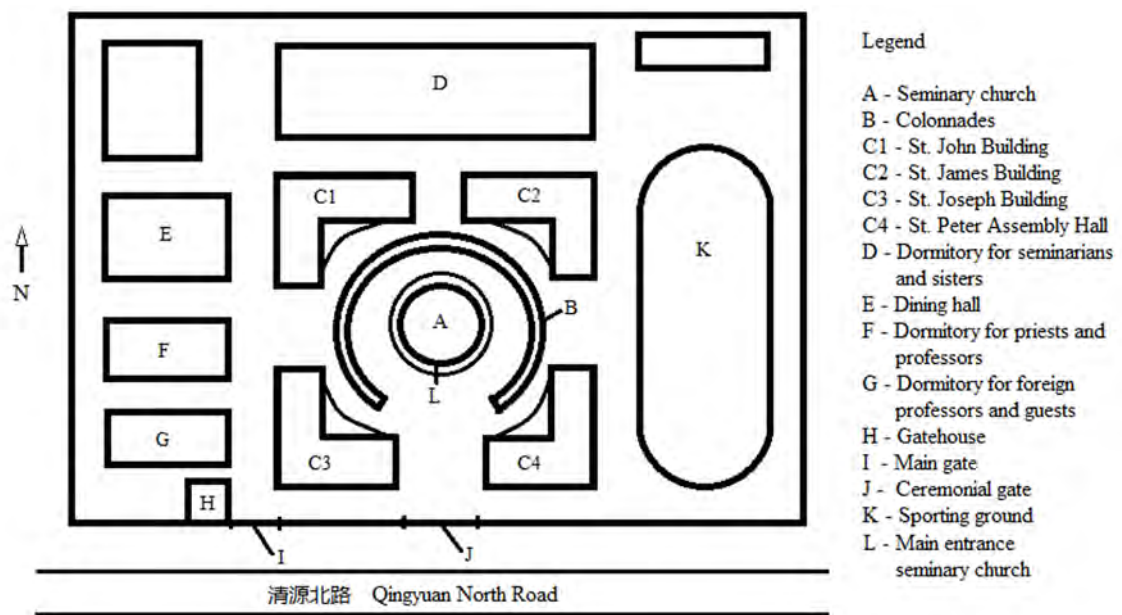


The “Sinicized” National Seminary of Beijing: Liu Bainian’s Ideas for a Chinese Catholic Church

Gregor Weimar SVD

Campus of the National Seminary of the Catholic Church in China



“The situation of the Catholic Church in China is very difficult for foreigners to understand, as its case is very special.” This argument is used quite often by mainland Chinese Catholics and Liu Bainian 刘柏年¹ used it, too, when he explained to me what he thought was the Catholic Church in China within the universal Catholic Church. In an interview arranged through the assistance of Bro. Friedbert Ewertz SVD² and Sr. Liu Jiabin 刘家斌 of the Zhonghua Shengmu hui 中华生母会, the Society of the Mother of God of China, it was possible for me to meet with Liu Bainian on December 3, 2016 at the National Seminary in Beijing. Liu Bainian has his own ideas of what “a special case” should mean. He was

This article is based on the author’s master thesis “Sinicization of the Catholic Church in China – A Case Study from Church Architecture,” School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 2017.

- 1 Liu Bainian was born in 1934 in the Chinese Province of Guizhou. By his own account he was baptized by a Divine Word Missionary and hails from the same area as Bishop Zong Huaide who came from the Province of Shandong. In 1952 Liu became vice-chairman of the Patriotic Association in Shandong. 20 years later he went to Beijing and he held the position of vice-secretary of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association until 1992. He then became its vice-chairman and held this position until his retirement in 2010.
- 2 Bro. Ewertz established a workshop for painted glass windows at the National Seminary in Beijing where he trained Chinese sisters until 2016.

in charge, according to his own account, of the construction of the new National Seminary of the Catholic Church in China in Beijing (hereafter “National Seminary”) in the early 1990s. He used that opportunity to manifest his ideas of a Chinese Church in stone and concrete. He held the position of vice-chairman of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association when he retired in 2010 and still is honorary chairman of said organisation. Looking at examples of other Catholic edifices in China we do realize immediately the uniqueness the National Seminary possesses. Most of the churches in China today feature a style of Western architecture.



Left: Dongtang 东堂 “East Church” of Beijing; middle: Seminary Church of Beijing Diocese; right: Church in the Catholic village Jiahoutuan 贾后疃, East of Beijing. Photos: Gregor Weimar.

The Dongtang 东堂, the “East Church” of Beijing, is an example of early Western church buildings (built 1905). The church of the diocesan seminary in Beijing has a modern style, which is also rather rare. Often we can also find churches like the one here on the right, a church located outside of Beijing in a small Catholic village named Jiahoutuan 贾后疃. These are churches built in recent decades, featuring elements of Western church architecture with no traces of “Chineseness.”

There are only few exceptions featuring a “sinicized” / Chinese style:



Outside altar of the pilgrim church in Dong'ergou 洞儿沟, Shanxi.
Photo: Gregor Weimar.

Above, the Catholic church in Dong'ergou, Diocese of Taiyuan, Shanxi. It was designed after the design of the Tiantan 天坛, the Heavenly Temple in Beijing, according to the wishes of a Taiwanese donor.



The Catholic church of Xiliulin 西柳林, Shanxi. Photo: Gregor Weimar.

The church in Xiliulin, Diocese of Taiyuan, Shanxi, was reconstructed in 1995 in a Chinese style.

Another exception is the above mentioned church at the National Seminary in Beijing. The National Seminary is located in the Daxing qu 大兴区, a district in the Southwest of Beijing.



Front view of the seminary church and adjacent buildings at the National Seminary in Beijing. Photo: Gregor Weimar.

Interview with Liu Bainian

In this 80-minute interview Liu gave his insights and thoughts on the theological ideas (historical, ecclesiological, and biblical) which constitute the basis for his concept. He gave his permission to record the conversation which had more the character of a talk. It seemed that he was eager to talk about the seminary and its construction, of which he appeared to be proud as he regarded it as his project. He gave his own account of what had to be done and he talked about the ideas behind the whole concept as his ideas. Liu Bainian, besides introducing the whole complex of the National Seminary, explained to me also in part the theoretical background of his view about the Church in China. His concept, according to himself, was greatly influenced by the results of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) of the Catholic Church. He further elaborated on the government’s support for his plans and his ideas for the Catholic Church in China which are also observable in the buildings of this seminary.

