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Faith Journey of the Church in China After Fithty Years of Vatican II

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Abstract

This article is a theological reflection on the faith journey of the Church in China after 50 years of Vatican II. By looking at the past and present reality of the Church, sharing our suffering and joy with the world, giving inculturated images of Jesus for Chinese Christians, we thank God for working marvelous things in the Church. This article also proposes some theological and pastoral suggestions for evangelization in the future in order to continue the mission of Jesus with new situations and challenges.

Introduction

With dynamic developments of globalization, interdependent economic relationships, Internet, high-technology, various means of communication such as email, Facebook, Skype, QQ, the convenient and fast travel vehicles, the breaking of geographical boundaries, the movements towards universal unity, the construction of the "global village", the correspondent changes of worldviews, especially the reality of cultural and religious pluralism co-existing in the world today, China has had great changes in social-cultural, religious, economic and political fields. With these transformations, one might wonder how Christianity has responded. It has been fifty years since the Second Vatican Council, when the Catholic Church called for change. At this historical moment, it is a good opportunity to reflect theologically on what God has done for the Church in China.

Indeed, Vatican II is the gift of the Holy Spirit for the Universal church, indigenous churches and the world. It opened a big window for the Catholic Church which could see "Seeds of Word" in other religious and cultural traditions and better understand God's plan of salvation for all human beings. Vatican II seems like a "gas station" by which provided the global churches with fresh 'oil' or 'energy,' and through which the-

people of God were recharged to walk together towards the truth and love. At this moment of amazing Grace, the church in China looks back the past and present faith journey of the fifty years after Vatican II; we can express our experience with a word "Exodus." We have experienced the way of cross, wild desert, tests, joy, hope and peace through the incarnation of the Word, the death and Resurrection of Jesus on our pilgrimage of faith journey.

The purposes of this paper are to praise God for God has done marvelous things for the Church in China, and to offer theological suggestions for the Church in China to move forward by examining our past and present suffering and joy with sisters and brothers in Christ and the world.

This paper will be divided into three parts: Part I gives a brief description of the past and present situations of the Church in China. Part II describes inculturated images of Jesus for Chinese Christians. Part three forwards our hope and vision for the near future in order to help us to walk together with all peoples towards the truth and love—*Caritas in Veritate*.

Part I: The Past and Present Situations of the Church in China

When Vatican II held in 1962-1965, the Church in China was facing religious persecution.

1. The Time of Persecution

During 1949-1976, religious beliefs were considered as superstition. Many religious people were arrested and put into prisons. Temples, churches, seminaries, and religious congregations were destroyed or being used as warehouse. All religious activities were stopped. Many priests, sisters and laities died in prisons in order to witness to their faith. My mother's uncle was a Catholic priest, who died in the prison during the time of persecution.

Here, I would like to share a true my family story. I was born into a traditional Catholic family. My parents were devout Catholics, medical eye-doctors, and worked in the Hospital in China. They set good examples for us to love God and people. They treated patients kindheartedly and operated carefully. My parents healed many blind people. They were happy when blind people recovered their sight and could see their loved family members, their friends, the beautiful creatures.

Unfortunately, a religious persecution began in 1949 when the communists took power in China. Many missionaries were forced to leave China for returning to their own countries. Then different movements continued to persecute religious believers. During the time of persecu-

tion, my parents were forced to stop working in the hospital to go to the countryside because they were Catholics. My father was separated from our family and sent to a labor camp for several years. My lovely mother took care of us. We suffered at this time of difficulty. The government did not offer our family enough food for our daily life because they saw Catholics as enemies. We had to collect wild vegetables in the mountains for our food.

Indeed, it was like manna from heaven feeding our family. However, it was in that difficult time that my lovely mother taught us how to pray Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory to be, Rosary, Stations of the Cross, and etc. She told stories of "Abraham's call and migration," Jesus' passion and His resurrection, "Five Loaves and Two Fish," "Jesus Calms the Storm," "Healing of the Blind Man," "The Miracle at the Wedding at Cana," "The Raising of Lazarus", etc. She encouraged us not to be afraid.

With the time passing away, my father returned to our home. My parents continued to teach us the way of Jesus, especially the way of the Cross. They told us that Jesus is our Savior, our protector, and our helper. Fortunately, my parents cultivated the seeds of the faith in my heart while I was little.

