

Christianity in China is Growing to a New Level of Maturity

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<p style="text-align: center;">Introduction: Defining our topic and clarifying terms</p>

Growth in numbers versus growth towards maturity

In this lecture we ask ourselves the question: how do we understand “growth” of Christianity and how can Christianity in China grow today? In a first part we will, starting from concrete examples of the Middle East, Europe and of China itself, indicate different models of growth of Christianity in history. We will distinguish between growth in numbers and growth towards maturity in faith and identify phases through which an individual or a community passes on the way towards full participation in the celebration of Eucharistic life in faith. Then we will, in part 2 and 3, apply this to the situation in China. In the 2nd part we discuss pre-evangelization and explore how Christianity in China can grow by improving its dialogue and cooperation with society; especially with those who are the most remote from faith – atheists – and improving the efficiency of its presence in Chinese Society. In the third part we discuss evangelization proper. We will take note of the many Chinese who are interested in joining the Church and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese Church community celebrating its faith on the Eucharistic level while facing this historic opportunity for growth.

Clarifying some terms

We must first clarify some terms and principles that are important. We take them for granted through this lecture in which speak mainly of the Chinese Catholic Church.

First: when we speak of “mission” or “missionaries” here, we mean “mission in China by the Chinese local Church itself”. Foreign China-missionaries consider themselves as partners in mission who are willing and ready to support and cooperate with the local Church wherever possible. In this lecture we will indicate areas where we think foreign missionaries, if invited, could contribute. Mission is first the task of each local Church.

Secondly: nobody is excluded from the dynamic of our dialogue towards evangelization. Dialogue with atheism is a must for the Church. Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes*) teaches us that the Church does not live in a vacuum. It must be in dialogue with society.

Thirdly: We will speak about the “*Official [open] Church Community*” and the “*Unofficial [underground] Church Community*”, but not of the so-called “*Patriotic Church*”. This misnomer has caused confusion in many discussions. There is no “Patriotic Church”. There exists a “*Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association [CCPA]*”. The Chinese Catholics who celebrate in open churches are not members of the CCPA and if anyone would call them *Patriotic Church*, meaning that they are CCPA members or even sympathizers, they would feel insulted. We do not discuss CCPA here. We refer to the community of Catholics openly celebrating their faith in open churches.

Part I
Phases of growth in faith

The principle of "duration": God respects human freedom while he saves people

The rapid "growth" of Christianity in the Middle East and in Europe

The Lord Jesus told His apostles: "Go and make all peoples into my disciples (Mt 28,18). The apostles went and did what the Lord told them and the Church grew rapidly. During the first centuries several countries in the Middle East became Christian. But later most of them became Muslim, which shows that faith can be very alive and growing, but it can also die. After Emperor Constantine became Christian and after Clovis was baptized, Europe became Christian very fast. Christian faith became even part of the tradition. It was so identified with European culture that it became "conventional". For generations Christian faith was taken for granted. One supposedly received faith at birth from the family. Many made faith into their own personal belief as they grew up. Others did not. As a result, when secularization and materialism appeared, many European Christians had a hard time to confirm personally that they were Christians. Many "Christians by name" in Europe and even communities need to reaccept faith, gradually acquire sufficient understanding of their faith, learn to live as a Christians and celebrate with the Christian community. Historic circumstances created an atmosphere that allowed for quick growth of Christianity in the Middle East and in Europe. In China it was the opposite.

The dramatic history and slow growth of Christianity in China

During the 16th century missionaries left Europe and also did in China what the Lord told them to do: proclaim the Good News. But Chinese people did not accept Christian faith as smoothly as Europeans did. The history of the Church in China is dramatic. It met with many misunderstandings. Our Catholic Church was rather exclusive. China has also an old, proud and rather exclusive culture. This caused the drama of the Rite Controversy (17th century). Politics of Western powers were at the origin of that other drama: the Unequal Treaties (19th century); then followed the Boxer Uprising (1900). The history of the recent past fifty years and the Cultural Revolution will probably be registered as one of the most dramatic in the history of the Chinese Church. It entirely isolated the Church in Chinese society and caused an internal split inside the Church. That is the reality which we must keep in mind as we discuss "Growth of Christianity in China today". The historical background of China and Europe is so different. One cannot say that, Christianity in China today faces the same situation as in Europe with regard to growth in faith. But there are striking similarities.

Idealized Salvation versus *Principle of Duration*

Even though growth in number of baptized Christians is important, I do not think that this should be our first concern today. As missionaries we are anxious people; sometimes too anxious! Do we sufficiently take into account the reality of China in which people live? The historic and cultural reality which we referred to above has entered the mentality, the consciousness of the people we preach to in China. We are happy about those who are ready to join the Church and pray with us: "I believe". But the large majority of Chinese does not believe and perhaps never will. We must be more concerned about the prejudices of this majority of Chinese against Christianity and be happy if we succeed in giving them a more objective and truthful testimony about who we are as Christians and what we stand for. Important growth can happen among the 99% non-believing Chinese, not only because many of them become Christians but also if some

of those who have in the past been prejudiced against Christianity by the unfortunate historic events, grow more open to the gospel values. If dialogue and Christian testimony overcomes prejudice and allows Christianity to enter into dialogue then the Church grows because more friends accept it in Chinese society. This improves the quality and efficiency of the Church's presence in society.