Since the closing of the Catholic Fu-Jen (輔仁) University and its departure from Beijing in 1951, there is no longer a Catholic university in mainland China. Liu Bainian saw this as a major shortcoming for China, and the National Seminary was, in his eyes, suitable firstly to be “the heart” of the Catholic Church in China and secondly to have the potential to be developed into a Catholic university later on. At the time of the interview, Liu Bainian was already retired.

The Interview with Liu Bainian in Excerpts³

Weimar: Could you please explain the concept of this seminary church?

Liu: I can ... This church, I have thought up the whole design and concept behind this church. I have of course consulted with Bishop Zong Huaide 宗怀德, who was beforehand the chairman of the BCCCC [Bishops’ Conference of the Chinese Catholic Church] and who was also the bishop of Jinan 濟南 Diocese in Shandong. We are from the same place. When I designed this place I talked to the bishop about why the design should be like this. We also bore a lot of hardships. The most necessary matter was to implement the spirit of Vatican II.

The spirit of the Second Vatican Council: Religion needs to realize the localisation and enculturation, as they are, and that is very correct, not the style of the past.

When the Gospel came to ancient Greece it became Greek, when it was transferred to Europe it became European. Well, when it is brought to China it should be sinicized. Not everything that exists in the Catholic Church has to be in a European or Western style. Because we will evangelize China, so it is necessary to let the Chinese people understand the Gospel according to all aspects of their own culture, then there will be a very good understanding.

So we thought back then that ... we thought: a local seminary is the heart of a local Church. This all-China national Catholic seminary is the heart of the Chinese Church.

³ The excerpts selectively displayed here are what I deem the most important pieces of an interview which was a rather unstructured talk given by Liu Bainian. For better readability the translation has been edited.

For the future, the development, and the growth of the Chinese Church what is most needed is this seminary. Because it will train the talented ones, the highly talented ones of the Catholic Church in China: the future bishops and theologians. The Chinese Church, spreading the Gospel in China, needs to have Chinese theological thinking and needs to have a high standard academic institute: this seminary! It [the National Seminary] is not average, so related to this thought we deliberated at that time: we need a Chinese style architectural style, not the Gothic style or Roman style, but a combination of these; both to embody sinicization and to embody the spirit of the global Church. For example, it can both embody sinicization, Chinese architecture, and Chinese culture and also embody what represents the European, Roman, and the global Church, this kind of architecture.

What is Chinese architecture? It is *tian yuan di fang* 天圆地方, the heaven is round and the earth is square. If we embody this spirit then this is Chinese. The West does not have this style, Europe does not have it, and nor does Africa. So at that time we thought: The church should definitely be round then [...] I just thought, what is it that the common people understand the best? What can represent that? So I thought: When the emperor offered sacrifice to Heaven, the Chinese emperor, every year he offered sacrifice to Heaven, to thank God, and to pray to God. The Emperor had to go every year when it was the time of the Spring Festival, to a place to offer sacrifice to Heaven, thanking God for having blessed him, and hoping that the Emperor would be well, and the common people would be well. Where was that? It was at the Heavenly Temple, the Tiantan. All Chinese people know that the Tiantan is the place for offering sacrifice to Heaven. It is very big. I thought about it and the first thing was: This church [map:⁴ A] will be round, adapted to the design of the Heavenly Temple. The Chinese people can accept a place of “offering sacrifice to Heaven,” a place of venerating Heaven. This is one idea. Well, the Tiantan has twelve pillars [...] the Tiantan also has three tiers. At that time I was thinking, it is the shape of “three persons one body” [the Holy Trinity]. Twelve pillars – twelve apostles. It just is, we say: “The one, holy, and apostolic Church” [*zhi yi, zhi sheng, zhi gong* 至一, 至圣, 至公] is the form of the Church that the apostles passed on. [...]

The Chinese Church is erected on a Chinese foundation, a foundation of offering sacrifice to Heaven. This Holy Trinity, venerating the Holy Trinity, and the Church, the Catholic Church, is erected by the twelve apostles, erected on the basis of the twelve apostles. [...]

Here, you can see a round frame [pointing at the colonnade framing the church building in the center; map: B]. [...]

There it is one, two, three, four. Rome has four, mine has two, two pillars to give support. Rome’s Mission enterprise encircles the whole globe, encircles the mission of all the earth. Rome’s enterprise embraces the whole world. Four pillars. Mine has two pillars. The Chinese National Seminary, the Catholic Seminary, its mission is all of China. Rome has four pillars, mine has two pillars, encircling all of China. The Chinese style church, sinicization, is erected on the foundation of the apostles. [...]

The three-tier design refers to the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Ghost. Well, the windows, there are 24 windows in total. If you omit the ones above the main entrance, there are 20 windows remaining. [...] This chapel is called “The Holy Virgin’s Annunciation

4 The reference “map” in this article always refers to the map I provide on p. 31 of this article.

Church.” The Annunciation unto Mary (The Holy Virgin), all the seminarians, when they live the clerical life are made to follow the example of the spirit of the Holy Virgin. God called Mary and she responded. So, the seminarians coming into the seminary, the chapel of the Annunciation of The Holy Virgin, shall follow the example of The Holy Virgin. The vocation [a vocation to live a religious life and to serve in the Catholic Church] which is given by God, also needs to be answered, and accepted.

The spirit of The Holy Virgin: completely heeding God’s order, and sacrificing oneself. [...]

The 20 windows then include: The twelve apostles, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist.

There is Jesus. There are Mary and Joseph. There are also the three prophets, prophets from the Old Testament, three of them. This all is the foundation of this seminary.

[We are looking now at the glazed tiles on the third tier of the façade of the church.]

We have Jesus’ Birth, the Crucifixion [...] I put in twelve – twelve scenes [of the mysteries of the rosary].

Why should we make this part like this? Because non-believers will come to have a look, so it is an introduction [to the faith].

Why did Jesus have to suffer? Why did he give up his life? Here we proclaim briefly the hows and whys of the Church. This is that tier.

This building has also a main entrance [map: L]. These four carvings, these copper carvings, they are cast in copper. This is as it is at the Vatican in Rome.

This church also has a basement [a crypt]. This chapel [pointing at a picture of the crypt of the seminary church in the pamphlet] is in the basement of the church. When I went to Rome, Belgium, France, the churches were all built of stone. So here also everything is made of stone, the pews, the lanterns, and the altar as well. What meaning does that have? By this we let the seminarians and priests know and think about the beginnings of the holy teaching.