With time passing away, after finishing my primary and middle school, I was not allowed to go to a high school for my further study because I am Catholic. As a result, I suffered from heart problems, which made me have a near death experience. However, my parents told me that "Jesus is our great Master, our Teacher, our director, you can learn from Jesus in our house school." Definitely, I love Jesus more and more and learned His teachings in my house church and home school. It was the house church where I felt a calling from Jesus. Consequently, through the care and love of my parents and my sister and my brother, God granted me recovery of my health. Then, I could go to climb the mountain with my sisters and sang songs to God. One miracle happened, a lady received baptism after listening to the story of Jesus which I retold to her. Truly, my parents took up their cross with faith, joy, and love. My parents were good models for us, encouraging us to follow Jesus in any difficult situation. Obviously, the images of Jesus as Savior, protector, helper, suffering servant, physician, or healer, teacher, master, director, and life-giver function in my life. Likewise, many families have similar story in the period of persecution.

2. The Present Reality of Evangelization

The Chinese government has adapted the new policy of economic reform and opening to outside the world since 1978. Meanwhile, religious freedom was improving for the better. Different religious temples, Islamic mosques and churches have been reopened little by little. Religious con-

gregations and seminaries have been reopened. This openness has been continued to the present day. Let's take a closer look at the present situations of the Catholic Church in China:

Catholicism

According to statistics at the end of December, 2011 from the Holy Spirit Center of Hong Kong, there are 1,200 million Catholics, 6000 Cathedrals and chapels, 138 Dioceses, 107 Bishops, 3200 priests, 35 Seminaries, 1560 seminarians, 5000 religious sisters, and 60 religious Congregations [1].

Definitely, the Church has made great progress in spirituality, liturgy, evangelization, theology studies, and service of charity, publishing, etc.. I believe that these are fruits of evangelization in the Holy Spirit and of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. I would like to explore this a little further based on five concrete models of evangelization in the church in China, namely Sacraments, preacher of laity, charitable work, publishing, and incuturation.[2]

Sacraments

Christ is the Light of nations. Jesus commanded his disciples to *Go into the whole world and proclaim gospel to every creature*,[3] to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race (*Lumen Gentium* 1). The Church procures the glory of God and the salvation of all, takes zealous care to foster the mission (LG 16).

Preaching of laity

The document of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) addressed the laity, who has proper and indispensable roles in the mission of the Church. Our own times require of the laity no less zeal: in fact, modern conditions demand that their apostolate be broadened and intensified (AA 1). For example, there are many laity groups for preaching in each Cathedral or parish, they are volunteers to come to join in groups of gospel preaching, to receive people including the faithful, non-Christians, and non-believers to welcome and guide them to know the church and

[1] TICOZZI Sergio, ‹‹ChinaChurch and News Update 2011 Compiled››, in Tripot Vol. XXX II, No. 164 (Spring 2012). Also on line: *http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk* (1 May, 2012).

[2] ZHAO Jianmin, Encvountering Between Christian Faith and Chinese Modern Cultures, Religious and Cultural Press, Beijing 2010, 430-445.

[3] Cf. Mk 15, 16.

Jesus. Indeed. The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself (AA 3).

Charitable works

The charitable work is the essential mission of the Church for serving her peoples. *Just so, the Son of God did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many* (Mt 20, 28). The Church in China haszealouslydeveloped various charitable works to meet the needs of those who are marginalized, the poor and the weak groups, etc. According to incomplete statistics of the Faith Press of HeBei, in China, by October 15, 2005, the Catholic Church has opened a number of charitable organizations, for example: Nursing home 55, Clinics and Hospitals 172, Kindergartens 25, Homes for handicapped children 11. At the same time, there are more than 50 religious sisters working in more than 30 leprosy hospitals in the whole country.[4] Indeed, the faithful in the church in China witness their faith and love through their charitable work in their daily life. They respond to the call of *Guadium et Spes*, "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts" (GS 1).

