your generation seeks is Jesus Christ. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." From antiquity, the Chinese have sought the unity of Heaven and humanity. But the Confucians only talk of humanity, of entering the world, of the Way for people, and of interpersonal relationships. They do not discuss Heaven, or the Other Shore, and so they cannot reach the boundary where Heaven and humanity are one. We speak to you about Heaven, and the unity of Heaven and humanity, supplementing what Confucianism has neglected. This is

the reason why we have come to China from so far away.

### **The Harvest of Evangelization**

The missionaries overcame all kinds of hardships for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Language barrier? They worked painstakingly to grasp our written and spoken language. They certainly had an excellent command of our ideographic characters. They always asked questions humbly, and studied assiduously. Before long, they resembled our great scholar-officials, always saying, "Confucius says, Confucius says," and they became dignified specialists in Confucianism. They did as St. Paul wrote, "I have become all things to all people, to save at least some of them." (1 Cor. 9:22)

Facing utterly different customs? They knew how to enter the culture, removing their Western clothing to wear Confucian robes. They ate and drank just like Han Chinese. Because Chinese are known throughout the world for their tradition of revering the old, all the missionaries grew long beards. To remove feelings of prejudice, coldness and hostility, they opened wide their front door to welcome all guests, young or old, rich or poor, treating everyone with hospitality. They did not reject people. Rather, they patiently and thoroughly answered their questions.

All the missionaries who came to China had received an advanced education. They were talented scholars. Aside from a profound knowledge of philosophy and theology, individual missionaries also had a grasp of specialized fields such as astronomy, geography, mathematics, medicine, art, and mechanical engineering. They could be of service to people from the imperial court down to the poor, sick, toiling masses. They brought the latest accomplishments in Western science and technology to China, and, at the same time, they introduced Chinese culture to the West. Today, both Chinese and international scholars acknowledge that they made great contributions to Sino-Western cultural interchange. Throughout the centuries, unbiased people have esteemed them. Their achievements cannot be obliterated.

Speaking of our Shanghai Diocese, when the Jesuits returned here in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they founded the Xuhui Public School. A century ago, they established Zhendan (Aurora) University. They went on to open more than 20 academically renowned middle schools. A century ago, they also built the Sheshan Observatory and the Xuhui Meteorological Station, as well as several modern hospitals. They also had a library well-known both within and outside China, as well as the Tushanwan Art Gallery, which the famous painter Xu Feihong called the cradle of Sino-Western painting. (See the Dec. 6, 2007 issue *Liberation Daily*). At the same time as they were preaching the Gospel, missionaries also introduced cutting-edge Western science and technology to China.

### **The Policy of Evangelization**

The early missionaries used their talents to influence the upper classes of society. Their good personality traits attracted a large group of intellectuals. Their spirit of sacrifice and service moved countless numbers of people, causing Christianity to take root, flower and bear fruit in China. Their guiding principle of evangelization was to indigenize Christianity, and to make it blend into Chinese culture. They emphasized dialogue and opposed confrontation.

Because they had a correct policy and strategy for evangelization, after 10 or 20 years of diligent planting and weeding, there were missionaries serving in the imperial court. They could protect the missionaries throughout the country, enabling them to preach freely and publicly. Thus it was a period when missionaries were active across the vast territory of China, and achieved great success. The emperor even provided a tomb for Matteo Ricci, who was buried within the City of Beijing after he died.



## **The Laity**

The missionaries profoundly took to heart the words of Jesus, "The harvest is great, but laborers are few." They knew that the work of evangelization could not unfold only through a small number of foreigners. Thus they put great effort into training local forces for evangelization. Speaking concretely, they selected key people from among the Catholics and trained them to be assistants. They organized the Catholics, making some of them lay leaders to oversee the community. At that time there were no congregations of Sisters. Foreign Sisters were mostly cloistered or semi-cloistered; they did not cross the ocean from afar to evangelize. So the missionaries trained virgins, building up their spirituality. The virgins took a vow of chastity, but they did not leave home. They worked to support themselves. Most of their efforts went into managing the church buildings and teaching catechism to the children. The missionaries expended themselves in preaching, administering the sacraments, and visiting distant places. Was not this the way the Apostles in the early Church proclaimed Jesus Christ?