Let the seminarians know that Christ’s Church suffered hardships and was hated; suffered oppression. We should all carry this spirit, and not forget it, let none of them forget. We should follow the example of this spirit: when we face many problems in the future, we should keep up our own faith!

So, in the beginning we also had stone kneelers. We actually would not need kneelers. You could just kneel on the floor. Because when you face hardships, you should kneel directly on the floor. But, afterwards, the priests could not bear it anymore and they prepared round cushions to kneel on. Big round ones made of rubber. I prepared it for them to just kneel and no seats. But, the priests disagreed and secretly brought in chairs and replaced the stone kneelers. [...]

There was once an exchange with Korea, when 30 seminarians came over to study at the National Seminary in Beijing for one month, not even one month. Afterwards it did not happen again. Now this building is for outside guests [map: G]. This building where the seminarians live, this dormitory, is designed according to my ideas [map: D]. I got the idea when I went to visit Korea and saw that they had two sinks and a toilette in each com-

mon sleeping room. So, I changed the design to the same here. They got three common bathrooms.

When they get up in the morning and four or five seminarians need to use the facilities at the same time, that would be difficult and that would affect their rest.

Where the seminarians live is modelled according to my experience in Korea. Where the priests live [map: F] is modelled after Germany, especially the SVD’s [Divine Word Missionaries’] houses. I went there because the SVD provided the bishop in Qingdao, Shandong, and also the cemetery. [...]

I have a very good relationship with the SVD, as I am a Catholic from Qingdao and Qingdao was an SVD mission territory before. I was baptized by an SVD priest. [...]

This building for the advanced studies of priests and the master’s program is the “St. James Building” [map: C2]. Why is it called St. James Building? When we built this, Kim Cardinal Suhwang from Korea, we all got on well together ... he said the first missionary to Korea was a Chinese priest. He was transferred to Korea. His name was [James] Zhou Wenmou 周文模.⁵ I told our students to remember that the first missionary to Korea was Chinese. We will have to prepare for the future; we also shall go out [i.e. evangelize]. He [Cardinal Kim] said he would donate the money to cover the expenses for the building.

Ewertz: The relation with Korea is still very good, right? In Tianjin...

Liu: In Tianjin, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Shenyang, Changchun, Qingdao, everywhere. At that time I and the president of the Korean Bishops Conference, the Archbishop of Taegu, Korea mutually agreed that they [Korean priests] could come to China but not interfere with the Chinese Church matters. They celebrate the mass and take care of the religious welfare of the Korean parishioners [in China]. And they have nothing to do with [what happens in] China. What the protestant Korean churches are doing is not acceptable. What they do is very bad. I am very opposed to that and the country [the government of the PRC] also does not approve of it.

In the end Korea had a financial crisis in ’98, ’99, ... I think it was in 2000. So, they had no money to donate. This building cost 7 million RMB, and he [the Cardinal] could only give 3 million RMB. So we could not build it. What should we do? So we took responsibility to build it ourselves. But, we had already granted him [Cardinal Kim] the wish. We then did not call it Zhou Wenmou Building, but called it St. James Building instead.

The next building is where the seminarians have their lecture halls [map: C1]. It is the “St. John Building.” Why is it called St. John Building? I tell everybody fervently to follow this example. Why should all follow the example of St. John? St. John the Apostle was the most loved disciple of Jesus and everybody should try to become like this. All those who become a priest should try to become a most loved priest of Christ and work towards this aim.

This building is the library building which is the “St. Joseph Building” [map: C3]. At first it was called Huaide (怀德) Building, because the head of the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China at that time was Zong Huaide and he donated some money

5 In Korean his name was „Chou Moon-Mo“. His baptismal name was „James.“

in his name, in order to be remembered. However, as the other buildings also had no concrete name we decided to rededicate the building and use Bishop Zong’s baptismal name instead, Joseph.

And this building [map: C4] with the amphitheatre meeting hall / assembly hall and two storeys high was initially designed to provide simultaneous translation [at conferences]. You could have spoken in German, in English, or in French that would all have worked. Basically these three, in the corner above the roof, but in the end they did not do it. Also, there are now not many lectures in that big hall. This assembly hall is called “St. Peter Assembly Hall.” Why is it called St. Peter Assembly Hall? When you study theology in this seminary, and you understand it all, then the highest representative of Christ is St. Peter. So, when you enter the church, the big hall and this assembly hall, you should become like St. Peter and safeguard it [the Church] in the same way. When you come into the St. Peter Assembly Hall you can see a mosaic on the wall. I adopted here the “five loaves of bread and two fish” image, the miracle of Jesus with the five loaves and two fish. When they come in to hold assemblies and meetings they should follow the example of Christ’s spirit in this parable. They should turn to the common Church in China and evangelize, and they should also take care of the common Chinese people, to have something to eat. When Jesus had finished his speech he took care of the people. That means, the priests should definitely remember in the future that they not only evangelize, but also care for the life of the common people by following the example of Christ’s spirit. [...]

We invited theologians to give talks, invited foreign theologians. At this place ten cardinals gave talks: three from America, one from Belgium, one from Great Britain, and some from France. And besides them we had many theologians, famous ones, and bishops who we invited. Several Korean bishops also came to give talks. They were all very willing to give talks as they could also increase their recognition.

This is the sports ground. Originally we also planned to have a swimming pool [...]. But, the water of Daxing district is too bad. [...]

The 73 *mu* 畝⁶ are worth 73 million RMB which roughly equals to 10 million US\$. In the beginning the state authorised 20 *mu*. So according to state rules the number of students could not have exceeded 200 on land of this size. But, how is that, I thought: The Chinese Church has to think further ahead, Christ said “Put out into the deep!” [Lk 5:4]. Jesus said to St. Peter when he was fishing “into deep water,” “put out into the deep.” We cannot only think about today. So, we had to build a seminary on a big scale. This was really God’s will and I had to look here and there to find a way of doing it. I myself personally understood that this was not my doing but it was God’s plan and guidance. State regulations were very strict. Even one additional *mu* would not be ok. I did not give presents and I did not invite people for dinner. I just took the Bible and went to some departments [of the government] and asked what I should do. They said: Ok, ok, we will have a look. Like this I gained their sympathy and they paid attention to me and thought of a method. In the end I got 70 *mu*, 50 *mu* more. Much more! I could build on 21,000 m².

Ewertz: Did this land belong to the government before?