Publishing

In the post-modern age, the Church not only has published a great number of religious, spiritual books, but also utilizes high science and technology, multi-media such as Internet, DVD, CD, QQ, WeiBo, etc. for preaching the gospel and communicating with the faithful and non-Christians as well as non-believers. For example, there are three famous Press in the Catholic Church in China: Guangqi Press in Shanghai, Faith Press of Hebei, and Sapientia House Press in Beijing. They have made great contributions on evangelization by publishing religious books and articles. For example, Beijing Diocese has published DVD entitled *The Life of Jesus*. The Sapientia House Press published *Appreciation for Bible and Christian Arts*, DVD, in 2000. In addition, most of dioceses have their own newspapers.

Inculturation

China has a long ancient history of traditional religions and cultures with 56 different ethical groups. Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism,

[4] Ibid., Zhao Jianmin, 430.

Islam and Protestants co-exist currently. Hence, the church in China has been aware of the importance of elements of other traditional and modern cultures in evangelization today. Chinese Christians have used their language, their arts, sacred music, songs, symbols express their faith in the liturgy. Evangelization through culture means that we discover of the positive values of the gospel and its contribution to the local cultures. The value of the gospel has power to transform the negative elements of cultures into new being in the process of dialogue. Therefore, the outcome of dialogue between local culture and the gospel is inculturation. This fruit of dialogue is guided and produced by the Holy Spirit. For purpose of evangelization through religious and cultural exchanges, Beijing Institute for the Study for Christianity and Culture (BISCC) was established in 2002. BISCC is striving to make a specific contribution to dialogue and communication between Catholic Christianity and Chinese Culture and so contribute to a more humane world and the Glory of God.

In addition, there are different kinds of groups and programs in many perishes. For example, Bible sharing group, Sunday school for children, Rosary prayer group, Group of caring dying people, youth service and preaching group, catechetical programs, wedding service, choirs in Chinese and English, etc. In a brief, I have seen the rich fruits of evangelization in the church in China after 50 years of Vatican II.

Part II: Inculturated Images of Jesus for Chinese Christians

There are images of Jesus including both the traditional images of Jesus and new emerging images for Chinese Christians.

2.1 Jesus as a Suffering Servant

Chinese Christians feel most comfortable with the image of Jesus as a suffering servant. Many of them define Jesus as the prophetic Messiah whose role is that of the suffering servant, and the one who *offers himself as ransom for man*. In Gethsemane, Jesus said to his disciples "My soul is sorrowful even to death, remain here and keep watch." (Mk 14,34). They realize that through Messiahship, Jesus creates a new humanity. Jesus is the Messiah through his suffering in service to others, not by his domination over others.

For Chinese Christians, the images of Jesus as the suffering servant strongly encouraged them to face the times of persecution. This image encourages us to seek the meaning of suffering in our own experience. Jesus suffered for us. Likewise, we suffer for the faith, the truth, families, the society, and other communities. Jesus' suffered for love of all, which gives us strength to be concerned for the pain in our community and the world.

2.2 Jesus as the Universal Savior, Protector, and Helper

Many Chinese Christians speak about Jesus Christ as their universal savior or protector.

God's Universal plan of salvation appears in St Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Eph 1,3-23). The blessing describes God's plan of universal salvation in the broad sense. According to his purpose which he set forth in Christ is a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on the earth" (Eph 1,9-10).[5] Then, God's salvation is fulfilled through Jesus' death and resurrection and this same power places the exalted Christ "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph 1,20-21). The cosmic level of lordship refers to the relationship of the Church to the world. This cosmic Christology to the church is a particular contribution of Ephesians.[6] Chinese Christians believe that Jesus is the Universal savior and God's plan of salvation is for all human beings. We have seen the "seeds of Word" in other religious traditions. Therefore, as Christians, we must open our hearts to other religious traditions and trust that the power of Holy Spirit can transform us into "new beings" in the process of dialogue.

2.3 Jesus as the Poor

ManyChinese Christians have experienced poverty. Jesus said to his disciples, *Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head* (Mt 8, 20). In China, many Christians live in the villages, and they do not have an opportunity to be educated because they cannot afford the tuition. Some of them do not have shelter, some lack needs in their daily life. They see the face of Jesus in the poor. The image of Jesus as the poor strengthens them to overcome their challenges in daily life; and they are concerned for other poor in the society and the world. As Chinese Christians, we must follow the model of Jesus for being with the poor help us experience the presence and love of Jesus for the poor. Jesus as the poor strengthens Chinese Christians' 'option to be poor' by becoming true "followers of Jesus."[7]

2.4 Jesus as Compassion

The Chinese Christians have experienced Jesus Christ's compassion. According to the Gospel of Mark, the story of "Feeding the Five Thousand" tells us that "He saw the crowd; and he had compassion for

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[5] SENIOR Donald and STUHLMUELLER Carroll, The Biblical Foundations for Mission, Orbis Books, NY 1983, 199.

