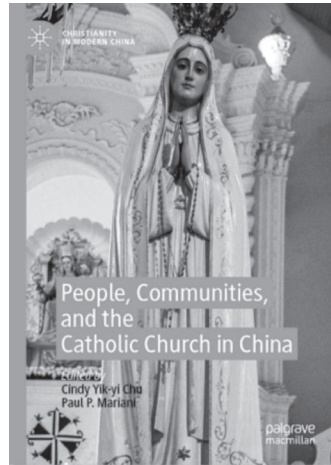


Book Review

by Tommy Murphy, SSC

Cindy Yik-yi Chu and Paul P. Mariani, eds. *People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. xix, 157 pages. Hardcover ISBN: 978-981-15-1678-8



This slim volume from the Hong Kong Baptist University is a welcome contribution to our knowledge of the Catholic Church in China. It is published as part of their Series on Christianity in Modern China which attempts to respond to the acknowledged dearth of material on both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in China. This volume, edited by Cindy Chu and Paul P. Mariani, consists of nine articles exploring key issues in Sino-Vatican relations, Church leadership, and the development of local Catholic communities. These articles cover the development of the Catholic Church in Post-Mao China, focusing on two important Church personalities, the Chinese translation of the Bible, the growth of the Jinde Charities Foundation, current initiatives in Youth Ministries and an examination of the 1980 “miracle” of Sheshan. It is a valuable book both for the newcomer researching Catholicism in China and for the more seasoned observers in this field of study. It also responds to the “enormous demand for monographs on the

Chinese Catholic Church” as mentioned in the introduction, and is therefore a useful book to have on our library shelves.

Cindy Chu, one of the editors, claims in Chapter 1 that this “book provides readers with the information and insights needed to better understand Sino-Vatican relations and the rationale behind the decisions taken by Pope Francis.” It may not provide all the information one needs to do this, but it certainly goes a long way in helping us understand some of the key issues involved in this question.

Gianni Criveller’s overview of the Catholic Church in Post-Mao China is a helpful summary of the key moments that the Catholic Church has experienced since the 1950s. He rightly holds that “there is no national (or ‘patriotic’) Church in China,” yet it is clear that the Church faces serious challenges in the political, social and pastoral faith life of its adherents. He believes that the provisional agreement has raised “both excessive enthusiasm and unwarranted criticism”; yet he writes that the provisional agreement does not mean that the Chinese Catholics are now freer, and stresses that there are serious obstacles to bringing the benefits of the negotiations to the level of local diocesan and parish life. Yet he has great faith in the “moral strength and faith of the Catholics of China” to carry them through this difficult time.

Sergio Ticozzi describes the growth in quite difficult circumstances of the underground (unregistered or unofficial) Church in China. Many in this group have given great

witness to their faith and many also suffered persecution. He also points out that unfortunately some believers created situations that divided these communities. Given the strict registration drive by the Government and the lower number of vocations, he is not hopeful for the future survival of these unregistered communities.

Rachel Xiaohong Zhu gives us a good overview of the life and contributions of Bishop Jin Luxian in Shanghai and of his attempts to create space for the Catholic faith to survive and grow in China. She highlights Bishop Jin's public effort to convince the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) members that if they did not love the Church, then they should leave the CCPA.¹ The author indirectly raises the question of what role the CCPA may have played in the survival and ongoing existence of the Catholic Church in China. Despite the criticism Bishop Jin received for cooperating with the CCPA, he was clear that the path of conflict had been a devastating one for the Church and what was needed was more dialogue. The earlier *Cold War mentality* evident in the "clashing ideologies and broken communication between China and the Vatican", have given way to a spirit of dialogue from the time of Pope John XXIII to the efforts of Pope Francis today. The theological concept of inculturation offered Bishop Jin a useful framework to

1 Yet Bishop Jin also pronounced that "the CCPA is not part of the church but a political community." See "The Opening Address on Shanghai CCPA Symposium," *Catholic Research Material Collection* (天主教研究資料編) (1990): 3–11.

cooperate with the government but this approach was not accepted by all. Many were persecuted and humiliated. The author suggests that Bishop Jin played an important role in building up the Church but that much work remains to be done. This will involve reflection on past events in a constructive way to bring about a future of reconciliation.