In the history of salvation the Lord respects the *principle of time (of duration)*, allowing people to grow to maturity in faith. We must do the same. If we make abstraction of the reality in which people live and of the reality of their human growth we may perhaps offer people an "*idealized type of quick salvation*" which has no roots. God does not work out an idealistic type of salvation. As he saves his people he respects the laws of history and of human freedom. This explains the slowness of salvation ever since the Old Testament, the New Testament and up to our days. In Salvation History God took the risk to enter into human history and he faithfully respects the duration of history. In the life of Jesus, time is left for Jesus to grow. He manifests himself only at the adult age. "Jesus grew in age and wisdom before God and man (Luc II,52). Why this lapse of time between his ministry and Easter and Pentecost? The Apostolic Church expected the *parousia* to come quickly, but it did not. God is not the actor of an idealistic salvation, but of a salvation which is incarnated in history.

Phases of growth in faith

The action of the Church begins there where people did not hear yet about God or Christ or do not even think about Him. They live without faith; a life where Christ does not enter. Still the Church addresses also those people. It also addresses the many others who are open to the message of Christ but who did not join the Church yet; and those who have already accepted Christ as their Lord and who celebrate their faith in Christian communities but who constantly need to re-open themselves to Christ's message. The Church community in mission addresses itself to this whole range of people who are in a very different kind of relationship to God or to the Lord Jesus. We will call these "*stages (or phases, or levels) of growth in faith*". This missionary action of the Church will only be completed at the parousia. At that time the Church Community – the Body of Christ – will become mature, adult, for eternity; only then, not earlier. Before individual believers or communities reach that final level, they pass through various stages of growth towards maturity in faith. Pastoral theologians identify the following stages.

- 1- Pre-evangelization, when people are not (yet) interested in God or in Christ.
- 2- Evangelization when a certain, perhaps still vague interest in the gospel grows.
- 3- Catechumenate: people decided to believe in the Lord Jesus and learn about faith.
- 4- Baptismal stage when people are baptized but still learn to live as Christians.
- 5- Eucharist stage when a Christian community lives and celebrates its faith.
- 6- The Parousia

Every Christian community, just as every Christian individual, is called to grow to the Eucharistic level, which is considered to be the level of maturity. Each community tries to reach it, even though it constantly runs into obstacles. Strictly speaking we can divide Christian communities according to the level of growth they have reached: Catechumenal level, Baptismal level and Eucharistic level. Growth in faith is only complete at the Parousia. But faith grows and at times it regresses. At one time a person lives his faith to the full, other times he is weak and regresses and then lives at another level of growth. In every Christian community all these phases (stages) mentioned above, are potentially and constantly present at the same time. For reasons of clarity, we discuss the various phases as following in time, one after the other. In Part II we will now discuss in more detail the

phase of pre-evangelization, when people show no interest or only a 'neutral interest' for the gospel.

Part II
The phase of pre-evangelization
 A historical opportunity for growth by
 reconciling Christianity with Chinese Society

Once there was confrontation between Church and State. How is it today?

The road opens towards reconciliation of the Church with Chinese Society

Historical events have caused the Chinese society to look rather critically or negatively at Christianity. If the Chinese Church could reconcile with Chinese society and be accepted – respected -- that would mean an important moment of growth. But a large majority of Chinese is not interested in Christian faith. To enter in dialogue with this majority of Chinese citizens is crucial for Christianity if it wishes to become part of the society in which it lives. Is dialogue happening? Let us first describe briefly the positive evolution that took place during the past fifty years from both the sides of the Church and of the government. Then we will evaluate the cooperation of the Chinese Church with the government: what are the successes and what are the failures? Finally we list the possibilities and challenges that lay ahead for the future.

From confrontation to dialogue and apology

During the fifties the Church spoke about communism only with the words of *Divini Redemptoris* (of Pius XI) calling it "systematic violence" and "intrinsically wrong"¹ Pius XII warned the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) in *Ad Apostolorum Principis*, June 20, 1958 not to consecrate bishops without Rome's approval, threatening with excommunication.² It was Pope John Paul II who started the way to dialogue. On Feb.18, 1981 he said: *There is no opposition or incompatibility in being at the same time truly Christian and authentically Chinese. And "(the Church)...encourages her members to be good Christians and exemplary citizens."*³ Pope John Paul II also pleaded for concrete discussions towards a solution for the diplomatic relations between Beijing and the Holy See and said in October 1982 *We hope to overcome all the obstacles and find an appropriate way and adequate structures to resume dialogue and keep it constantly open.*⁴ On Oct. 24, 2001 Pope John Paul II impressed all Chinese when he said "I ask forgiveness and understanding of those who may have felt hurt in some way by such actions on the part of Christians."⁵

¹ Cfr. "Papal documents related to the New China", edited by Elmer Worth, MM, Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY, 10545, USA & Holy Spirit Study Center, Hongkong, pg1.

² cfr ibidem pg 49. Note: there was no formal decree of excommunication, only a reference to Canon Law

³ Cfr Mimeographed text obtained in Manila in 1981.