[6] Ibid., 201.

[7] PIERIS Aloysius, An Asian Theology of Liberation, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988, 15.

them because they were like sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things" (Mk 6,3). Mark stresses that Jesus is the compassionate God who meets the spiritual and physical needs of people around him. In reality, there are many people seeking the true meaning of life. Since the 1980s, many people have become richer in material possessions, but they feel empty in their spiritual lives, they are seeking the way and truth of life. So it is an opportunity for Chinese Christians to meet their needs to proclaim the good news to them. On the other hand, in the area of poor mountain villages, many people lack daily food and clean water. Chinese Christians must imitate Jesus and try to find concrete ways to help them.

For example, when the terrible earthquake happened in Sichuan, China May 12, 2008, the Catholic Church not only offered prayers for the victims, but also donated materials to people there. In facts, the Catholic Church organized different religious groups to go to Si Chun to be spiritual companions and bring medical needs for victims. Moreover, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10, 29-37) is the significant story of practical compassion. Another message comes from the gospel of Jesus compassion addressed both the spiritual roots and social consequences of peoples' problems. He brought hope, forgiveness, inner release, and healing. He fed the hungry. Compassion is concern for peoples' spiritual and social problems. We are challenged by Jesus to be compassionate and merciful, as he was. Indeed, we believe that we are called to follow Jesus to be compassionate with those who are in need.

2.5 Jesus as Healer or Physician

Chinese Christians believe that Jesus is Healer and Physician through their experience of being healed by the power of his love. Matthew and Luke both report Jesus as saying: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12,28, Lk 11,20). The types of healing of Jesus in the four gospels are as follows: fever, leprosy, paralysis, withered hand, bent back, hemorrhage, deafness and dumbness, blindness, and exorcisms. For example, after a woman touched the hem of his garment in order to be healed, Jesus knew that power had gone out of him (Mark 5:30). When Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors they said to his disciples, "why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus heard this and said to them "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk 2,16-17). Indeed, the power of healing of Jesus embodies in both spiritual and physical levels. The Chinese Christians have been wounded and hurt in their hearts and their bodies during the time of persecution in the Chinese context, even today some unhappy things have happened within the Christian churches and outside the churches, the Christians

have been hurt again. Therefore, they need Jesus as a great physician to heal their wounds. In turn, the Chinese Christian should follow Jesus to be a healer for others.

2.6 Jesus as a Liberator

Jesus is a Liberator for the Chinese Christian today. This new emerging image of Jesus unfolds in two ways: a) proclaiming the good news of kingdom of God, b) breaking prejudice and injustice boundaries and giving salvation to others.

a) For proclaiming the good news of kingdom of God

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus proclaims the good news to the poor and the oppressed. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has appointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to give the blind new sight, and to set free all who are oppressed* (Lk 4,18-19). Jesus as a Liberator means that Jesus challenged the unjust powers of his day, healing the sick and broken-hearted, and forming community with the marginalized. There is injustice, corruption, abuse of power, oppression, religious persecution in the Chinese context. Therefore, the Chinese Christians see Jesus as a liberator so as to set themselves free from the oppressed and the blind, and help others to be free from ill-treatment and dehumanization.

Moreover, through Chinese women Christians' experience, Jesus frees them from the patriarchal family system in the Church and the society to live out the spirit of the Gospels, to live in wholeness, humanity, and dignity which God grants all at the beginning of creation. For Chinese women Christians, Jesus as a Liberator set them free from any oppression, abuse, and ill-treatment. In turn, Chinese women Christians should set others free from ill-treatment to be whole as daughters of God.

b) For breaking prejudice and injustice boundaries and for giving the good news to others.