6 *Mu* 畝 is a traditional Chinese area measurement, that roughly equals 0.07 hectare.

Liu: No, none of it. It was all farmland. After the construction the farmers received some money and their *hukou* 戶口 was changed from a “rural-*hukou*” to a “city-*hukou*.” So they did not have to farm anymore but could go and work in a city job. [...]

This, what we built up, you can see there is still free space [both corners on the northern side of the campus]. You can see there is the outside guests’ hostel. And there is the building for the sisters. The government did not allocate any money for this. This was built with money I myself spent. I used money that we ourselves have raised. 6,000 m² are for sisters to come here to study theology. It is beside the seminary and close, so it is also convenient for the professors to go and teach. And in the front there is still some free space. This piece of free space, I thought we still needed to construct two buildings. What would be the purpose of constructing two more buildings? I wanted to erect, at that time I was thinking of erecting a Catholic university. Just like Fu Jen University. We had a Fu Jen University before.

Weimar: So there would not only have been theology, but also other subjects?

Liu: Yes! China is so big, future evangelization enterprises will be undertaken in China; if there is no university, then it would not work. So, this plot of free space remains for two more buildings to be constructed. To establish a Catholic university; if you have three departments you can call it a university. The first would be the Department of Theology, the second would be the Department of Philosophy. The philosophy department would deal with Church philosophy, scholasticism, etc.; there would also be Chinese philosophy. There would not be a problem with that. The third would be a Department of Foreign Languages. It would be a Department of Foreign Languages in China. If we had a Department of Foreign Languages, to get foreign language teachers would not be a problem. There are teachers from within China and from without. When Chen Shujie 陈书杰 was Rector of the seminary, when he came here I told him: After ten years we shall turn to this place and develop it and build up a university. What should we do with this building? Now there is no more hope. When we look at the will of God, then this is the whole plan, I guess. After it was finished ... Before the seminary was finished I have successively sent off 210 priests, seminarians and sisters to other countries; to seminaries in America, to France, to Germany, to Korea, the Philippines, Switzerland, and the Netherlands to study theology. It was the plan to train them in various fields. Now they are coming back, those coming back number approximately 200. What was the purpose of that? This seminary was built in ten years; it was only finished after approximately ten years. Why is that? Initially it could have been finished after three years. If you build it in three years, probably the first building would have been excellent; the second building might have not been that good anymore, it would have gotten worse and worse, and they would not have kept up the quality. As it was built slowly I could exchange the people in charge of the construction three, four times. They put their heart into it. If it was just one person, it would have been good in the beginning but then it would have gotten worse and worse. Why did it need to take ten years to build it? I sent the priests and seminarians away to get Masters degrees and PhDs and they would only come back after ten years. It takes between eight

and ten years. If the seminary was finished [before they had returned] who would have been the professors?

There must be professors. And, the professors of the seminary should receive their degrees outside. If someone has no Master's degree, how could he then train seminarians? So here, those priests who had just graduated, directly became professors. Old ones were not possible, because someone who does not have the spirit of Vatican II, how could he become a professor? [...]

Foreign cardinals, from the USA and quite a few rectors of German seminaries came. I introduced to them, especially the three American cardinals, I introduced the situation in the seminary to them explaining that in the seminary we have 24 professors, in total 24. Twelve of them have studied abroad and came back with an MA or PhD. Seven studied in the USA, came back, and teach here now as professors. Three have studied in Germany, in France and some are still studying now. Besides them we have twelve guest professors, three of whom are Americans. So, we actually have nine of our own who study or have studied in the USA, so in total we have twelve professors who have an American academic background. [...]

To the professors we invited, before the work began, we said very clearly: Do not interfere with politics! Do not talk politics! Give your lectures and talk about theology! Do not talk about social issues, or state affairs. Then it will be very good. This is the first condition. The second was a condition I gave the rector of the seminary: What the foreign professors are teaching, do not inspect it; do not investigate into their lectures.

According to the regulations of the Church, one must examine the lectures which are taught at a seminary, to see whether the content is according to Church teachings. And only then you allow them to give lectures. I told them, however, that they are approbated; all those who were invited had been approbated before, so we should not investigate them. No one will go to sit in and listen to what you are talking about and no one cares about your lectures, in order to avoid misunderstandings. We need to trust the foreign professors we invited. If they teach freely from their heart then it will preserve the Chinese Church. We should not interfere or meddle with them and now it is like this, is it not? If I went to Germany to give lectures, I could not talk at my own pleasure. The rector of the seminary would first listen to what I want to talk about and only after his approval could I start to lecture. I told them we do not have this kind of regulation, we are open. We should have faith in them and also it is now necessary to know all the different points of view in theology.

For example Hans Küng, he also came once and gave a talk. So, we are very open and liberal. This is freedom! The government and state cadres, the cadres of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, they never came once to listen to what is being taught in the lectures. The foreign media say that China is not free, how could we be freer?! Professors come to China; American professors come and give lectures without any limitations. If they went to Germany they would have to be vetted before they could lecture. Freedom?! This is not freedom.

Now after ten odd years, the walls become brittle, crack, and problems appear. There is a need for renovations and we will have to spend quite some money. Official Liu [does not

mention his whole name] of the State Administration for Religious Affairs said to me: You made it so big, you are a daredevil. The buildings are in danger of collapse. You made it in violation of the laws; it is illegal!

Weimar: But, the State Administration for Religious Affairs, how did they think about this detailed plan of a construction in this style, this architecture?

Liu: They were very supportive. They told me that I had put a lot of deep consideration into how to deal with the Church and win honour for the country. Because I was saying very frankly that when there is an assembly of the world’s bishops in the future and Chinese bishops also take part, then other bishops might ask: Bishop, do you have a PhD? No. An MA degree? No. Are you an academic? No. From where have you graduated? Shijiazhuang 石家庄 Seminary. And you? Geliaogou 圪僚沟 in Shandong, which is ours [?]. And you? [...] [He apparently gives examples of different seminaries]. When I am at a meeting of the Bishops’ Conference, Chinese bishops are very diverse in their education. So I am thinking we have a need for our own PhD and our own theologians. Many Chinese engineers go abroad for their training. That is true, the Catholic Church also needs to go abroad to receive good training to win honour for the country. Initially, we only got 37 million RMB, but because I talked to someone higher up in the political hierarchy, higher than the State Administration for Religious Affairs, they⁷ added another 37 million RMB and so we have what we have today.