⁴ Cfr "Papal documents..." pg 161

⁵ Cfr. "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar", Lecture Jeroom Heyndrickx CICM. Prior to this apology of the pope, two unfortunate events happened. One was the ordination of five bishops, ordered by Chinese authorities without nomination by the Holy See; and this happened in the midst of a move to normalize Vatican relations. The second was the canonization by the Holy See of 120 Chinese martyrs, most killed by the Boxers. The ceremony was held on Oct 1, the National Feast of the PRC. These two events broke off all ongoing dialogue towards normalization of diplomatic relations. Since April 2005 there are signs that the door for negotiations is open again.

Religion is no more "opium of the people" and receives a positive role in society in China.

In 1985 Zhao Fushan, then vice-chairman of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, gave his historic speech at the Chinese People's Political Consultation Congress explaining that *it is wrong to say that religion is opium for the people*. Later Premier Li Peng received American evangelist Billy Graham and told him that China needs moral strength if it wants to become a great nation. He spoke about youth criminality in China and indicated that Christianity could play a role in the reform of China. China counted on religions to combat the growing moral decline. After the persecution of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese Catholics suddenly received a positive and creative role in their society. The credibility of Catholics in their atheistic society was growing.

The speech of Jiang Zemin and new Regulations are the new norms of religious freedom

The speech of President Jiang Zemin on Dec.12, 2002 (at the State Council, during the National Working Meeting on Religion) was the most recent step in the efforts of China to come to a more open policy on religion. Decree Nr 426 – Regulations on Religious Affairs -- signed by Premier Wen Jiabao on Nov. 30, 2004 and enacted as of March 1, 2005 is based upon that speech. Experts inside and outside China are still studying the "*Regulations*" and discussing whether after all they show a new positive growth or not. We do not enter that discussion here. The practice of authorities will have to prove that during the coming years. One might say that the *Regulations* represent the present day vision of the PRC on religion.

Over the past fifty years there has been a remarkable evolution from a situation of confrontation between Church and State to the present situation. Now the road opens towards reconciliation and dialogue between the Chinese State and Church. But how does the majority of Chinese citizens look at Christianity?

Dialogue between the Church and atheists can remove mutual prejudices

Atheism has been officially proclaimed in the PRC over the past fifty years. Moreover, all that time the 'negative role of some Christian missionaries' during the 19th century has been constantly rubbed into the memory of the whole Chinese nation. One should not underestimate how deep the prejudices against Christianity are, that were caused by decades of brainwashing. As a result many Chinese are atheists. Some are strongly opposed against any kind of belief in God or have a negative attitude towards Christianity.

But there are signs that positive interest in religion and also in Christianity grows in society. Several government research institutions and also universities have created centers and institutes for study on religion, especially on Christianity. Their interest is academic study, not introduction into the faith. But even this academic interest represents a big progress. They do not study Christian faith from an ideological Marxist point of view in order to destroy it, as used to be the case in the past. They wish to make a positive, yet critical and academic study. Most of the major universities in China have opened such a center: People's University, Beijing University, Qinghua University, Fudan University etc. There are four such institutes on the national level, nine on the provincial level, 23 institutes within existing Chinese universities and two private ones.

These centers are to be considered as positive initiatives offering space for Christianity in today's atheistic, communist PRC society. They represent a new evolution in the New China, which calls for our attention. One must note, however that, while these centers are allowed to exist openly in universities according to Chinese law, direct evangelization is not allowed in these centers nor in any public institution; only inside the compounds of the churches. The academic centers can be seen as an invitation for dialogue.

After this positive evolution between Church and State, and facing the invitation of so many institutions to dialogue, is dialogue and cooperation happening between Christianity and Chinese society? From what happened during the Cultural Revolution, one can understand the reluctance of some Chinese Christians to enter in such a dialogue. Yet, as we stated from the beginning, nobody is excluded from the dialogue of the Church to make known its message. And we do not speak here of dialogue as a way to convince others that atheism is wrong and Christian faith is right. A good dialogue starts by listening. It is possible that in the process of making known the content of our own message, we discover that there are prejudices on our own side against non-believers, atheists or communists. If prejudices or misunderstandings exist on either the side of the Church or the side of the State, they have to be removed. Overcoming unfounded prejudices among people in society is part of evangelization. Religion in society as well as the State must be tolerant. More tolerance towards the Catholic Church in Chinese society would mean growth for the Church as it becomes more accepted and improves the efficiency of its presence. But there can hardly be tolerance between partners who do not know each other well. Dialogue is therefore the only way. It is a must.

Successes and failures in the dialogue between Church, society and government

Christian Churches give an impressive testimony in Chinese society

An impressive testimony for the gospel message and Christian values is offered to society at large by the many initiatives of the Chinese Church in the field of charity and dialogue with society. When Chinese families refuse a newborn baby because it is a girl or it is handicapped they often put it at the door of the Church for they know "the Church takes care of babies which other people reject". And so one can now visit orphanages run by the Church in Biancun or Xianxian (Hebei) as well as in Gansu and many other provinces, by either official or unofficial Church communities. Catholic sisters and lay people care for aids-patients and lepers in Siquan, Gansu, Shaanxi and elsewhere. Dozens of dispensaries and health stations are started by the Church with poor means, just to make up for shortages in society. Religious sisters serve the poor in those dispensaries. The Church organizes structures to support these many initiatives:f.e. Beifang Jinde (Hebei Province) and the Xi'an Center for Development. These initiatives efficiently put the Church in dialogue with the Chinese society and spread the gospel message to the poor, without preaching.