In the middle of the last century, the Second Vatican Council stressed the role of the laity, announcing the arrival of the Age of the Laity. In China, it had been the Age of the Laity 400 years ago. During the reigns of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong and Jiaqing Emperors [1661-1821], there were many incidents of persecution of the Church. Missionaries were expelled. But Chinese laity and their leaders, and the virgins continued to maintain the existence of the Church in China. So we salute them. Now as we celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Church in Shanghai, we not only remember Fathers Cattaneo, Brancati and the other missionaries, but at the same time, we also recall and take as our models those unsung laity, lay leaders and virgins who spent their lives working for the Church, and who suffered much as a result.

## The Mission of Evangelization

In God's supremely wise providence, the era of foreign missionaries preaching the Gospel in China has come to an end. God has transferred this holy mission to us. We should happily accept this mission, and carry out the work of evangelization in an even better way.

All the priests of the Diocese of Shanghai have already met to discuss detailed plans for parish and diocesan activities to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Church in Shanghai. Diocesan leaders will meet to study the plans, and then issue a public announcement. As bishop, I want to recall for the priests, Sisters, seminarians and all the faithful the following few points:

(1) Evangelization is something that every Catholic must do. The summons, "to proclaim the Good News to every creature," which Jesus issued to the Apostles before His Ascension, was given to everyone who has faith in Him. In his encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI points out three main tasks of the Church. The first is to proclaim the Gospel, the second is to administer and receive the sacraments diligently, and the third is to carry out works of charity. Most of the Catholics of Shanghai pay attention only to the second point, while neglecting the first and third points. Our sister churches, namely Protestants of every denomination, all place great emphasis on proclaiming the Gospel and on performing works of charity. Before Liberation, they only had 30,000 believers in Shanghai, but now their number exceeds 200,000. Back then they only had 700,000 members in the whole country, but now they have printed more than 50,000,000 Bibles. We can see how their numbers have increased. And ourselves? On the eve of Liberation, our Diocese of Shanghai (not including Chongming Island) had 100,000 Catholics. And now? According to incomplete statistics, there are only about 150,000. It will soon be 60 years since Liberation, time for almost three generations of growth. According to the natural growth rate of the population, we should have many more Catholics than this. We cannot speak of success in the work of

evangelization. In fact, there has been a decline. As bishop, I feel I am failing in my job. I am ashamed to face the missionaries of the past. I do not know how I will be able to give an account before God.

(2) Each of us Catholics should take the spreading of the Gospel seriously, coordinating with the priests and Sisters in the work of evangelization. We priests, Sisters and seminarians, who live a consecrated life, cannot just finish the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the reading of the breviary, then close the gate of the church, and spend the bulk of our time on the Internet or watching TV. The gate of the church should be open during daytime; the priests and Sisters should always warmly welcome visitors. They have been led by the Holy Spirit. If we neglect them, then we neglect God. Inquirers are curious. When we welcome them sincerely, and patiently dispel their misconceptions, they will express a willingness to go further and find out more about the Jesus Christ whom we proclaim. Some of them will ask to attend the catechism class, and will begin to study the doctrine in earnest. After a period of study, contact, and understanding, they will request baptism, and will join the ranks of the People of God. We will have won them over. St. Augustine said, "Everyone is our brother and sister, either already, or in the future."