And also God through the people in power, arranged for those people in power, people in power in China – he arranged for us to get this payment of grace through these people, because the governing power also comes from God. This country exists through the divine plan. At the first Church council, the Council of Nicaea, the 20 sentences of the creed of the Church were defined – the faith of the Church. Who convened this assembly? It was not bishops, and there were no cardinals, yet. So who? Emperor Constantine did it. He called the Church of the East and of the West together. The West sent representatives and they discussed so that in the end they defined the creed. So, this means the power and authority of the governments also come from God. God can make use of the government’s authority to assist the Church in resolving issues. Constantine at that time had not yet professed his faith.

Weimar: Constantine thought: “You are in my empire so I should manage your affairs.”

Liu: Not managing; [Constantine meant:] “I should assist you.” [...] Because the power of Constantine came from God, and the power of bishops is from God as well. God can work through the authority of governments, and then the government assists the Church. And God can also assist the government through the Church.

Weimar: And in China it is also like this?

⁷ It is not quite clear who “they” are.

Liu: Yes! Why did Constantine receive baptism before he died? He said: How could I be baptized? After baptism I will be restricted, I will be controlled. If he had received baptism before, if he had professed his faith, he would have had to heed what East⁸ or West Rome said. He would have had to accept the control of the Church.

In his heart he had actually already accepted the faith. So he acted only when he approached death; only then he got baptized. I want to say that the money the government gave me is according to God’s arrangement. Through the government, the state has done this. I am saying that this is why the seminary has gotten this big.

We continue with the original arrangement to “put out into the deep water.” We go into the deep. This seminary will definitely be the heart of the Chinese Church in the future! What I just said, Chinese theological thought, theologians, they are in this seminary! [...] When it comes to bigger theological questions in the Chinese Church, the professors of the seminary are given priority, they play the central role.

Weimar: What about the inculturation of the Church and its theology in China?

Liu: Theological thoughts and faith, that is not the central reasoning. It is not just the reasoning according to the central regulations. It is all about research and promotion of the enterprise of evangelization. African theology does not necessarily fit the Chinese context. Japanese theology also has its theological research which does not fit the American or German context. Each country’s individual theology has the purpose to evangelize in that respective setting. China, however, what about its own theology? The core of this is in this National Seminary. Under the guidance of the Bishops’ Conference at that time it became like this, and this is my presentation of how the seminary got this big. [...]

However, speaking of sinicization and Chinese inculturation: these twelve apostles and for example Abraham in this image. Now there is no one in China who can do what you are doing, the specially painted window panes [pointing at Bro. Ewertz and referring to his glass painting skills and the workshop he established to train Chinese sisters in glass-painting]. But, ten years ago there was no one. And so, paper-cutting is one of China’s skills and it has the air of inculturation as well. [...] And also how can it represent China? In China no one can paint this. At that time it would not have come out right. It would have been something not decent and not appropriate. But, paper-cutting, now in China, why should we use that? In other countries they have abstract styles. An abstract image of The Holy Virgin would be an image with contours.

Abstract! This is to say that no one has ever seen St. James. None of us! No one has ever seen The Holy Virgin! We can keep the pre-image of The Holy Virgin, ok. But, like all the others, Bartholomew, Paul, etc., we have not actually seen them. So we used the paper-cutting technique which is similar [to an abstract style] and then we subtitled it: St. John the Apostle. Everybody understands this picture. In these days, there are images of The Holy Virgin in France: a French one; in Africa: an African one; Spain has a Spanish one, Japan a Japanese one; Taiwan a Taiwanese image of The Holy Virgin. So when we think like this of paper-cutting, then it is the Chinese style.

8 I.e. Constantinople.

Weimar: When we look at contemporary churches, there is only this seminary church which has the paper-cut style. You have just talked about how the SARA has supported your design. Talking about other churches, if one was to be built, would they also use this sinicized style?

Liu: This is not a unified plan. It is for the locals to make this decision! But, in China everybody wants Gothic style, Roman style; still with a majestic appearance like those before. This cannot be combined.

Weimar: My question is, however, whether the government encourages the Chinese style. Do they urge the believers to keep the style Chinese? Chinese believers seem to like the Western styles. Does the government tell them what the style in China should be like?

Liu: This is none of my concern! They should respect their Church and their bishop. If they do not violate Chinese architecture, if they do not do that, everything is ok. [...]

The Catholic Church has the Gothic or Roman style as the characteristic mark in those Western countries. Every country has its own image of the Holy Virgin. The Holy Virgin of China ... Already twenty years ago I put a sinicized image of her from Taiwan on a Catholic journal cover of ours. We published it and the result was phone calls: “What are you doing? This isn’t Catholic! Why does The Holy Virgin look like this?” They could not accept it at the time. Probably, after having received such a long influence from the West, they are not willing to change. I hardly go to the Nantang 南堂 [the “South Church” in Beijing]. The first Sunday Mass at 6.00 a.m. is in Latin. The old people are accustomed to this. They think that how it was before, that is the Catholic Church. “God knows what I mean when I recite texts I do not understand.” They recite and pray the rosary during mass. They do not know what they are doing.

Ewertz: In Europe it was the same before.

Liu: Yes, the same! In China we promoted the mass in Chinese. We are divided over this. We only started this in 1984 ... no, 1993 or 1994. Why was it like that? The thinking was still very conservative and against masses in Chinese. We adopted the way of doing it. Priests travelled to foreign countries, and went to Taiwan to visit relatives and then they came back from other places to the Mainland. These priests then celebrated Chinese masses and the parishioners denounced this. I told them not to care about it, and that they would slowly get used to it. So, China put this [Chinese masses] into practice very late. [...] But, old minds are like this, they still want to have Latin masses!

The National Seminary of the Catholic Church in China

The way Liu talked about this project it was very clear that this is a construction which has been thoroughly composed in his ideas, hopes, and dreams for the future of the Catholic Church in China.

For the Catholic Church to have a future in China and also be active in mission, they would have to develop their own theological thinking. Only in this way could the inculturation of the Gospel in China be achieved, Liu said. This would make an institution for

higher education necessary. This institution can do, as Liu put it, what is “most necessary,” to bring the “Spirit of the Second Vatican Council” to China which entails the sinicization, the making Chinese of the Catholic Church in China.