Beatrice K. F. Leung writes that Cardinal Zen has “had dramatic relations with the Government of the HKSAR, as well as Beijing and the Vatican.” Yet she notes that his “silence on the Communist treatment of Chinese Catholics when he was a teacher in Chinese seminaries was a contrast to his vocal criticism on the inhumane policy of the HKSAR on sociopolitical issues.” She is supportive of Cardinal Zen’s political stance that claims “respect for human rights is in full accordance with a Christian interpretation of social justice.” She writes that “Zen truly became the archenemy of Beijing, as well as a headache for the HKSAR government, after he began criticising the latter for siding with the rich and not caring sufficiently for the poor.” Yet she acknowledges that his opinions or confrontational style have not been accepted by everyone either in society or in the Church.

Raissa De Gruttola highlights the achievement of Gabriele Allegra and the staff of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Sinense in producing the first full Chinese translation of the Bible, known as the Sigao Bible. The article acknowledges that in the past there was a delay on the part of Catholic missionaries in translating the Bible into Chinese. After

outlining some of the reasons behind this delay, she then gives some of the reasons behind the Franciscans' subsequent efforts to make the Bible available to the general faithful. She highlights the variety of work the organization is currently undertaking. She also draws attention to other translations of the Bible in Chinese and to the preparation of a future publication of the Bible in simplified Chinese characters. It is worth noting that the Claretian Press hopes to publish in the summer of 2021 a new full Chinese translation of the Bible, and that last year in 2020 a group of Chinese Catholic Biblical scholars in China has already started work on the ambitious task of translating the Bible within China itself.

Zhipeng Zhang outlines the origins and growth of the Jinde Charities Foundation and its impact on Chinese society. By using detailed lists of its activities, the author shows how it has changed the social image of Chinese Catholicism, and highlights Jinde's important role in collaborating with other major religions, government agencies and civil society. Its approach attempts to unite the "servant Church" model with the "prophetic Church model." However, the author notes that of the 5,919 official foundations in China in 2017, Jinde Charities was the only Catholic foundation.² Together with other Catholic social services, they "have not only witnessed the Gospel but also raised the status of the Church in Chinese society." Jinde's international links are

2 With a foundation status, an organization can set up a donation account and get an official stamp, so that it can receive donations from both domestic and overseas donors.

an important part of its operation, and which help facilitate good mutual communication between various countries and many international Catholic organizations.

Bruno Lepeu gives a positive description of some pastoral activities taking place with, and among young people in China. He states that the study of youth ministry is of crucial importance to understanding what is emerging in the Chinese Church at present. This article is an encouraging description of what is actually happening on the ground in China. Far from being paralyzed by the many restrictions imposed from above, many pastoral agents are showing creativity and courage in organizing helpful faith formation activities for young Catholics in different parts of China. Faith formation for young people has changed from being centered on catechism classes for young people during school vacations to actual youth ministry that varies from prayer groups to liturgical preparatory groups and faith-deepening activities, as well as service outreach activities. However, the modern secular way of city life has made attending Church youth activities less attractive. And many local churches are “not well equipped in terms of mindset and resources to face the specific challenges of youth ministry.” With young people moving to the cities for work and study, local dioceses have organized specific outreaches aimed at these young migrants in the bigger cities. These have proved to be useful in supporting and developing the faith of young people who have moved away from home into the large urban areas.

The author has conducted more than sixty interviews with young people and youth ministers which provide a solid basis for his observations. His initial survey findings show that many young people did not receive a solid faith formation which left them vulnerable and unable to answer questions from secondary school classmates about their faith. The interviewees mentioned that their faith was sometimes rekindled in a diocesan summer camp. Meeting with other young believers in a youth-friendly setting and with age-appropriate programs and prayers encouraged them to feel pride again in being Catholic. Well-prepared summer camps with trained volunteers has had a big impact on many young believers. Pilgrimages also prove to be suitable faith builders for many young people. These gatherings also provide opportunities for bible study and faith formation. The Taizé prayer service format has also deepened the faith commitment of many young Catholics. Service opportunities are also availed of to give concrete form to their growing faith. Many of them have asked for accompaniment in the form of pastoral care and companionship, but it is difficult for local parishes and dioceses to provide this level of accompaniment. Young people have high expectations of the Church and of Church leaders. They hope that priests and Sisters will have solid personal formation and exhibit good virtues in their lives, and that there will be efforts to unite the different sectors of the Church in China. It is clear that young people need a lot of support but often the local Church does not have suitably trained personnel or does not have the resources to offer this kind of supportive outreach.