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a significant model of Jesus as a liberator. *Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink*." The woman knows that a Jewish man should not talk with a Samaritan woman. However, according to O'Day's interpretation, Jesus will not be limited by such conventions and restraints. This story demonstrates that the grace of God is available to all. Jesus and his ministry will not be bound by social conventions.[8]

At the end of the story, she believes that Jesus is the Messiah. She returned to her town for testimony of seeing Jesus the Messiah. And she

[8] CARL A. NEWSOM - SHARO H. RINGE, (eds), *The Women's Bible Commentary,* Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 1992, 295.

also invites the people to see Jesus the Messiah. Many of Samarian villages believe in Jesus and go to meet Jesus for themselves. John calls for us to witness to Jesus—to see Jesus and tell others about that experience which is one of the primary tasks of discipleship. Now the Samarian woman witnesses to Jesus, and through her words many came to faith. To do testimony is the appropriate pattern of discipleship and faith. To tell others your own experience of Jesus is to witness to faith. The Samarian woman is such a witness and disciple like John the Baptist, Andrew, and Philip.[9]

Consequently, we have discussed inculturated images of Jesus for the Chinese Christians. These images of Jesus continue to function and transform their life of Christian discipleship into new witness of faith, hope and love in the present Chinese context, which was called for 50 years ago at the Vatican II Council.

Part III: The Church in China in the Future

In the light of teachings of Vatican II and inculturated images of Jesus I mentioned in part II, and based on multi religious and multi cultural context in China, I would like to propose the following considerations for evangelization in the Christian Church in China:

Word of God, contemplation, the Holy Spirit, dialogue of Humanity, reconciliation and compassion, collaboration, ecumenical dialogue, interreligious dialogue, inculturation, the voice of women, model of Virgin Mary, the Voice of laity, publishing, multi-media communication, the Group of Social justice and Peace, formation, charitable service, witness...

Conclusion

In sum, I am inspired to take the opportunity of 50 years after the Vatican II to do theological reflection on the faith journey of the church in china, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The church being the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5,13-15), is more urgently call upon to save and renew every creature, that all things may be restored in Christ and all human beings may constitute one family in God and one people of God (*Ad Gentes*, 1). The pilgrimage Church is missionary by her nature.

Especially ecumenical dialogue is a challenge and a call to conversion for the whole Church and for unity. Communion needs to be restored among those who in faith have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 30). Also, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church's

[9] Ibid., 296.

evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission *Ad Gentes* (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 31).

Evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. Through culture the human person comes face to face with the Gospel. Culture shapes persons, and as persons and societies change, culture too changes with them. By encountering the different cultures, the Church transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within. Thus, inculturation is a special urgency in current multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situations of China, and we should remember that the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of the inculturation of the Christian faith in China.

Confidently, we hope that the Church will continue to be open to the World, to encounter new situations and challenges with peace, to continue the mission of Jesus, to witness to the faith, hope and love, and to tell God's plan of salvation for human beings through the death and risen Jesus by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit. "Go to the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature (Mk 16,15). "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28,20).

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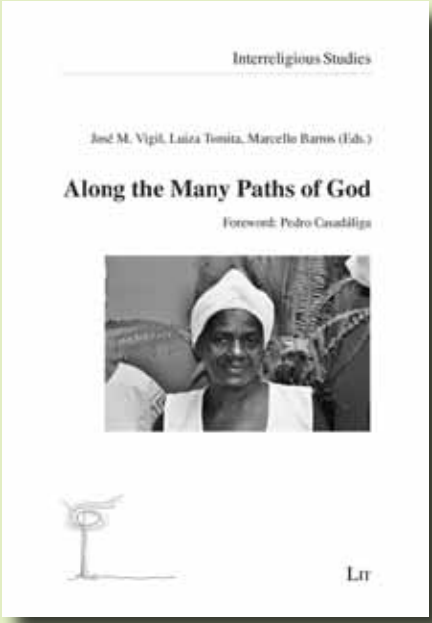
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Along the Many Paths

J.M.VIGIL, Luiza TOMITA, Marcelo BARROS (eds.)
Foreword: Pedro CASALDÁLIGA
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Published by the Chair of World Christianity at Radboud University Nijmegen



Latin American theology is associated with liberation, basic Christian communities, primacy of the praxis and option for the poor. The present volume shows that Latin American theologians added new themes to the previous ones: religious pluralism, inter-religious dialogue and macroecumenism. It is the fruti of a programme of the Theological Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in Latin American, to work out a liberation theology of religions.

This volume summarizes the three first ones of the series of five volumes.

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