Before the construction could begin in the mid-1990s, Liu first consulted with Bishop Zong Huaide, then chairman of the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in China. He also needed the approval and financial support from SARA. “Initially, we only got 37 million RMB, but because I talked to someone higher up in the political hierarchy, higher than the State Administration for Religious Affairs, they added another 37 million RMB [...]”. Firstly, this shows Liu Bainian’s well connectedness in the Chinese Catholic hierarchy and in the higher political circles of Beijing. Secondly, we can conclude, unsurprisingly, that this project had been approved by the Church and political authorities in China. It mirrors a consensus by the official Catholic hierarchy and the government of the PRC on what the Church and its future in China should be like.

The Campus

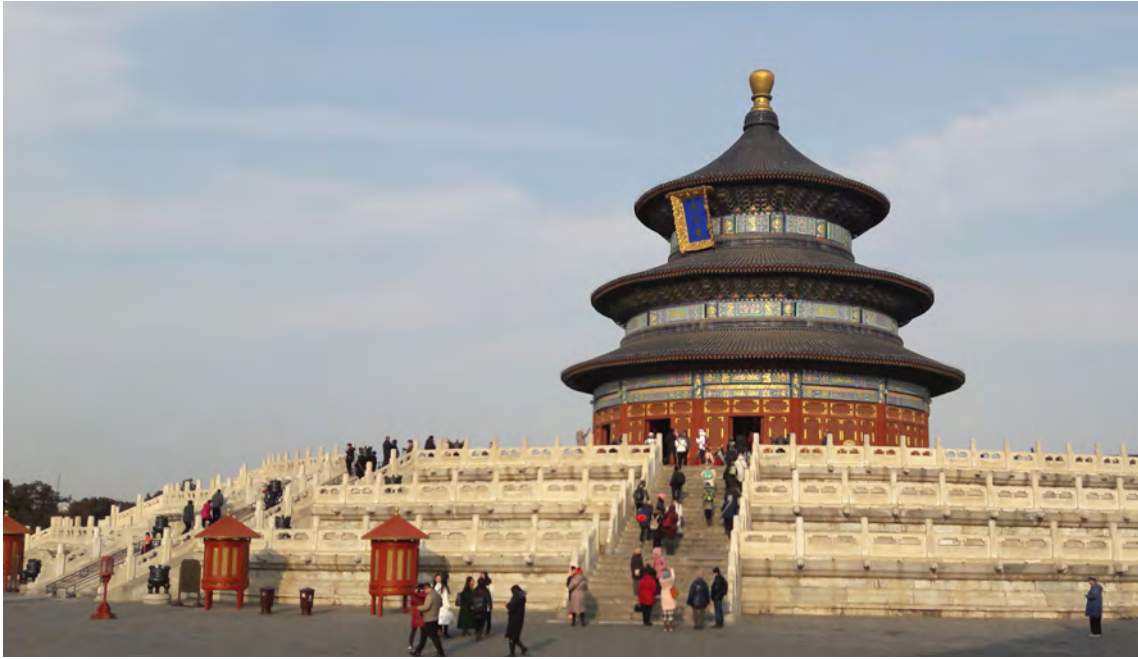
Construction of the National Seminary commenced in the mid-1990s and lasted for almost ten years until completion. Liu himself explained this rather long period – that it was deliberately set to take this long. The main reason was that only after ten years would enough professors have returned to the seminary as they were sent abroad to study “new” theology. The grounds of the campus are situated on former farmland which had been made available by the government partly through expropriation. These grounds in the Daxing District measure 73 *mu*, an area of 4.87 hectare.

The Architecture

For Liu Bainian in his explanations, most important is the “Spirit of the Second Vatican Council” whose main idea he concentrates on a deep respect for the local churches and local cultures. In chapter 2, article 3, no. 15 of *Ad Gentes*, a document of the Second Vatican Council, we read: “This congregation of the faithful, endowed with the riches of its own nation’s culture, should be deeply rooted in the people.” Consequentially this respect for cultures other than its own bears the motivation for inculturation, the localisation of the Church in the context she encounters. For Liu the Chinese Catholic Church, in the light of these Vatican II ideas, needs to elaborate a unique Chinese spirit and a proper Chinese style, as this has not yet been realized after Vatican II in China.

Only new professors, who had studied in countries where the spirit of Vatican II had already been put into theological reality, would be able to realize this said spirit. Old Chinese professors would not have the means to do so, as their theology was still “pre-Vatican II.” They have no place in this National Seminary, according to Liu Bainian.

This first “spirit” leads to a second mind-set: the spirit of Chinese religiosity. Liu, in search for “the riches of its own culture,” has implemented a concept in the construction that he says is something that all Chinese people understand: *tian yuan di fang* 天圓地方, heaven is round and the earth is square. Zhou Shachen (1984) writes in his Beijing Travel Guide *Beijing Old and New* that the round shape shall reproduce the shape of heaven.



The Tiantan 天坛, the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. Photo: Gregor Weimar.

Round is here understood as infinite and perfect, a place without corners; the dwelling place of the divine. The square shape stands for the earth; the habitat of the people. It's a concept which is very clearly applied at the Tiantan, the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. The Temple of Heaven was the place where the Chinese emperor annually sacrificed to heaven and prayed for good harvests and requested the *tianming*, his heavenly mandate to reign as emperor.⁹ This place represents the amalgamation of the Chinese ruling system with religion. It is about the preservation of the cosmic order. The government respects this order and functions at the same time as the supremely authorised protector of this order; a mediator between heaven and earth. The government cares about preserving this order and prays for the wellbeing of the state and its population.

This place of “heavenly worship” also serves the stabilization of political power and the civil order. For his concept of a Catholic Church in China, Liu Bainian has accepted this principle of Chinese governing that comes along with the principle of the sovereign being in charge of protecting the state's stability. It means that the political power determines which religion or which formations of a religion cross the line to heterodoxy and therefore have no place in Chinese society as they threaten social order. Orthodox, the opposite of heterodox, means here a form of religion which serves the stability and positive development of society. Any questioning of the current political system by a religion would not be tolerated. The emperors of China had explicitly by order of their *tianming*, the mandate of heaven, the task to preserve the cosmic order. A cult or rite which assists in preserving the order is recognized as orthodox. This was the case when:

⁹ On the Tiantan, cf.: Bredon (1931); and Arlington – Lewisohn (1987).

[...] they solidified the correct hierarchical structures within families; helped to build strong communities that were rooted in agriculture; and thereby fortified social stability under the imperial reign.¹⁰

In concrete cases this could be rather arbitrary as “[...] orthodoxy is what the emperor and the state consider appropriate.”¹¹ In Ma Xisha and Han Bingfang, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiaoshi* 中国民间宗教史 [The Story of Chinese Folk Religion]¹² we read: The difference between popular and orthodox religion is mainly political, not of a religious nature. The government has decided politically over religious matters.

