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*Experiencing Jesus Christ Through Chinese Eyes
Panel Presentation*

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF CHINESE CLERGY

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I. The number of Chinese clergy:

The latest report about the current Chinese Church is from AsiaNews, which reported the numbers of Chinese bishops, priests, and religious sisters. These data were collected before 2004. According to the AsiaNews, there were totally (including both the Open Church and Underground Church) 12 million Catholics, 120 bishops, 2,740 priests, 1,380 seminarians, and 5,200 religious sisters. The AsiaNews provided no more information regarding their background and current situation. In my impression, during the past 4 years, there is not much change in these numbers, but the ages of the bishops have been changed significantly. According to a report of the Holy Spirit Study Center in Hong Kong, there were 10 bishops died in 2006 alone. In addition, I heard and from my friends in China that some other bishops died in 2005, 2007, and in 2008. However, I could not find the exact number. I believe that during the past 4 years, there were about 10 new bishops from the Open Church, and there are also some new bishops from Underground Church.

II. Where the most of the clergies come from?

To my knowledge, most of the clergies are come from central and western China, such as Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Inner Mongolia, and Sichuan; there are very few clergies were from the Eastern area, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu. Interestingly enough, the Eastern area can be called the "first world" of China, because the economy in these areas is very much developed, whereas the central and western area can be called the "second and third world," because the economy in these areas is much less developed. In addition, most of the vocations are from the rural area, and very few vocations are from big cities. Unlike in the US, in China, the majority poor people live in rural area.

III. The education of the priests and religious sisters:

To my knowledge, there was very few seminarians received college education before they entered seminary. Many received high school education, and most seminarians received only middle school education. When I was in Sheshan Seminary from 1987 to 1994, only 5 seminarians (out of 130 seminarians) received college education before they entered seminary. There were about a dozen seminarians who graduated from high school before they entered seminary. Most of the seminarians were only graduated from middle school before they entered seminary, and I was one of them. I found this situation had not much change in 2004, when I taught theology in Jinan seminary and the National seminary in Beijing.

Most of the seminaries do not have a systematic formation plan, nor do they have stable theological teachers. Before 1990s, everything was taught by elderly priests, and most of them were stayed in prison for 20 or 30 years. Since the early of 1990s, the Chinese government permitted the Chinese seminaries to invite teachers from abroad. However, they were only allowed to stay in China for several weeks to several months. As a result, they could not make any systematic teaching plan, but only taught whatever they could with the limited time. Since 2000, there were more and more Chinese priests who completed their study in abroad and taught in the seminaries, like myself.

IV. Their Challenges:

The Chinese clergy face many challenges, including the challenges from the local government, non-Catholics, parishioners, and the conflict relationships with religious sisters, other priests and/or bishops. Given the challenges, most priests did not received adequate training about how to deal with these challenges and how to cope with the pressures in the seminaries. Furthermore, people have many expectations on priests, such as fight back the properties which were confiscated by the local government many years ago, build churches, to deliver good homilies, and to be ready whenever they have any pastoral needs. As a result, many priests had a lot of pressures, and they don't have enough support and helps.

Since 2001, two seminaries and several women religious communities asked me to be their spiritual director. Talking with them, I heard a lot of confusions, sadness, anger, and even abnormal behaviors. In the beginning, I thought that it was because they were not pious enough, or they did not pray hard enough. Thus, I asked them to prayer harder and to trust in God more. However, several years later, their difficulties were only getting bigger. That made me to ask many questions about how to help them. I thought, probably the traditional Catholic spiritual exercise would not be able to help them. In 2004, when I was asked to work in the National Seminary as a full time faculty member, I requested to back to the US to study more. I wanted to study pastoral counseling, because I wanted to find a way to help them from a different perspective. I believed that there are problems were not religious or spiritual problems, instead these were psychological problems.

V. Their Needs:

This summer, I went back to China and stayed at the National Seminary for 2 weeks. While I was there, I worked with some seminarians, priests, and some religious sisters. These experiences confirmed my questions in 2004. Indeed, they need not only spiritual helps, but also psychological helps. I am glad I study pastoral counseling, and I know I could provide them psychological helps.