The Church has also created channels where atheists, or scholars of the Institutes for Study on Christianity can find answers to their questions. Beijing Diocese has its center Sapientia which, besides its publications, cooperates in organizing meetings with people from academic circles. Shanghai has Guangqi and its Catholic intellectuals Association. In Hebei there is Faith Press and also Tianjin and even Chifeng (Inner Mongolia) publish their monthlies and even an occasional Catholic Digest with articles selected from other magazines from in- and outside of China. These are channels and associations through which the Church enters in communication with the Chinese society at large. There are dozens of Catholic websites with basic information on Christian faith: as Beijing Beitang, Dioceses of Shanghai, Tianjin, Shijiazhuang, Liaoning, Taiyuan, Yichang etc..The Chinese Church is to be congratulated for the impressive number of initiatives which it runs with the limited local means. It is a missionary Church on the way to making itself accepted in its own society. Still, one cannot say that there is full trust between the Christians, the Chinese society and government.

Full dialogue between civil authorities and the Catholic Chinese Church failed so far because of the government's refusal to recognize the Catholic hierarchy

Government structures for dialogue with religion exist

There is a structure for dialogue on religion with the government through the *Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)*. This is a patriotic united front organization led by the Communist Party of China. It is made up of delegates from all walks of life, including religions. Dialogue between the Church, society and the government can happen through this structure on local and national level. There are 2.800 local CPPCC sections throughout the country. Many Christians, priests and bishops are members and find there a platform to express opinions and suggestions openly. There is also the *State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA)*, which is the government entity taking care of religious matters. S.A.R.A. is also represented in the provinces and on the district and local levels. It is indicated that the Church should join these existing structures to dialogue with the government. These structures seem to suffice.

But cooperation with the government of some, has caused an internal split in the Church

Some Catholics, priests and bishops in the PRC, have, since the fifties and mainly after the Cultural Revolution, opted for dialogue and cooperation with the Chinese government and the Communist Party. We call them "*the official (or 'open') Church community*"⁶. Even though they were deeply disappointed with what happened during the Cultural Revolution, many priests and bishops joined the "official Church community", with the intention to rebuild the destroyed Church community. Their effort was impressive. Today seventy bishops, 1700 priests serving half of the 8 million Chinese Catholics in about 5000 churches and chapels in 110 dioceses of the Catholic Church belong to this group. This shows that their effort was meaningful.

It was meaningful but not successful because their effort has divided the Church. Internal division in a Christian Church means failure. An important group in the Church opted not to cooperate with the government. They refuse, until today, to register as a Church community and as a result the government does not recognize them or their activities. They are "illegal". We call them the "*un-official (or 'underground') Church community*". More Catholics joined them even during the eighties and nineties because they were told that the "*government recognized bishops*" were schismatic and not united with the pope and the Universal Church. This rumor was in fact caused by the government itself since it forces Church leaders to join the CCPA. CCPA professes in its statutes that it wants the Chinese Church to be independent from Rome, which goes straight against Catholic faith⁷.

We do not consider these two communities as two different "Churches" because there is no difference in faith, no disagreement with regard to unity with the pope, although the Universal Church doubted this for a long time. By now more than 80% of all Chinese bishops have been recognized by Rome. Doubts about their unity with Rome have been clarified. The unity with the pope of both the "official" and "un-official" communities has never been demonstrated so openly

⁶ One must clearly distinguish the "official Church community" from the "Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association" (CCPA), because the majority of the Catholics who celebrate their faith in this "official Church community" are not members of the CCPA. A "PATRIOTIC CHURCH" DOES NOT EXIST. Catholics celebrating in the "official Church Community" would feel insulted if they were identified with the CCPA. We are interested here in the question that there is a need for the Church to enter into dialogue and cooperation with the government. This could also happen without CCPA (through other existing structures), or also through CCPA, but after some changes in the statutes that would bring CCPA under the bishops. But we do not enter further into this discussion here.

⁷ The fact that the government actively tries to force priests and bishops to join the CCPA was confirmed again by the official document Nr 26, August 1999. of the Chinese Communist Party.

and formally as after the death of Pope John Paul II. Masses and commemorations were held in the 6000 open churches as well as in all the 'unofficial' communities.

There is discrepancy between the principles explained in the *Regulations* of the government and the practice of local authorities concerning respect for religions

Many Catholics even of the unofficial Church community are willing to cooperate with the government, but not through the CCPA. They say that the government does not show openness for religion as Jiang Zemin proclaimed in his speech. In several areas of China their bishops, priests and lay people are still being detained. Some are picked up unexpectedly for long periods of interrogation and so-called 'study sessions', trying to force them to join the official "CCPA" as recently as March, April 2005⁸. The main issue that divides the Church is not whether or not to cooperate with the government – many would agree on this -- but whether or not this cooperation should happen through the CCPA. The fact that this is imposed on the Church is in contradiction with the spirit of what Jiang Zemin said in his speech of Dec. 12, 2002⁹.