The Spirit of the Apostles

The roof of the church is very similar to the design of the roof of the Tiantan, which stands for the worship of Heaven. However, the roof with its tripartite division also symbolizes the Trinity and with its twelve pillars the Twelve Apostles, Liu Bainian explained. The Twelve Apostles are also to be found on the church windows of the seminary church. The apostles in Church. This form was passed on by the apostles. It is a quote from the Credo, the creed of the Catholic Church, and for Liu this creed is also of course shared by the Chinese Catholic Church.

The Dedication of the Seminary Church

Another spirit is the attitude of Mary. The seminary church in the center of the campus [map: A] is dedicated to the Annunciation unto Mary. Liu Bainian said it was about the Spirit of Mary to “fully obey God and sacrifice oneself.” All seminarians should acquire this spirit when they enter the seminary and enter that church. The largest window in the seminary church is head-on when you enter the church, in the wall behind the altar. It shows the scene of the proclamation of the message – that God chose Mary – through the sending of an angel to Mary. Both this and the rest of the total of 24 stained glass windows are made in the style of Chinese paper cut art. Two criteria come together here: 1. It is a traditional Chinese handicraft that represents China, and 2. a design in paper cutting technique is also feasible in China.



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Scene of the “Annunciation unto Mary” in Chinese paper-cut-style on a seminary church window.
Photo: Gregor Weimar.

¹⁰ Madsen (2015), p. 65.

¹¹ Liu Kwang-Ching (1990), p. 2.

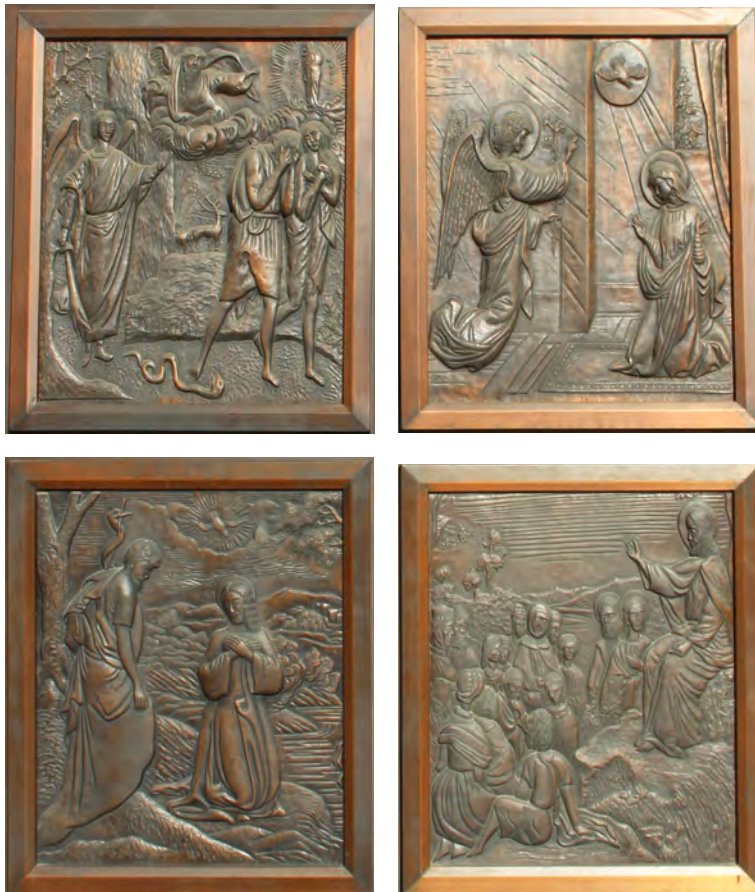
¹² Ma – Han (1992), p. 3.

The Crypt

In the basement of the seminary church Liu installed a crypt. This crypt symbolizes the time of the early Church, when persecuted Christians had to gather in the Roman catacombs. The persecuted Church, Liu said, has faced many difficulties and has managed to preserve its faith. The Church would experience difficulties again and again in China and it was important not to despair, but to stand firmly in the faith. The crypt should be a place where one can remember these early experiences of the persecutions and trials of the faith and one can practice simplicity, Liu said. This simplicity was expressed in that the sanctuary and the seating area are only furnished with stone objects reminiscent of the subterranean scantiness of the catacombs in Rome.

The Authority of the Vatican

When Liu Bainian says that this seminar is to be “the heart of the Catholic Church in China,” it also includes a claim to authority and jurisdiction over what happens in the Church in China. This is architecturally visible in two features. The first feature is the style of the colonnades that surround the seminary church. In Rome, there are colonnades with four columns in width that surround St. Peter’s Square. Liu interprets that four pillars represent the global jurisdiction of the Vatican. In contrast, in Beijing, the colonnades [Map: B] have only two columns in width. This should symbolize a smaller area of responsibility. But, it also makes it very clear that the Church in China is responsible for Catholic affairs in China. The second feature is the style of the door at the church entrance. It is designed in the style of the



Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica. It is a door with copper works of biblical scenes. At the seminary church we find three of the sixteen scenes displayed on the copper plaques of the Holy Door: above left, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise; on the left below, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John the Baptist; on the top right, the Annunciation unto Mary. The motif on the bottom right is not taken from the Holy Door in Rome and shows a scene in which Jesus instructs the disciples.

Copper works of biblical scenes on the entrance of the seminary church. Photo: Gregor Weimar.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ

In the entrance area of St. Peter’s Assembly Hall [map: C4] we find a large wall mosaic depicting Jesus’ “feeding of the five thousand” with five loaves and two fish. Liu Bainian points out that this should remind viewers that it is not just about the theology and development of abstract constructs, but the charitable-practical component is just as important: the practical concern for the needs of believers and also a social commitment among the socially weak, non-Catholic population of China.

“Governance Comes from God”

Liu gives the example of the Roman Emperor Constantine I (272–337), who summoned the Council of Nicaea in 325. He takes it as an example of the work of God through people who are not baptized. Liu says all political power, inside and outside the Church, comes from God. Constantine had not submitted to the control of the Church, but remained free in his political actions and influenced Church affairs, and Liu thinks he was justified to do so. In his remarks we find an acceptance of the world being separated into two spheres. The Church takes care of spiritual, social, and moral issues and politics belongs solely to politicians and a government installed in due process. Liu Bainian has a strong belief in God’s plan being effective in the world as it is today. This belief sometimes almost seems fatalistic.