Proclaiming the Gospel, proclaiming Jesus Christ crucified, makes those outside the Church, those without faith, accept the instruction of Christ. They believe with their hearts, and gladly convert to become followers of Christ. This is certainly not an easy task. We can say that it is something which exceeds human strength. "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. For God, all things are possible." (Mk. 10:27)

### **Strengthen Spirituality**

Actually, proclaiming the Gospel is God's work. It is the power of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit does not take action, if the Holy Spirit does not move the hearts and souls of the listeners, then our loud, forceful proclaiming will merely be like what St. Paul



described, “only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Cor. 13:1) In the time of St. Paul, some Catholics were confused. They attributed the fruit of proclaiming the Good News to people. “Some say, ‘I belong to Paul,’ and others, ‘I belong to Apollos.’” (1 Cor. 3:4) Paul admonished them, saying, “What is Apollos, after all, and what is Paul? Ministers through whom you became believers, according to the work the Lord assigned each one to do. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth.” (1 Cor. 3:5-7)

In 2008, the main focus of our celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church in Shanghai, will be to increase the work of proclaiming the Gospel. Thus we must strengthen our own spirituality and prayer life. If we only attach importance to formalities, pilgrimages, meetings, and group tours, then we will labor in vain. We should start a prayer campaign in every parish in the diocese.

### **The Spirit of Sacrifice**

(3) The Diocese of Shanghai as well as the Church of China must give credit to the foreign missionaries for the achievements they have today. I have already cited the great personalities among them. They are an example for us to follow. Regarding them, we cannot be like what the historian Sima Qian wrote, “We look at the high mountain; we strive to walk towards it. Although we cannot reach the summit, our hearts still admire it.” We cannot merely look toward the missionaries; we should strive to imitate them, and always place their magnificent, luminous personal traits before our eyes, comparing ourselves to them, and searching for the areas where we fall short. They were full of knowledge and talent. We cannot put ourselves in the same class with them, but at least we can never get weary of learning. Time is God’s most precious gift to us. We should know that wasting time is the greatest waste. St. Peter said, “Consider the patience of our Lord as salvation.” (2 Pet.

3:15) We should especially follow the example of the missionaries' spirit of sacrifice and of service.

Many people among us say, "Was not my entering religious life the greatest sacrifice? I have said to God, 'I have sacrificed everything for you, given you my all.'" Jesus taught us, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Mt. 7:21) God wants to see our real activity; He wants us to be His true disciples.

A friend of mine once said to me regarding priests and those in religious life, "There are two kinds of people who present themselves in sacrifice. One kind carries a flower vase, filled with gold and silver, fame, status, power and prestige. He approaches the altar silently, and pours all that treasure upon the altar, saying, 'God, graciously accept my offering.' Then he quietly retreats to a corner of the church, where he repeats in his heart the phrase which St. Francis loved, 'My God, and my all.' The other kind carries an empty vase, and says loudly 'I have come to offer sacrifice to God.' When he reaches the altar, he puts the offerings of the other people into his empty vase, saying 'I already belong to God. Of course I can gather and use these things.' Saying this as he walks away, his heart is still not satisfied. He regrets having brought too small a vase. This kind of person uses the name of 'sacrifice', but in fact he or she 'plunders' others' goods. Do they think they can trick God?"

This friend continued by telling me that he reached this conclusion after years of observation. I only hope that all our priests and Sisters belong to the first category of sacrificer, and not to the second. I personally keep pondering to which category I belong. We made a regulation that every priest and Sister should examine himself or herself twice a day. It's as if young people today have lost the tradition of spending time in examining themselves. I think we should restore this practice. Our spiritual works should not merely consist of reading the breviary and saying the Rosary. Zengzi, a disciple of Confucius, said, "I examine myself three times a day." We should at least reflect upon our life once a day.

Human life is always moving forward, and we are always meeting forks in the road. We must make choices without ceasing. Our sacrifice cannot be made just once for all time, and then make no more sacrifices, without regret, again. Reality is not like that. We often have regrets, so then we stop sacrificing and take back our offerings. Then we proceed to make demands on God and on the Church, all for our own benefit.

### **The Spirit of Service**

(4) We studied the spirit of sacrifice of the missionaries. We should also study their spirit of service. Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve." (Mt. 20:28) All those who truly offer themselves to the Lord must have the same spirit of service as Jesus had. Conversely, those without a spirit of service definitely cannot be real sacrificers. In 2008, during the anniversary celebrations, we must reflect and ask ourselves, "Do I have the spirit of service? My mouth says 'service', but in fact, do I seek service from others? Do I grumble about my work, thinking that I put too much effort into it, and get too little in return?"

