

Reflections of the European Catholic China Colloquium September 1-4, 2003

Collaboration with the Chinese Churches towards Formation of Church Ministers in an Age of Globalization

The **European Catholic China Colloquium** met at Louvain in Belgium in the first days of September 2003. We were a community of friends from 18 local Churches committed to mission as exchange and cooperation among our local Churches and seeking to confirm each other in faith. We reflected upon the theme "Collaboration with the Chinese Churches towards formation of church ministers in an age of globalization." During these days we were dedicated to prayer and worship in community, to deepen our unity in the one mission of testifying to God's presence in China; to engage in dialogue to share our concerns for the growth and development for the Chinese Catholic Church, and to deepen trust among us as prelude to more concrete ways of collaboration and cooperation, broadening our lines of communication and expanding our sharing of resources.

Unity and Reconciliation

The central issue addressed was the quest for unity and reconciliation inspired by the great prayer of Jesus "that all may be one" (Jn 17:20-23). We were gifted by having received a copy of a letter of our brother in the faith Bishop Joseph Han Zhihai of Lanzhou Diocese in Gansu Province addressed to his brother bishops in the Church in China. The theme of his letter was "*Time has come to heed the call of Pope John Paul II to remake unity in the Chinese Church.*" He appeals to them to "*free the Chinese Catholics from this ambiguous situation of division,*" noting "*a new situation is emerging for the Church in China, which calls on us to make new initiatives.*" He recalls the off-repeated wish of the Pope to be reconciled in a common celebration of the Eucharist as the source of their unity. We join and affirm the Bishop in his hope and expectation that this unity may be achieved under the guidance of the Spirit.

In our discussion we were aware of the fact that this quest for unity and reconciliation is common to the Universal Church. We were blessed at this colloquium by the presence of a very representative group of younger Chinese clergy, religious and laity from the Church in China. This helps us to be conscious of the deep pain and suffering which afflicts communities of faith in China, which only time and God's grace can heal. We recognize that reconciliation is a human process in which all concerned must open their hearts in forgiveness and love; and that it can only be achieved by those grounded in a deep christological spirituality which manifests itself in sharing the Eucharist.

This quest for unity extends beyond the Church to society at large. Particularly in Asia it calls us to a **commitment to inter-religious dialogue** with fellow pilgrims seeking the truth and valuing deeply the cultural richness and profound religious ethos of the Chinese people and their sensitivity to harmony and peace in all things.

Formation of ministers in an age of globalization

We affirm that all baptized Christians are constantly called to reform and renewal in their lives. For the clergy we recognize that human and spiritual development requires equally important attention with theological education. In the formation and education of priests fidelity to the guidance of the bishops of China in these matters is essential. Considering **seminary education** two points were stressed: the necessity to include in the seminary curriculum a respect and appreciation for the role of women in the Church; and the necessity of training in pastoral ministry to families and the capacity to offer pastoral guidance to couples in the development of a deeper spirituality of marriage.

In respect of financial assistance for the education of seminarians, priests and sisters, priority should be given to education at home. For those coming abroad careful policies and guidelines should be developed in dialogue with the sending bishops.

Greater emphasis should be given to promoting the theological, spiritual and **pastoral formation of religious women and laity** in the Church in China; and to heightening the appreciation among the bishops and clergy in China about the importance of this formation.

In concert with religious and spiritual formation, attention should also be given to raising the general academic educational level of all church ministers, with the goal of equipping them to engage in dialogue and collaboration with their peers in secular society.

Catechesis and liturgy are important opportunities to foster the ongoing formation for the laity. In catechesis we deepen our knowledge of our faith which we celebrate at liturgy and live out in our daily lives. Collaboration in development and training in catechesis and liturgy should be fostered among all the Chinese communities, especially in the sharing of material resources.

Prophetic role of the Church in China

We recognize that in its desire to become more prophetic, the Chinese Church seeks to be faithful to the truth, and to act in justice and respect for others. It is challenged to enable the people to find life meaning and purpose, faced today with a widely acknowledged "spiritual vacuum" in their society, characterized by pervasive secularization, rampant materialism and the injustices flowing from the growing wealth-gap.

The **social ministries of the Church** are among the most concrete expressions of a prophetic Church. In doing social ministry, we should emphasize the importance of broad collaboration with all segments of society, avoiding duplication or initiating parallel services. The professional training and preparation of those in social ministry is essential. The engagement of the Church in China in social ministry is an area which lends itself to many ways of collaboration among us as Sisters Churches.

Research in service of local Chinese Churches

Undergirding all our efforts to serve with the Church in China in mission is a necessity to ground our activities and programs in solid research, particularly the need to continue and expand research on the history of the Church in China and to develop relationships with scholars of religion in China, particularly that Christianity might be better understood and accepted by Chinese intellectuals and government officials. In the area of theological research and study, a priority should be given to research on the pastoral formation of women and laity.

Conclusion:

In sharing these reflections we readily acknowledge our weaknesses and failure to adequately live up to the ideals they call for. We trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and take courage and strength from our unity in faith that together we will go forward to an ever more effective proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, convinced we will find our reconciliation and unity in the Love of God, who is Father and Mother to us all.