- *In general we may say: in developing relations with our friends from religious circles our principle is: solidarity and cooperation, mutual respect for each others opinion and faith. This will never change.*
- *If their religion is not respected or understood or if we approach them the wrong way, the masses of religious faithful will no more trust us and there will grow a gap between them and the Party.*
- *When dealing with matters of religion we may, by all means, not act too hurriedly and in no way repeat the left methods of the "Cultural Revolution".*

In spite of these failures it is a fact that dialogue and cooperation with government and society are crucial for the Church if it wishes to grow and important for the government if it wishes to live up to the PRC Constitution which allows Freedom of Religious Belief.

Cooperation of the Church with society & government remains a difficult challenge

The Church must officially register and obtain government recognition of its hierarchy

In any country a Church community must officially register with the government and organize its activities according to the prescriptions of the local law. This is also so in the PRC. On the other hand the Church expects that, as part of Religious Freedom, its faith and Church law are respected by the government. For the Chinese Catholic Church this implies that, just as in more than 160 other countries, also the Chinese government recognizes the Church's hierarchy: i.e. that bishops are recognized as shepherds who are given the freedom and authority to guide their flock in faith and at the same time also are recognized as members of the Universal College of Bishops guided by the Pope, united with him through hierarchical communion. Only through an

⁸ On June 7, 2005, Christians of Xuanhua, diocese, worry about their 86year old Bishop Zhao Zhendong (underground) who has been detained since early January 2005. Nobody could visit him, not even to bring him his medicine. There was no news about him, till recently when Christians learned that he is brought to the hospital with unusually high blood pressure. Still no visit is allowed. The only reason for his detention: his refusal to join the CCPA. Note that Bp Zhao has, since long, encouraged his priests to join the official Church community. This proves that underground Christians agree to cooperate with the government through existing channels, but they refuse to join CCPA which insists on "independence from Rome".

⁹ It is sometimes hard to check whether some reports on maltreatment of Christians are authentic. Some reports seem to exaggerate the facts. But there is no doubt that leaders of the 'underground community' are often harassed by authorities.

open and fruitful dialogue can this be agreed upon with the government. It is a matter of agreeing on *what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God*.¹⁰

Normalizing the Sino-Chinese diplomatic relations may not be necessary to achieve that goal. But it would certainly help. One wonders when will both sides trust each other? Whenever this issue is discussed Chinese authorities quote the whole range of misunderstandings between China and Christianity starting far back in history. Pope John Paul II took a historic initiative. He went even as far as apologizing for what happened during the 19th century. Not one of the countries who were the main political and military actors of the Opium War and of the Unequal Treaties or even the 2nd World War has ever done so¹¹. All what Chinese authorities have offered so far from their side is "hope" that the Religious Policy in China will "progress with the times"¹². But as long as the bamboo wall of suspicion against Christianity in China remains, no progress can be made.

What can we contribute on this level? Communication and dialogue are crucial. Initiatives on the academic field between research institutes involving also government institutions can contribute to open the line of dialogue by providing the information which is often lacking in the field of religion and law.¹³ The Verbiest Institute in Leuven has two times invited delegations of the State Administration for Religious Affairs for a dialogue and visit in Leuven. It has also organized one International Symposium on Religion and State in Countries of Asia and Europe. Scholars from Europe and Asia, including China, presented papers which were all published in Chinese as a document providing information on that topic.¹⁴

Ways of cooperation and exchange with official institutions

The dozens of *Institutes for Study of Christianity* that exist in Chinese universities and in the Academies of Social Sciences (on national and local levels) are an invitation for developing dialogue on Christian faith. Catholic China Institutes and individual scholars from China and from abroad could be more active responding to the invitation: f.e.

1- Exchange with academic institutions:

Organizing international Symposia with participation of Chinese scholars, in cooperation with universities and newly created Centers for Study on Christianity:

a- On history of Christian missions in China

¹⁰ This is the crucial part which must be agreed during negotiations to normalize Sino-Vatican diplomatic relations. Without an agreement on this point, normalization would not help the Church in the PRC.

¹¹ Historians study the meaning and importance of a public apology for developing world peace after conflicts or misunderstandings between countries. Apologies allow history to move forward. The Pope apologized to China (and to more countries), for events of the past. Germany has repeatedly and in many ways apologized after World War II. Would Europe have grown united without it? How come Germany and the Vatican were willing and able to apologize? Has this something to do with cultural background? Japan has not apologized. Moreover, there is also another side to the coin. The apology from one side calls for the other side to give a sign that it accepts the apology. Accepting an apology does not mean that past events are removed from the history books; but it means that by-gones are by-gones, that past misunderstandings are not repeated as pretexts for making new demands time and again. China had never responded to the apology of Pope John Paul II. However, on April 3, 2005 (the day after Cardinal Danneels left China after his visit) China expressed condolences for the death of Pope John Paul II and added explicitly that the pope had done great things a.o. *he apologized for what happened in the 19th century*. That was the first public acknowledgment by China of the apology of the pope.

¹² "Yushi Jujin" cfr article of Pan Yue in Shenzhen Daily and also used by Ye Xiaowen in a speech of August 2003.