Whenever I think of Catholics in the world, I feel my own insignificance. Many families have children. I admire them. Look what it means to be a mother or a father. It means rising early, preparing breakfast for the children, and only eating after making arrangements for them. Then they take the children to school. Next they quickly race to work, afraid of being penalized for arriving late. They work diligently and conscientiously for eight hours on the job, not daring to be careless because of a deep fear of being fired. After work, they pick up the children from school, and buy some food on the way home. Back home, they go to the kitchen to wash, cut and cook the vegetables for supper, not an easy task. Cleaning up after the meal, they still have to help the kids with homework and put them to bed. Then the parents can finally get some rest. On the weekend, they have housecleaning and leftover chores from the workweek. If someone in the family gets sick and goes to the hospital, then they are busy in both the house and the hospital, plus



having their own personal matters to attend to. There seems to be no end of work. Yet they accept the situation in silence. No words of discontent come out of their mouths, they do not complain, but they gladly make sacrifices. I feel they are truly great, while I am insignificant.

We have individual priests and Sisters, who after morning Mass, lock the gate of the church and return to their rooms. Either they watch TV, or they play with the computer. The content of TV and the Internet includes everything and anything: news, games, gambling, violence, sex, and business. Of course there are some academic presentations. Nothing is lacking, and everyone selects what he or she needs. Then one day they get hooked, and cannot pull themselves away. They need to call quickly upon the Lord to save their souls. Evangelization, service and sacrifice are banished from their minds. We in religious life should remember the responsibilities of our vocation.

### **Rouse the Catholics to Action**

The early missionaries obtained glorious achievements because they aroused the laity to action, and organized them. We should continue this good tradition and carry it forward. Previously Catholics in Shanghai had an organization for church extension. They helped evangelize, and widely promoted works of mercy, and so gained fame throughout the whole world. I hope that Catholics in Shanghai today will continue that outstanding tradition, and cause evangelization work in the Diocese of Shanghai to develop and flourish.

Our diocese currently has two fine lay organizations. For years they have made contributions to diocesan construction, but they have not put evangelization work in first place, which is a blemish in some otherwise perfect institutions. I think that during our 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, they should reflect among themselves, rectify the shortcomings in the direction of their work.

### **The Blessed Mother of Sheshan — Our Lady Help of Christians**

We Catholics are enthusiastic about going to many places on pilgrimage. This is a good thing and should be encouraged. In all of China, the most famous destination for pilgrimage is Sheshan. Eighty-three years ago, Archbishop Celso Costantini, the first Apostolic Delegate of the Holy See to China, summoned all the bishops of China to the first Plenary Council of Shanghai. First he led all the bishops up to Sheshan on pilgrimage, and entrusted the Church in China to Our Lady of Sheshan. She graciously granted their prayer, and has protected the Church in China to this day. In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI, in his Letter to the Church in China, summoned Catholics throughout the world to invoke Our Lady of Sheshan, Our Lady Help of Christians, to protect the Church in China. We Catholics of Shanghai feel immense honor. We thank our Holy Father. At the same time, we also feel pressure. In 2008 large groups of pilgrims both from within China and from overseas will come to Sheshan. We should make every effort to extend the friendship of a host, and treat well the multitude of pilgrims. Let them feel the brotherly and sisterly affection of the clergy, religious, and laity of Shanghai. Especially let them see the love of God manifested in our words and actions, so that they may give glory to God. Let them come with enthusiasm and return home rejoicing. Placing ourselves before Our Lady of Sheshan, we request abundant graces from Our Holy Mother. We will increase our devotion to the Blessed Mother, and imitate her. We will not fail to meet the ardent expectations of the Holy Father.

Finally, I invite everyone with one voice to sing the praises of Our Lady of Sheshan, Our Lady Help of Christians, please continue to protect us and care for us!

And all you missionaries in heaven, pray for us!

+ Jin Luxian  
Christmas 2007