The Missionary Conscience

The selection of the Tiantan as a template for the design of the seminary church, the enamel work on the façade, the Vatican attributes, this all points to a Catholic self-confidence which courageously presents itself to the exterior. It is in all a very distinctive building and there are often passers-by who would take pictures at the honorary gate [Map: J]. The design of the campus shows the self-confidence of being part of Chinese society, and it is therefore confidently present in a Chinese Catholic way. The enamelled rosary scenes are placed under the highest roof for high visibility. This just-mentioned self-awareness



Enamelled scenes from the mysteries of the rosary on the façade of the seminary church. Photo: Gregor Weimar.

then also shows a missionary awareness. The perspective goes outwards. These scenes are to convey content to the passers-by about the Catholic faith. At the very front we see the Christmas scene, the Pentecost event, and the presentation of the Child Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem. The Christmas scene is arguably the most well-known scene from the stories of Christianity and therefore very effectively attached to the most prominent position. This missionary stance is directly invoked by Liu Bainian when he talks about the first Chinese missionary, James Zhou Wenmo. A missionary sent in 1795 by the Bishop of Beijing, Alexandre de Gouvea, to a heavily persecuted, small Catholic community in Seoul, where, after only six years of difficult work, he was taken to the authorities and executed soon after, as Moffett describes.¹³

Liu Bainian’s Frustration

At the end of the interview, Liu’s frustration with the current situation of the Church and its believers became clear. His idea had been to use the seminary to create a place where, within the framework of political possibilities, a free academic exchange between the “East” and the “West” of the Catholic Church could take place. He had hoped that a Catholic university would emerge again, at which the subjects could continue to expand beyond theology and the philological and create Catholic influence on society through the creation of non-clerical graduates.

Conclusion

Liu Bainian presents himself as a devout Catholic with a deep Christian conviction, which is founded more on the early Christian foundations than on the western Catholic tradition. On the other hand, he is a Chinese patriot who does not oppose the government and wants to “win honour for the country.”¹⁴ He has accepted a worldview in which the current political system is taken as a fact: the Communists are in charge also of the religious sphere, and he even alludes to the statement that the government is an actor in God’s plan. On the background of these two poles, Liu Bainian’s idea was to create a Church in China based on the foundations of the early Church, which in the spirit of Vatican II fulfils its mission in China and promotes social stability and engagement as the PRC’s government demands. Here priority is given to a realization of the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in China by Chinese Catholics in a Chinese way. If the Church wants to be missionary in China, the content must consequently be understandable to the people here, which is underlined by an understanding of the Second Vatican Council that localisation / inculturation of Catholicism in different cultures is the “spirit” of Vatican II. This view is supported by the Vatican II document *Ad Gentes*. Liu said, “for the future, the development and the growth of the Chinese Church, what is most needed is this seminary.” This seminary is a place where the future Catholic hierarchy shall be formed in the manner of the aforementioned paradigms. The Church should not be a foreign body in Chinese so-

¹³ Cf. Moffett (2006), pp. 312f.

¹⁴ Cf. the interview.

ciety, not just thrust into it, but something that the Chinese can call their spiritual home. Sinicization is in his argumentation a consequence of the Second Vatican Council. In the Catholic understanding the Vatican has global authority over all matters in the universal Church, but Liu uses the Second Vatican Council as a means to give the Chinese Catholic Church almost full independence in administration and government of the Church in China. The connection to the universal Church is here of a mere spiritual nature. He only uses elements taken from the time of early Christianity. He does not mention at all the long period of Church history between the end of the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire until the Second Vatican Council, in which the Catholic Church was also heavily involved in affairs concerning secular power as a political agent. He restricts the Church to the Christian foundations: the Apostles and the Creed, the prophets of the Old Testament, the evangelists, Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, Peter the preserver of the Church, and Mary’s obedience and devotion to God’s will and of course the Gospels. The Church is reduced to spiritual, religious and charitable work.

Zhuo Xinping 卓新平 explained this Chinese approach on religion when he said that religious matters in China have to be considered on three different levels: spirituality, culture, and society.¹⁵ The first level, spirituality, enjoys relative freedom in China when the spiritual contents are sinicized. “Sinicization,” however, equates here to “supporting the political status quo of China.” On the cultural level, China can shape religion, but it cannot erase it, because it is, as Zhuo says, part of human culture. The Chinese government has apparently accepted this, deviating from the strict demand of classical Marxist-Leninist teaching to try to eliminate religion entirely from society, according to Richard Madsen.¹⁶ However, religion also has a social component that calls for taking social action. The Chinese Government is interested in religion’s charitable help in social issues, but knows it must control the manner in which it is done. The government knows that social engagement can lead to political engagement. Therefore, the Chinese government prohibits foreign influence on the design and organization of the five recognized religions in China, and calls for a patriotic education of the faithful by preachers and clergy.¹⁷ Liu Bainian expressed it very similarly in a contribution to *Theological Analects*.¹⁸ He said that “Catholics are always citizens and believers,” and I strongly believe he deliberately put it in this order. The faithful are citizens who are not allowed to oppose the government. Therefore, Liu Bainian also shows his indignation at the illegal activities of the Korean Protestant missionaries.

For him the power of the government also comes from God and it is part of God’s plan for his Church in China. The fact that Liu Bainian selected the Tiantan, the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, as a template for his design of the seminar speaks volumes. It is a very clear symbol of the superiority of the state and its rulers over religions in China. Religions must serve the welfare of the state or are deemed heterodox and banned. Within these parameters, a Chinese Catholic Church is to develop its own Chinese theological thinking

15 Zhuo (2015). Zhuo Xinping is the Director of the Institute for World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

16 Madsen (2015), p. 63.

17 Wang (2013), p. 4.

18 Liu (2016), p. 8.

and its own culture, totally in line with party policy. Liu has hope for the situation of the Church, but, it must practice the virtue of perseverance, as did the persecuted Christians in the Roman catacombs. The actual expectations of Liu Bainian on the possibilities of the seminary were huge. But the actual results are rather small and Liu Bainian seems sobered by this situation. In his mention of the example of Constantine, who withdrew from the political influence of the Catholic hierarchy on his policy making and his baptism on the deathbed, shows perhaps a faint hope that something similar might possibly happen with the Chinese government at some point.

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