¹³ The discussion on diplomatic relations is, obviously, left to expert diplomats of both sides. One hopes that they, while searching for an agreement, will succeed in respecting the expectations of both sides. This may take more time than many seem to think.

¹⁴ "Between Emperor and Heaven" (in Chinese), Huaijen Congshu Nr2, Kuangch'I, Taipei.

Many misunderstandings and prejudices grew from history. Academic study of history, avoiding any ideological prejudice, contributes to honest and open dialogue. Initiatives were taken in Leuven, San Francisco, St. Augustin, Rome, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Beijing.

b- On social, ethical or philosophical issues

International conferences on social issues are opportunities to discuss the Social Doctrine of the Church¹⁵ f.ex. in cooperation institutes of People's University, Qinghua University, Wuhan University etc

c- Inter-religious dialogue

The above-mentioned CPPCC offers a frame through which initiatives of cooperation and exchange with Chinese religions can be organized, inside China or/and internationally.

2- Other activities

a- Teaching:

Foreign priests, religious and lay people are teaching in Chinese universities, colleges and secondary schools. Their presence, testimony and social contacts are important contributions in this field.

b- Human development

Caritas and other agencies participate meaningfully with the government and private partners in human development projects.

We have discussed pre-evangelization. In spite of the failures in dialogue so far, we think that chances for success in the future are growing. Let us now go on to discuss evangelization in part III . We will discuss the four following phases together.

Part III
"Go and teach" (Mt.28,18)
 The phases of Evangelization,
 Catechumenate, Baptism & Eucharistic celebration

The Chinese Church is given a historic opportunity to grow in numbers and also by building an updated post-Vatican II Local Chinese Church Community

These phases represent those people who are interested in Christian faith, others who have decided to join the Church, and those who have joined the Church already through baptism. The Chinese Church proclaims its message to all of them. They make the Church grow in numbers. We discuss all four phases here together because they represent the phase of Church-growth in numbers. Today, perhaps more Chinese are interested to join Christianity than ever since foreign missionaries worked in China. This happens at a time when the Chinese Church is challenged to update its way of being Church to the level and norms outlined by Vatican II. This affects not only the very traditional Chinese Catholic Church community but it also influences the way of welcoming new catechumens. The Chinese Catholic Church is given a historic opportunity to educate new Christians in the spirit of Vatican II and bring the Christian community to the same level of Vatican II. The "Adult Catechumenate" recently revived in the Catholic Church offers the Chinese Church the right way to coop with this huge task.

¹⁵ Cfr. The Symposium on Social Issues organized by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in cooperation with German scholars in 2003 or the Exchange Programs on philosophy organized by Leuven University with Beijing University. The "Social Agenda", published by the Holy See (Justice & Peace Commission) with quotations from all social encyclicals of the popes, has been translated into Chinese and can serve as instrument for teaching and for discussions (cfr. Kuang Ch'I Taipei and Verbiest Institute, Taipei)

The level of evangelization

A great number of Chinese people are favorable towards Christianity. They do not say that they "believe in God" or in Christ. They feel that "Christian faith is good". In present-day China they can buy and read a lot of books on religion and on Christian faith. They read the bible, though they often do not understand the meaning well. Many do not know clearly what they are looking for but they are interested in a deeper reflection upon the meaning of life. They have not reached the point where they formally ask for a full introduction to Christian faith, but they are open to more information on it. In spite of the aggressive propaganda against religion and Christianity during past decades these people want to know what Christianity is all about. A person who is in that stage has entered already the perspective of faith. He/she is in his/her personal pilgrimage opening him-/herself to the gospel message. The Church community is directly interested in them. The question is how to contact them. That growing interest in Christianity among the Chinese population is exceptional and historical.

The phases (levels) of the catechumenate and of baptism

At one point in their 'pilgrimage towards faith' those who were searching for meaning in life are touched by the gospel message. Conversion takes place: they accept the Lord Jesus as their savior and are invited to enter into the *adult catechumenate*. From that moment on they are welcomed in the Church and accompanied by the Christian community which plays a key role during the catechumenate (cfr infra). Their decision is then ratified at baptism, which is the formal entrance into the Christian community.

The Eucharistic Community

The end of this growth is the Church community, conscious that it is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church community. It lives the Paschal Event. The community is aware of the presence of the Spirit of the Risen Lord among them; aware that it lives, united in Him and receiving the fullness of His Life as it celebrates the mediations of grace, the sacraments. It celebrates its unity in the Eucharist and practices charity in and outside the community. This is the ideal which we strive to attain, aware that the human condition is a condition of sin. As it celebrates the Eucharist, sacrament of unity and love the community seeks to overcome the obstacles to unity caused by human division and sin. In each Eucharistic celebration the community is aware of its shortcomings with regard to unity and the practice of love and seeks forgiveness. Conversion is a permanent attitude. If a "community that goes to Mass" does not live what it professes, it lives in a state of lie. It needs a serious effort towards a new beginning; a new conversion. How is the Christian community dealing with this historical opportunity for growth? What are the challenges? What are our strengths and our weaknesses?