Young Catholic migrants in the big cities are an important sector in the modern Church. Some good outreach efforts are being made to offer them supportive structures but many are unfortunately lost. With increasing restrictions on ministry for under 18s, the local churches will have to rely more on family-based training to help young people grow in their faith. The author suggests that the concept of “The Church as Communion” can be a useful framework in helping young people remain within the supportive faith life of the Church. This approach was stressed in early Christianity and can be useful today in China. He concludes by saying: “When young people discover the joy of being disciples of Christ, they get very involved in the life of the church, which becomes a more participatory and collaborative Church.”

Paul P. Mariani focuses on the Sheshan “miracle” of 1980 and its several interpretations. After the Cultural Revolution, long repressed religious groups emerged, among them Catholic believers who gathered at Sheshan in March 1980 expecting Our Lady to appear. This was a surprise to many in the Church and also caught the authorities unawares. The author looks at the different interpretations given to this event both by people within the Church and the government. The Chinese Communist Party had assumed that their decades-long campaign to eradicate religion had been successful, only to be surprised by seeing ten thousand pilgrims travel to Sheshan in March 1980. This kind of large pilgrimage had not taken place for over twenty five years so it stood as a witness to the survival of the faith despite much persecution.

In summarizing the views of one of those accused of organizing the pilgrimage “miracle,” the author writes: “the real miracle of Sheshan was that religious belief in China had survived even the darkest of times.....this was something the government was having a hard time accepting.” The authorities came up with their own narrative to explain the “miracle.” “The hardline approach was out. The government now countenanced an approach where they simply explained the reasons for religious belief. Religion would gradually die off on its own accord. But it was deemed counterproductive to try to attack it.” The strategy was to prosecute “criminals” and the mass of believers would fall into line. However, this is not what has actually happened. By analysing the various interpretations of the Sheshan “miracle,” the author shows the importance of the faith of the common people for the overall life of the Catholic Church. He concludes by writing: “A great surprise in the reform era was that political liberalisation and economic reforms led to the unexpected revival of religion in what had been one of the most atheistic societies on earth. The Sheshan miracle was one of these events.”

Reading through this book, one notices some themes or issues that emerge, e.g. How should one approach the Chinese authorities, by means of confrontation and conflict or through negotiation and respectful dialogue? Some suggest a more confrontational style while others prefer to use a patient style of respectful dialogue. It probably is fair to say that in the past the confrontational style has not brought satisfactory outcomes in the long run in either the

political or religious spheres. The difficult exchanges of Bishops Maigrot and Tournon with Emperor Kangxi in 1706 are some examples that come to mind. Pope John XXIII and subsequent Popes have tried to keep an open communication with Chinese authorities no matter how difficult that was. Today Pope Francis strives to keep this tradition alive.

While all agree that there is one Catholic Church in China, many struggle to find appropriate terms to describe the different communities in China. The terms “underground” or “overground” are not fully accurate and they are sometimes replaced with terms like “official” or “unofficial” and “registered” and “unregistered.” There can be a tendency at times to suggest that the unregistered communities are loyal to the Holy Father, with the implication that the registered communities are less loyal. I think this needs to be more nuanced as it is not a full reflection of the reality we find in the Catholic communities in China today.

This book has focused on Catholic communities in the post-Mao era and how they have experienced and survived persecution since the 1950s. The editors in their Preface draw our attention to a much larger project on the Catholic Church in China which they plan to publish in the coming years. I look forward to these upcoming volumes which hopefully will look at the experience of the Catholic Church during earlier periods of persecutions so that we might then be able to make a helpful comparison with the experience of the post-1950s persecutions.