Strengths and weaknesses of the Church in dealing with this challenge

Hope and strength of the Chinese Church is shown in the way it has rebuilt itself

The Catholic Church in China represents about 8 million¹⁶ Catholics, living in 110 dioceses and celebrating their faith together in about 5000 church buildings. If one puts the figures together of "official" and "non-official" communities there must be about 120 bishops, 3000 priests, 20 seminaries, 1200 major Seminarians preparing for the priesthood, more than 4.000 religious

¹⁶ No official statistics exist. The figures that are published quote between 5 and 15 million Catholics. Here we quote what we consider as minimum numbers of Catholics, priests, sisters etc.

sisters and more than one thousand novices being trained in 60 novitiates. Thousands of catechumens baptized every year: 90.000 in 2003.

To the above statistics must be added the many centers established by the Church: for handicapped, care for aids patients, for Lepers, for the elderly; the many health centers where religious sisters serve the people; the publications of Christian literature to instruct the Christians: Guangqi 300 books, Faith Press 140, Sapientia 22 and other local ones. Everybody has been impressed how smoothly the Chinese Church introduced the liturgical renewal in parishes all over the country. All these are signs of an extraordinary dynamism and of the level of growth and maturity reached by the Chinese Church.

The Adult Catechumenate: a way to build the post-Vatican II Church community.

It is remarkable that the *Adult Catechumenate* has been introduced in several parishes in China. This is the revival of the tradition of the ancient Church to welcome new Christians and to introduce them in the Christian way of celebrating faith and learning to live as a Christian community. In order to authenticate and assure the truth of their conversion, the community of the faithful – not just one catechist -- will accompany them to deepen the conversion. This deepening happens on three levels: first, the level of faith. The full catechesis enlightens their understanding of faith. Secondly, on the level of daily life, Catechumens are encouraged to confirm the change in their life as result of their faith; and thirdly to develop their awareness that as Christian they are sent to share faith with others. They learn about the social concern of the Church community.

Education in the faith does not happen in private classes of catechesis followed by baptism. The whole community, the god-father and/or god-mother, the sponsors and more other ministers take important responsibilities in this process of growth. Besides following catechesis with the preachers of the parish, they join the liturgies preparing themselves gradually to baptism. These are Christians who have gone through a true personal conversion. They have assimilated faith through a serious catechesis and decided to live an evangelical life of brotherly love. All through their lives, the new Christians know that they will be supported by a community which will help them in trying to be a good Christian and will remain for them the source of continued renewal of their faith till the end of their days.

The revival of the traditional Church catechumenate is not widely spread in the Chinese Church. It is also still growing in many other local Churches. But it is undoubtedly a way to build up a lively Chinese Church community, up with its time and open to society.

A big set-back and obstacle to growth is the internal division of the Church. Did the Universal Church fail to encourage reconciliation and so hamper growth?

Historical events have caused the Chinese Church community to be internally divided. While proclaiming unity around the Lord, it is internally divided when it celebrates and so loses its credibility. Restoring internal unity is the most urgent task for the Church if it wishes to grow. If anywhere 'growth' is needed, it is on this level.

Events of the past were a human drama: what happened before, during and after the Cultural Revolution has made thousands of Christians suffer. It caused internal suspicion, loss of trust, deep divisions. Many were even convinced that there was a schism. But during the past twenty

years, the Holy See has been assured that there is no schism. It has recognized and appointed two thirds of the official Chinese bishops (many who had been ordained without appointment by Rome). But wounds of the past are not healed; suspicion about schism lingers on. Pope John Paul II has repeatedly encouraged the Chinese Church to restore its internal unity through reconciliation. Some bishops and priests have taken steps in that line, but it is a painful and slow process. Is the Universal Church facilitating the process of reconciliation? Or are we making it more difficult? Reconciliation is the work of the Spirit in the hearts of the faithful. It cannot be achieved by human command, but the ministry of reconciliation can encourage and foster it. On the other hand if this ministry is neglected the division grows worse. *Communion* of all Christians around the Lord Jesus is expressed and celebrated in the Eucharist. As the community of believers listens and responds to the Word of the Lord, that's when the Spirit of the Lord re-creates and unites his people. But there exactly lies the contradiction, in the Chinese Church. On one side we know that the Church is internally divided. It should therefore pray and celebrate together in order to be reunited. But one Church document – the “8 points” -- forbids Christians to jointly celebrate the Eucharist. The Church is in a vicious circle.

Some priests and bishops tell their Christians that attending Mass in an “*official church*” is mortal sin and many Chinese Catholics believe that until today. As long as these instructions – threatening with mortal sin and hell – are repeated, every effort to promote reconciliation is paralyzed. Why should so many Chinese Catholics continue to live under this threat of “mortal sin”? When will a Church authority speak the liberating word to Chinese Catholics especially to the many Catholics in remote country villages and make it clear to them that there is no question of “mortal sin” if one participates in the Eucharist in an official Church? The “*8 points document*” has been obsolete since long. It continues to hamper the growth towards internal unity of the Chinese Church. It would be a moment of growth if and when higher Church authorities openly encourage all PRC Catholics to celebrate together their unity and officially declare that any other document that has in the past proclaimed the contrary is rescinded. Whether or not this growth will happen depends for a great part on the encouraging words of higher Church authorities.

The call of Pope John Paul II for reconciliation is also addressed to all Chinese Catholics outside of China. Reconciliation among us outside of China will unite our own communities and make us more truly Christian. Moreover, by doing so we also set an example that will invite Christians in China to follow. This would be our most precious contribution to the rebuilding of the Chinese Church. But in fact, sometimes the opposite is happening. Individuals and groups from outside China often confirm Christians inside China in their refusal to reconcile. It shows that also China missionaries abroad need to reconcile on this issue. Sometimes one wonders whether non-Church entities – or even political influences from outside the PRC -- do not take political advantage of this division in the Church to encourage Christians in China to oppose their government.

Why do Rome-appointed bishops not seek more contact among them?

Catholics expect both official and unofficial bishops to promote more initiatives towards unity in the Chinese Church. They are, as shepherds, the first responsible for remaking unity. More than 80% of all Chinese bishops are appointed by the Pope and in unity with the Universal Church. One then wonders how come that the bishops of both communities do not have more contact among them? If internal unity is so crucial for the Church why then should bishops passively wait for an initiative from higher Church authorities to achieve it? One can imagine that official bishops also had reasons why they did not make this contact. Still, one would rather expect that all bishops who know about each other that they are in full unity with the Universal Church and

the Pope should wish to express this unity among them and share this concern with their priests and Catholics.

Future tasks for the Chinese Catholic Church

To build a post-Vatican II, truly Local Chinese Church

The Chinese Catholic Church has surprised the Universal Church by the smooth way with which it has introduced liturgical renewal of Vatican II. More impressive even were the establishing of 12 major seminaries, several minor seminaries, so many novitiates for religious etc. The Chinese Church has always been and still is a rather traditional Church community. To welcome catechumens and to integrate more in Chinese society it needs the aggiornamento of Vatican II, which it has already courageously begun. This in itself is a challenge to grow. It implies that its teaching becomes more bible-centered, that the awareness of the Church as People of God is developed, that a plurality of ministries is allowed to grow allowing religious and lay ministers to take more responsibility; that the power of the clergy is deemphasized and that ministers learn to guide the community together in a spirituality of service. While devotions are meaningful and especially the devotion to the Blessed Virgin is important, the Church must avoid being called the "Church of Mary", instead of the "Church of God". Moreover, it must develop its Chinese face by efforts towards inculturation. By dialogue with civil authorities, it must obtain recognition for its hierarchy. Only then can it openly communicate with the Universal Church and bishops will then be able to fulfill their function as shepherds for the Universal Church. Indeed a very important challenge for decades to come.

The formation of a new generation of ministers: priests, religious, lay

The first priority of the Church is not the construction of church buildings but the formation of a new generation of Church ministers who will confront the challenges of the Chinese Church in this new era. The formation of such a new generation of priests, religious and lay ministers is by far more difficult and demanding than the construction of 4.000 new church buildings. The task of the ministers in the Chinese Church of today will be a very demanding one. When one lists the talents and qualities which they, ideally, should have to properly respond to the demands of this time in the Chinese society, their task almost looks like a super-human one. The coming generation of young Church leaders grew up after the Cultural Revolution in much easier circumstances than the times in which their predecessors grew up. One may wonder whether they are aware of their enormous task and responsibility and whether they have been sufficiently prepared to face the following challenges:

1. To evangelize and preach spirituality in a materialistic society of consumerism and resist to be contaminated by it.
2. Take the first step towards reconciliation in a divided Christian community and make it truly Christian.
3. Respect people in their traditional ways of prayer and yet motivate them to seek inspiration in the Bible. Teach them to celebrate together their unity in the Lord.
4. Guide Christians to dialogue with civil authorities. Fight corruption. Show solidarity with the needy in society and alleviate their needs.
5. Defend the rights of his Church -- f.e. to receive back from the government the Church properties -- and yet keep good relations with civil authorities.
6. Develop a community spirit of all Catholics and ministers in each local Chinese Church (diocese) gathered around their bishop, in full awareness of their unity, through him, with the Holy Father and with the Universal Church.

How can foreign China-missionaries contribute to growth in the Chinese Church?

Evangelization is the responsibility of the local Church. Missionaries go only where they are invited. In China they are only invited for specific, temporary tasks. Several areas have been pointed out above, where foreign China missionaries can contribute, if and when invited. One could describe the "Missionary spirituality of the foreign China missionary" as: a spirituality of service to the local Church. He is a friend afar, faithful and alert to the needs of the Chinese Church. He accepts the limitations of what he, in the present circumstances, can contribute to the Chinese local Church. He remains open to respond to the calls for help that come from the Chinese Church. He applies himself to the study of the Chinese language and culture so as to serve the Church better. He moves carefully whenever he is in China. When meeting with adversity, never gives up.

Conclusion

Christianity in China will grow in numbers and also to a new level of maturity if it is able to find back its internal unity, if it rebuilds and updates its Church community in the spirit of Vatican II, if it integrates in Chinese society and if the government allows it to express its communion with the Universal Church. The many "ifs", explained in this paper, show how complex the situation is. We think, however, that over the past twenty years the situation has been developing slowly but positively. That's why we put the title of this lecture in the affirmative: *Christianity in China is growing to a new level of maturity.*

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